

**SEXUALITY AND THE CHICANA/O
DETECTIVE:**

**Identity and Violence in Alicia Gaspar De Alba
and Michael Nava's Mystery Fiction**

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ABSTRACT

SEXUALITY AND THE CHICANA/O DETECTIVE: IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE IN ALICIA GASPAR DE ALBA AND MICHAEL NAVA'S MYSTERY FICTION

María de los Ángeles Lara-Jaén

This doctoral thesis looks at how queer Chicana/o detectives investigate, from an outsider/insider point of view, identity politics and violence as related to sexuality and gender roles. In particular, this thesis aims to make a comparative analysis between the mystery works of Chicana/o writers Michael Nava and Alicia Gaspar de Alba. This study is predominantly informed by Chicana/o, Detective Fiction, Feminist and Queer Studies.

Until the 1970s, the dominant traditional discourse in detective fiction had placed ethnic and homosexual characters in a marginal position. Traditional mystery narratives subordinated and limited these characters to a negative representation. In the last decades, this restrictive style has gradually morphed with the introduction of ethnic and queer sleuths.

The purpose of my research is to examine how detective fiction has been a suitable genre, for Nava and Gaspar de Alba, to explore sexuality issues within the Chicana/o community and examine homophobia and violence in a transnational context.

The inclusion of indigenous and non-indigenous critical theories to support this research will allow this thesis to offer an emic and etic approach to Chicana/o culture. It will also negotiate differences and similarities between those theories developed from inside the Chicano culture and those constructed from the outside.

INTRODUCTION

Along with my love for detective narratives, one of the reasons that initially motivated this study was the research that I carried out to write my dissertation for the MA in Comparative Literature at Dublin City University (Ireland). This dissertation revolved around the reinterpretation of myths as related to sexuality, which led me to discover Cherríe Moraga's play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (1995). My attendance at the conference *Transitions and Continuities in Contemporary Chicano/a Culture Conference* that took place at University College Cork (Ireland) in June 2011, where I had the tremendous opportunity to discuss her Mexican Medea with Moraga, further moved me in the direction of Chicana/o literature and criticism. Another author in attendance at this conference who has inspired my research in this field, and more specifically the present study, was Alicia Gaspar de Alba. Their academic work on the complexities of Chicana/o subjectivities and the interrelationship between ethnicity, sexuality and gender has encouraged my exploration of these themes.

The presence of queer, ethnic and female fictional detectives has become critical in the transformation of the genre over the past forty years, as they have produced a social commentary on traditionally marginalised identities that was rarely present before the 1980s (Kathleen Gregory Klein, 1999; Linda Martz, Anita Higgie, 2007; Nels Pearson, 2009). This transformation also brought an emergence of academic interest for the genre. Works such as Gill Plain's *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (2001) has examined the incorporation into the genre of a complex political and social agenda that challenges dominant perceptions of sexuality and gender. Phyllis M. Betz' *Lesbian Detective Fiction: Woman as Author, Subject and Reader* (2006) explores the experiences of lesbian characters and the increasing visibility of lesbian women in the genre. *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction* (2004) by Judith A. Markowitz also analyses the growth of gay and lesbian detective fiction and its contribution to providing more accurate images on homosexual experiences. In the field of Chicana/o literary criticism, work by academics such as Susan Baker Sotelo's *Chicano Detective Fiction: A Critical Study of Five Novelists* (2005) and Ralph E. Rodríguez' *Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicana/o Identity* (2005) investigates the influence on Chicana/o detective narratives in the genre and their significance as a tool for social and political criticism.

The present study not only aims to contribute to the expansion of Chicana/o detective fiction criticism but also to demonstrate the suitability of homosexual Chicana/o detectives as a vehicle to transform the genre and to create alternative discourses about. Nava and Gaspar de Alba's Chicana/o fictional investigators function as the unifying thread in this research. I draw from an intersectional approach of queer, feminist, detection and Chicana/o studies to explore, within the framework of transnational theory, the interconnection between identity constructs and violence. By offering an analysis of the convergence of sexuality, gender and social constructions of identity, this study suggests that to challenge traditional discourses on identity, it is necessary to dissect the foundations that sustain these discourses and also to look at the different forms of violence circumscribed to them.

Finally, I want to highlight that this research does not advocate the eradication of the discourse on subjectivity but refutes those articulations forged from a simplistic and confining perspective.

There are various reasons as to why I have chosen Nava and Gaspar de Alba's mysteries for this study. Firstly, the significant role that sexuality and gender as related to violence play in the novels, as well as the social commentary they offer. Secondly, the mainstream aspect of the novels and their international acclamation have informed my assessment of their contribution to Chicana/o literature and the detective fiction genre. Finally, the fact that the Ríos mystery series was published and set during the 1980s and 1990s, and that *Desert Blood* was published at the turn of the 21st century, illustrates to what extent traditional identity constructs are still pervasive and imposed, and what transformations they have undergone.

Practicality of the Outsider/Insider Viewpoint

This study conceives identity as a term used to describe how individuals and groups of individuals define themselves and are defined by others on the grounds of race, ethnicity, culture, gender and sexuality. It also highlights how the preoccupation with understanding and defining the subject has given way to a kind of justified discursive violence - which describes the individual in essentialist terms - as well as physical violence (Levinas, 2017). Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels offer useful insights on how identities are socially constructed through rhetoric emerging from nationalist, religious and heteropatriarchal structures.

My analysis of their novels, and in particular of their detective characters, aims to demonstrate how this construction is open to subversion through the articulation of alternative positions in

relation to sexuality and gender roles. I argue that both Ríos and Villa exemplify how identities are in constant change and consequently cannot be forced to fit a definition.

The notion of identity has established the boundaries of the social insider and outsider (Richard Jenkins, 2008). In detective narratives, the murderers represent the concept of the marginalised other, as they do not conform to societal conventions. Most of contemporary detectives, as Michael Cohen states, “displace the otherness of the villain by emphasizing that of the detective” (2000, p. 108) because of their racial or sexual identity, a tendency notable in Gaspar de Alba and Nava’s private eyes. Their sleuths adopt a liminal social status by being part of a minority group. This representation of otherness through the detective hero allows Nava and Gaspar de Alba to utilise the genre as a means for social commentary and change. They recreate a place for the outsider, integrating them within not only hegemonic society and power frameworks but also within a mainstream genre. They disrupt the essentialist structures of sexual order and advocate for the cultural “normalisation” and valorisation of homosexual identities. The queer Chicana/o investigator also conveys one of the main characteristics of the crime fiction genre by being portrayed as the outsider. In relation to this, Ralph E. Rodríguez indicates that “[t]his feeling of being on the outside, being the alienated other, thematises the hero of the detective novel and resonates especially well with Chicana/os, who though subjects of the nation are often represented as alien to it” (2005, p. 12). The duality of the Chicana/o detective hero as both outsider and insider emanates from an exercise in double consciousness which specifically echoes the situations of Henry Ríos and Ivon Villa. The complex interweaving of identities circumscribed to the bodies and desires of the detectives reflects their different positioning – sometimes as outsiders, some others as insiders –. Whilst I refer to the outsider perspective as that performed by the subject “other”, I also acknowledge that this standpoint is in constant transition. That is, both detectives are aware of their marginal position as Chicana/os and as homosexuals. They share commonalities with other Chicanas/os on the basis of their race and ethnicity but their diverse sexuality inscribes in them a differentiating aspect to most Chicanas/os and dominant groups. The outsider is created from both difference and rejection as it transcends the boundaries of the mainstream community. Simultaneously, these sleuths acknowledge their status of authority – as detectives seeking justice – they have achieved within a patriarchal and heteronormative society that ostracises them.

Thus, I argue that their outsider/insider perspective is crucial in dismantling the traditional discourses that constrain sexuality and gender roles. It firstly reveals how these gender and sexuality constructs have been produced and secondly contributes to the creation of a new identity rhetoric. This viewpoint transcends any essentialist meaning by questioning identity

formation within the theoretical framework of social constructivism and in turn, resisting the violence of hegemonic narratives.

The suitability of using an outsider perspective to critically analyse structures that belong to the insider's realm – that is, structures created by hegemonic groups, produces valuable knowledge on the complexities that reside in queer Chicanas/os. The outsider represents a departure from the norm and the representation of their experiences confers in them an agency that has been negated by the insider. The analysis performed by the outsider is understood within a transnational intersectionality framework. I draw from the understanding that an outsider perspective is able to discern and shed some light on concerns that remain invisible for insiders of mainstream groups and/or hegemonic cultures. That is, the outsider questions rather than confirms dominant cultural values whilst creating a space that represents alternative identities.

In the essay entitled “Dyad or Dialectic? Deconstructing Chicana/Latina Identity Politics”, Gaspar de Alba reflects on the contradictory character of identity politics in that it simultaneously asks two questions: “who am I the same as?” and “how am I different?” (in Ellie D. Hernández et al. eds. 2014, p. 12). By looking up the word identity, she finds that it comes from “identical” which means to be exactly the same or very similar. On the contrary, she argues, in postmodern discourses of multiculturalism and diversity, identity implies difference to a greater degree than sameness. The identity of the self is constructed through the relation of sameness and difference between the self and the other. As previously explained, the self and the “other” standpoints are also in constant flow, as our identity depends upon our positionality. We are all outsiders to something or to someone at some point in our lives.

This kind of identity crisis is what Gaspar de Alba calls cultural schizophrenia, which she defines as “the presence of mutually contradictory or antagonistic beliefs, social forms, and material traits in any group whose racial, religious, or social components are a hybrid of two or more cultures” (in Gaspar de Alba ed. 2003, p. 199). She argues that the recognition of this cultural schizophrenia is essential to the evolution of Chicana/o consciousness as the identity crisis it generates leads to breaking the division “between the outsider's perception and the insider's self-identification” (ibid., p. 200). The Chicana author explains that during her youth she attempted to comply with all the subjectivities within her, those articulated from the discourse of cultural authenticity, which in turn produced a kind of neurosis and negative attitude towards identity. For example, at home she could only speak in Spanish as she was forbidden to speak in English and at school only English. Through her writing, she constructed

an identity that rejected the divide set by cultural authenticity – from either the Mexican and the North American side – and bridged this cultural conflict that separates one side from the other. She proposes that to break with the regime of cultural authenticity is to accept the cultural schizophrenia constructed by her multiple subject positions. This, in turn, has allowed her to maintain her Mexican heritage and simultaneously question it through the revisioning of symbols as well as the production of new values. This has contributed to a new legacy that legitimises and recognises her multiple subjectivities as a lesbian Chicana writer.

Nava and Gaspar de Alba have forged their identity from a site of rupture and conflict which is reflected in their writing. Their identity bridges their insider and outsider sides by negotiating both positions, by shifting between two languages – Spanish and English –, through a conscious process that responds to violence and segregation.

This cultural schizophrenia resembles Foucault's crisis heterotopias in that it refers to individuals who are in a state of crisis in relation to mainstream society. The discursive space of heterotopia comprises the cohabitation of incompatible and antagonistic social or cultural groups within the same space. "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986, p. 25). This heterogeneity is also reflected in Chicana/o identities. The coming together of this perceived incompatibility between different subjects or spaces produces a contestation, a resistance, in that it challenges notions of authenticity as related to identity. It questions the normative set of relations that come to define authenticity and transcends its boundaries. The *Ríos* mystery series and *Desert Blood* also originate from a site of conflict from where the detectives are constantly negotiating tensions between their outsider/insider positions.

The outsider/insider insight is not just a dichotomy, but rather offers an intersectional approach that addresses the complexity of identities and their fluid status. An outsider/insider viewpoint is not fixed as it is being continually negotiated and changed because it is conditioned by the different positions the subject can take, as a consequence of the interactions of the subject.

This perspective also resembles that of the "outsider within" coined by Patricia Hill Collins in her essay *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought* (1986). Hill Collins discusses how black women have been traditionally marginalised within academic contexts and argues how they have used their marginality, "their "outside within" status, to produce Black feminist thought that reflects a special standpoint on self, family, and society" (1986, p. 14). She claims that the potential benefits of this status are its objectivity and ability to recognise patterns of oppression and exclusion that cannot be perceived by those that occupy a central position within academia. Thus, shifting those with an

“outsider within” status to the centre of analysis reveals personal and cultural experiences that enrich contemporary identity discourses. Similar to the insider/outsider perspective, the “outsider within” viewpoint is a valid source form which to interrogate cultural, social, economic and political hegemony.

Violence in Context

This study examines the different dimensions of violence enacted from a rhetoric based on hegemonic identities and from the tensions that result from trans-border relationships. Violence is a multifaceted element that is expressed in several forms. Consequently, it cannot only be explored by looking at interpersonal relations but also by analysing the socio-political and cultural background where it takes place. I contend that the combined analysis of violence and identity helps to produce a politics of resistance that contributes to social transformation and broadens the theoretical framework of research on cultural, feminist and queer studies. Violence and identity intimately commingle and their conjoined analysis serves to question the consequences of assuming heteropatriarchal processes of identification.

Normative violence results from that tension that the unknown aspect of the “other” elicits in the “self”. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Judith Butler criticises normative social survival in that it requires individuals to accomplish the expectations of their allocated categories or identity markings. Authenticity discourses encompass this type of violence because, as Butler argues, they link the “process of “assuming” a sex with the question of *identification*, and with the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications” (1993, p. 3). Butler analyses the relation between normative violence and cultural intelligibility. That is, how specific cultural and social norms have come to define who is recognizable as a subject – whose life matters – and who are not – those who are perceived as abject beings –. Language is then a powerful tool as it can influence how we perceive reality, a reality that is altered by normative discourses.

This altered reality is what Foucault terms as “regime of truth”, which is the discourse that society “accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth” (in Gordon ed. 1980, p. 131). This regime is produced and sustained by systems of power that can be counteracted through both theoretical and practical resistance. As Anna Marie Sandoval highlights when referring to the method used by third world feminists to simultaneously confront multi-oppression, “resistance

is a daily practice, and that practice is living theory. That practice is not only theorized, but the materiality of oppression becomes the focus of the discourse” (2008, p. 66). As I will demonstrate in this study, this multiple resistance is encompassed in *Desert Blood* and the Ríos mystery series. They portray experiences resulting from different forms of oppression and contribute to the theoretical response to the power structures that create inequalities.

The term structural violence, also referred to as systemic violence, was introduced by Johan Galtung in his essay *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research* (1969). In contrast to his definition of personal violence, which involves the action of an individual exerting the violent act, he describes structural violence as that where there are no specific actors but power structures. Galtung sees this type of violence as intrinsically connected to social injustice and inequality. Thus, he wonders which factors sustain inequality and concludes that there are elements that contribute to unequal power distributions. These include hierarchical social structures, the correlation between hierarchical ranks and centrality – the sense that higher rank actors in a system take a more central position – and the perception that there is only one means of interaction – the submission of lower ranks to higher ranks.

Reification of minority groups and those considered vulnerable subjects has also played a significant role within structural violence. Martha C. Nussbaum explains that “the objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into” (1995, p. 257). Thus, when analysing femicides at the U.S.-Juárez border, gender has to be taken into account as more than a mere piece of information, it is a key fact to disentangle the mechanisms sustaining these killings (Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano 2010).

Structural violence has become so stable and ingrained that it has not only escaped our attention but has also been naturalised. In relation to this, the narratives of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s investigators reveal the causal relations between homophobia and gender-based violence with structural violence.

Structure

With regard to the structure of this study, the first chapter is of a theoretical nature. To understand the need for a transnational and intersectional analysis of *Desert Blood* and the Henry Ríos mystery series, I first offer an overview on Chicana/o social and artistic activism from the 1960s, and the role that this activism plays in the emergence of Chicana/o feminist and queer theories. After an examination of the impact of these theories and their positioning

within, and often, against mainstream approaches, I also highlight some relevant arguments on the notion of identity and violence.

The second chapter focuses on the methodological model of textual analysis, which is based on an emic and etic approach. In relation to the main critical works explored, I demonstrate the significance of utilising transculturally contextualised approaches as well as indigenous and non-indigenous theories to inform my study. This chapter offers a review of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's fictional and non-fictional works, which is followed by relevant criticism on the detective fiction genre, queer, Chicana/o and identity studies.

Chapter three analyses the evolution of the fictional detective figure from traditional narratives to contemporary novels that reflect multicultural and multidimensional realities. It explores how Chicana/o detective fiction calls for a greater diversity within the genre and pushes the boundaries across the borders.

In the fourth chapter, I demonstrate how Nava and Gaspar de Alba's narratives question the supremacy of the nation state and dismantle fixed notions on identity. This chapter also explores the complexity of queer Chicana/o experiences and how they have been relegated to the margins of society. Additionally, I analyse Ríos and Villa's counter-discourse and the forging of new spaces where alternative identities can be truly represented. As Nava's mysteries predate Gaspar de Alba's, the last chapter of this study will reflect this chronology as I concentrate solely on her detective novel and the ongoing issue of the Juárez femicides.

Finally, through the analysis of Villa's narrative and interactions in *Desert Blood*, the last chapter focuses on the typology of violence and the Juárez femicides. Villa's discourse gives visibility to the exploitation and oppression of economic, political and social structures. This, in turn, demonstrates how the detection genre is the perfect vehicle to denounce the existent violence behind corrupt institutions, globalised systems and *macho* cultures.

The exploration of these mystery works and the detective protagonists offers valuable insights into the configuration of the intrinsic connection between diverse sexual identities, gender roles and violence. These novels contribute to those critical articulations that resist multi-layered forms of oppression and to the formation of strategies that promote the reaffirmation, as well as self-determination, of non-normative subjectivities and desires.

CHAPTER I

**TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES: CHICANA/O THOUGHT AND IDENTITY
POLITICS**

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Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition (2007, p. 25) – *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa –

I.1. Introduction

After attending the panel “The Personal and The Political” at the Second Sex Conference in New York, 1979, Audre Lorde wrote an essay that reflected on her experience, entitled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”. Lorde claims that analysing race and gender issues through a patriarchal and feminist hegemonic perspective emphasises power relations, and consequently relegates women of colour to a subordinate position in relation to white women. Instead, Lorde advocates for looking at women’s differences as a way to create a community that welcomes and acknowledges diversity. She explains that “[i]n our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower” (2007, p. 112). Thus, she believes that genuine change cannot be achieved through the use of patriarchal and Western feminist theoretical frameworks which replicate the oppressor-oppressed dialectic. Instead, she calls for an intersectional approach. In this regard, Gaspar de Alba’s critical work *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master’s House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition* (1998) clearly expands on the theories elucidated by Lorde on the “Master’s House”. The Chicana author reviews this major Chicana/o art exhibition, entitled *Chicano Art Resistance and Affirmation*, within the context of a mainstream art museum recast as “the master’s house”, as she refers to it (1998, p. xv). She examines how Chicana/o artists find ‘a room of their own’ within American art. The intention of this exhibition was, as she explains, “to open the doors to the master’s house – the hitherto exclusionary space of the mainstream museum – to remodel the interior *al estilo Chicano* and create an environment where Chicano/a art could be the vehicle for dialogue and reflection” (ibid., p. xv). Gaspar de Alba refers to this master’s house in the art world as being a “white, upper-class, male-dominated” institution (ibid., p. 22). The Chicana/o artists in this exhibition explore their pre-Columbian heritage and the complexities of Chicana/o identity. Furthermore, they expose social issues and call for equal representation and opportunities within the socio-political and cultural context of the United States.

Drawing from Lorde's conviction that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house", Gaspar de Alba proposes to utilise those tools to build a new house in order to abolish the segregation that existed, most notably in the field of popular culture studies. This proposal can be transposed to her own detective novel, *Desert Blood*, in which she uses a mainstream genre to reflect on a historically marginalised identity that is embodied by her lesbian Chicana amateur detective.

In this dissertation, a transnational paradigm is a useful tool that allows me to explore the intersection of gender, race and sexuality. It captures the multiplicity of identities resulting from these interactions and reveals the dynamics of power. To understand the practicality of transnationalism as a theoretical tool, I must answer two questions: firstly, what is transnationalism and secondly, what are transnational identities as related to Chicanas/os? With regard to the first question, I understand and refer to transnationalism as encompassing the social and cultural transformations related to cross border movements. It not only addresses the interconnections between nations but also how categories of gender, ethnicity and sexuality intersect and are formed within a transnational context. A transnational viewpoint transforms and contests hegemonic conceptions on identity, feminism and queer theorising. It challenges "[...] those myths of the nation that seek to marginalize others based upon race, gender, or sexual orientation" (Concannon, Lomelí and Priewe in Lomelí et al. eds. 2009, p. 3). It addresses different inequalities, breaks with the borders imposed by hegemonic discourses on sexuality and feminist criticism, and rejects essentialist views on nation and identity. With regard to the second question, I refer to transnational Chicana/o identities as those resulting from the negotiation and relations between Mexico and U.S. culture.

Nava and Gaspar de Alba's fictional detectives conduct their investigations within a transnational context. That is, they are constantly shifting between two cultures and two languages, and negotiate between their collective and subjective identity. Additionally, these Chicana/o authors' mystery works are a vehicle that allows them to confront and transform mainstream culture and discourses. The transnational aspect imprinted in their novels addresses the effects of globalisation on gendered structures as well as the multi-layered oppression suffered by gay Chicanas/os. Examining gender and sexuality from a transnational approach reflects an intersectionality that mainstream feminism lacks.

To understand the need for an intersectional and transnational analysis of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's fictional detectives, in this chapter, I offer a brief overview of Chicana/o social and artistic activism from the 1960s, and its role in the emergence of Chicana/o feminist and queer

theories. I also present some key arguments on the concepts of identity and violence that inform the theoretical approach of this dissertation.

I.2. Emergence of Theoretical Perspectives on Chicana/o Subjectivity

In this research, I use the term Chicana or Chicano to refer to people with Mexican descendants or origins. It is worth mentioning that throughout this dissertation I use Chicana/o, a term widely used among scholars devoted to the study of Chicana/o culture, - instead of Chicano/a -, in order to highlight and recognise the valuable work of Chicana women. This suffix – a/o - has inscribed a politicised view in that it endorses the struggles of Chicanas and their contribution to the creation of Chicana/o identity, community and studies (Charles M. Tatum 2006). New feminist trends consider the gender-neutral marker -o to be sexist and the ending o/a to be exclusionary as it emphasises gender binary opposition and does not allow for new gendered conceptualisations. Consequently, they have advocated for a language without gender perspective. Hence, the use of the endings -x or -e with an aim to be inclusionary (T. Jackie Cuevas 2018). In contrast to this view, Ilan Stavans states that the term “Latinx” is an aberration from a linguistic perspective. He explains that it sounds more like a commercial brand than a word and doubts that this term will stand the test of time (Stavans 2017). Similarly, the writer Daniel Hernández argues that “Latinx” is not linguistically viable and he does not see it as an “organic neologism” as this term is “used mostly by an educated minority, largely in the U.S.” (Hernández 2017). For the purpose of my investigation, and with no intention of being exclusionary, I will not be using the suffixes –x or -e as, I previously explained, I want to emphasise the efforts of Chicana women.

The 1960s and 1970s Chicano Movement led to a watershed discourse on national identity. This discourse is marked by a notable patriarchal bent, however, as I discuss in this chapter, gave way to the emergence of feminist and queer Chicana/o theories. To explore the rise and evolution of these theories it is important to first review the social, historical, political and artistic context of the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

I.2.1. The Chicano Movement

In my research, I use the term Chicano Movement and not Chicana/o Movement to highlight that, despite the fact Chicanas were actively involved in this Movement, gendered issues were not addressed due to the restricted views of Chicano nationalism¹. As Maylei Blackwell explains

[t]he Chicano movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s was motivated by several ideological strands of which Chicano cultural nationalism was a dominant one. [...] The backlash against Chicana organizing was tied in part to how Chicano cultural nationalism was not just an ideology of cultural pride and unity but also a gendered construction that mediated how gender roles and expectations were played out in the political practices of the Chicano student movement (2011, p. 92).

To date, the Chicano Movement has been “the largest and most widespread civil rights and empowerment movement by Mexican-descent people in the United States” (García in García ed. 2014, p. 1). Student activism and the consolidation of a Chicano identity were paramount to its emergence (Muñoz 1989). Additionally, Chicanas/os agricultural activism in the rural areas during the early 1960s also gave rise to the Movement (Gutiérrez in Lomelí et al. 2019).

The ideology behind the Movement was known as *Chicanismo*. It “encompassed both political and cultural constructs related to being both a Chicana/o and a participant of the Mexican American experience” (Maciel, Ortiz and Herrera-Sobek eds. 2000, p. xiii). This *Chicanismo* demanded equal rights, inclusion and self-determination for Mexican Americans. It also requested bilingual education and awareness of Chicanas/os’ cultural history.

The Chicano Movement has been widely considered to have taken place between 1965 and 1975, although, as Mario García indicates, “the new historiography [...] is pushing the movement further into the late 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, that 10-year period between 1965 and 1975 had [been] without question the most intense years of the movement” (in García ed. 2014, p. 1). In 1965, Mexican and Chicana/o farm workers initiated a strike in the central valley of California which demanded better worker’s rights and benefits. This protest “influenced many Chicano youth throughout California and the Southwest, where the majority of Mexican Americans lived, to become politically involved and laid the foundation for the emergence of the Chicano Generation [...] what came to be known as the Chicano Movement”

¹ The term Chicano nationalism was the standard means of referring to the Chicano Movement during its early stages.

(ibid., p. 1). This Movement sought to empower Chicanas/os through the affirmation of their ethnic identity and also to improve the social and economic conditions of Mexican-Americans. It demanded farmers' rights, better education and social change. It reacted against cultural assimilation and called for ethnic pride. The Movement's activists requested civil rights whilst they embraced their historical legacy. This combination not only shaped the collective identity during the Chicano Movement but has also been adopted by subsequent generations of Chicana/o activists (Gómez-Quiñones and Vásquez 2014).

The Movement was constituted by multiple organisations, among the largest were the United Farm Workers Union and the student organisation El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlán (MEChA).

Out of the United Farm Workers Union, originally founded as the National Farm Workers Association in 1962, emerged a new generation of activists whose claims for agricultural workers rights and social justice reached a national audience. One of the lead organizers of this Association was Cesar Chávez who became one of the main figures of the Chicano Movement (Vicki Ruiz 1998; Roger Bruns 2011). Farm workers' struggles and the Chicano Movement became unquestionably linked. The initial activism was carried over by these workers to the Chicano Movement (Rosales 1996; Rodríguez 2014). One the main acts that symbolises farm workers' activism is the grape boycott which was initiated in 1965 in the Delano fields and lasted for five years. Workers demanded better working conditions and pay. Their accommodation was bare and lacked both electricity and water. Families were prone to illness and disease due to unsanitary outhouses. As a result of these combined factors their life expectancy during the mid-1960s was just 49 years (Roger Bruns 2011). Their grape strikes and requests for boycott to consumers put pressure on growers along the Californian West Coast. This boycott finally resulted in the improvement of workers' wages and working conditions. Furthermore, it "stimulated militant activism nationwide, portrayed the poor worker with dignity, and became a key gathering point as it grew in tandem with, and shared activists with, the Chicano Movement everywhere" (Rodríguez 2014, p. 13).

Along with César Chávez, Dolores Huerta was one of the main advocates for farmworkers rights and a cofounder of the National Farm Workers Association. Her prominent role in this association positioned her as a feminist who did not comply with women's conventional roles of housewives and consequently became one of the forerunners of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Worth 2006; Gómez Quiñones and Vásquez 2014).

The late 1960s witnessed the birth of the Chicana/o student movement. In 1969, two major student conferences on Chicana/o concerns, held in California and Denver, fuelled the emergence of Chicano political subjectivity (Muñoz 1989; Ruiz 1998).

At the beginning of 1969, student organizations united under El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). “The new name signified the commitment to confront social inequities and to reject assimilation into the dominant society” (Gómez-Quiñones and Vásquez 2014, p. 158).

The promotion of critical thought by this student movement gave rise to feminist trends (Gómez-Quiñones and Vásquez 2014; Licón in García, M. 2014). Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that the emergence of feminism within this movement was not spontaneous. That is, women were banned from leadership roles and relegated to a traditional supporter role. Through their activism they fought their way into roles with more responsibility and voiced their concerns (Moraga 2000; Hurtado 2003; Blackwell 2011).

Ignacio García identifies four phases in the Chicano Movement. The first one is marked by Chicana/o politicians, intellectuals and students’ rejection of the liberal agenda. García refers to the liberal agenda as “the traditional manner by which immigrants and minorities were supposed to integrate into the American mainstream. This would include education, good citizenship, patriotism, alliances with liberal groups, faith in government, and cultural assimilation” (1997, p. 9). By rejecting this process of assimilation “Chicano activists sought to destroy the sense of inadequacy that many Mexican Americans felt in their relationship with mainstream society” (ibid., p. 12). MEChA’s activism and published articles revealed these tensions between North American society and Chicanas/os representation within it. Chicana/o students resisted assimilation and pursued educational as well as professional improvement (Rodríguez 2014). Up to the 1950s, Chicana/o middle- and upper-class militants advocated for assimilation as the key to solve the issues that Mexicans and/or people with Mexican origins faced in the United States (Gómez-Quiñones 1990). However, by the end of the 1950s, middle-class Chicanos started to reject assimilation as they “witnessed the successes Blacks were registering by using demonstrations and picketing and charging white America with racism” (Rosales 1996, p. 109).

The second phase of the Movement involved a reinterpretation of the past. Chicana/o activists “could overcome their powerlessness only if they could see themselves as a historical people with heroes, legends, triumphs, and legacies. Chicano historians discovered old heroes and

reinterpreted old events through a new nationalist framework that made Mexican Americans active participants in history” (García 1997, p. 12). The Movement took pride in Chicana/o history and fought for a fair representation and recognition of their efforts within North American society as well as history (Maciel, Ortiz and Herrera Sobek 2000; Moraga 2000). This proud heritage, which reverberated throughout the Movement, was materialised in the manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (1969). The Chicano poet Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia, known as Alurista, wrote the preamble to this manifesto at National Youth Liberation Conference in Denver. *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* aimed to strengthen Chicanas/os cultural identity and self-determination. It instigated a sense of pride in Chicana/o origins and heritage. As Lee Bebout argues, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*

claimed a lineage between contemporary Chicanos and the Aztecs of pre-Columbian times [and] located Aztlán, the ancestral homeland of the Aztecs, in the present-day southwest United States. This narrative positioned Chicanos and their struggle both geographically and historically. [...] the Plan called for uniting in the “struggle against the foreigner ‘Gabacho,’ who exploits our riches and destroys our culture (2011, p. 2-3).

In the same year, 1969, *El Plan de Santa Bárbara: A Chicano Plan for Higher Education* was developed. It was drawn up at the University of California Santa Barbara and became the structural foundation for the introduction of Chicana/o studies programs throughout North-American universities (Rodolfo F. Acuña 2011).

The Chicanas/os’ praise of their heritage illustrates García’s third phase of the Movement which is based on Chicanas/os’ reaffirmation of their racial origins, “[t]hey emphasized their indigenous past and glorified the ancient civilizations of Mexico and South America. This connection to racial origins gave Mexican Americans historicity” (1997, p. 12). Finally, the fourth phase was distinguished by the political activism carried out by Chicanas/os who “sought to empower their community to free it from Anglo-American politicians, nativist educational curriculums, and cultural stereotypes. By engaging in oppositional politics, Chicano activists could emphasize the “Mexicaness” of the community and steer it away from integration into American society” (ibid., p. 12-13). García understands that one of the key elements fuelling the Chicano movement and Chicano empowerment is political activism. The *Raza Unida* party was founded in 1970 by Mario Compeán and José Angel Gutiérrez in an attempt to address Chicano concerns which were not acknowledged by mainstream political organizations associated with Republicans and Democrats. The *Raza Unida* was an independent organisation that sought Chicana/o self-determination and significantly contributed to the creation of the Chicano Movement’s political agenda (Navarro 2000).

Each of these phases gave new impetus to the development of the Chicano Movement which was translated into an awareness of collective identity and the formation of a Chicana/o ideology.

The Chicano Movement also gave way, “[...] albeit in a tense and conflicted manner, to the development of feminism in the Mexican community [and] played an instrumental role in creating a transnational consciousness among Mexicans in the United States [...] in favour of a politics of solidarity based on cultural affinities and shared class interests” (Haney-López 2009, p. 238). In this respect, art became one of the main organisational tools to achieve Chicanas/os’ self-determination and to give visibility to the concerns of Chicanas.

I.2.2. Chicana/o Art as a Socio-Political Tool during the 1960s and 1970s Movement

The 1960s witnessed a new generation of Chicana/o poets such as Abelardo "Lalo" Delgado and Trinidad "Trino" Sánchez. This new generation of poets was, as Tomás Ybarra-Fausto argues, “propelled by a new sense of identity and a profound awareness of their cultural heritage” and their poetry reacted against

the limitations and presumptions of the dominant literary establishment. Seeking new forms and a new vocabulary, they created alternative outlets for publication and established the poetry reading as an integral part of the mass mobilization of the period. [...] Chicano poetry of the 1960s presented a positive alternative as it projected itself with human dimensions and human concerns. Poetry was made accessible, optimistic and reflective of a manifest struggle against cultural and human despoliation (quoted in Limón 1992, p. 84).

These poets’ political engagement was reflected in their poetry as it articulated a resistance to injustice and repression that Chicanas/os felt, and poems such as *I am Joaquín* (1967) “which was written, after all, as an organizing tool – signalled that change was imminent” (Pérez-Torres 1995, p. 12).

This epic poem by the Colorado-based Crusade for Justice leader Rodolfo “Corky” González, illustrates the previously explained four phases of the Chicano Movement in that it embodies political activism, conveys Chicanas/os heritage and rejects assimilation. This poem is one of the most influential literary works of the Chicano Movement and Chicana/o literature (Bruce-Novoa 2014). Notwithstanding, Juan Bruce-Novoa acknowledges that the poem has an “uncritical utilization of standard Mexican populism, perpetuating stereotypical imagery, while

using it to establish a Chicano heritage” (2014, p. 56). The stereotypical imagery is reflected by how women are defined from a male perspective, there is no gender consciousness (Rebolledo 1995; Rueda Esquivel 2006). Catriona Rueda Esquivel highlights the narrator’s use of the first person voice when he is referring to the male figures Cuahtémoc or Pancho Villa whilst there is a shift between the first and third person when the narrator impersonates the female:

I am in the eyes of woman,
sheltered beneath
her shawl of black,
deep and sorrowful eyes
that bear the pain of sons long buried or dying

The woman is then “defined through her love for the male hero, Joaquín: her eyes mirror him and mirror her warmth and love for him. Thus, she exists only through the heterosexual family romance” (Rueda Esquivel 2006, p. 147).

Chicana feminist thought and its artistic representation played an important role during and after the Chicano Movement. It is worth mentioning that Chicana artistic activism existed before the 1960s. For example, back in 1910, Chicana activist Sara Estela Ramírez wrote the poem *Rise Up!* dedicated to women:

Rise Up! Rise up to life, to activity, to
the beauty of truly living; but rise up radiant
and powerful, beautiful with qualities, splendid
with virtues, strong with energies.

Ruiz’ recognises the nascent feminism of the poem in that Ramírez’ verses encourage women to be empowered through activism (Ruiz 1998).

The Chicano Movement also gave way to the emergence of the Teatro Campesino and other cultural productions. The Teatro Campesino, which started in 1965 during the Delano Grape Strike, was founded by the Chicano artist Luis Valdez, who is also well-known for his play *Zoot Suit* (1978) and his movie *La Bamba* (1987). The Teatro Campesino was conceived as the cultural arm of the United Farm Workers Association (Rosales 1996). The one-act performances, referred to as *actos*, of the Teatro Campesino aimed to “inspire the audience to social action. Illuminate specific points about social problems. Satirize the opposition. Show or hint at a solution. Express what people are feeling” (Valdez 1990, p. 12). Additionally, it provided economical support to the farmers’ strikes. Valdez states that the novelty of the *acto* lay in its social outlook contrary to any individualistic view of the playwright. (Valdez 1990).

This political theatre was performed by farmworkers and depicted their lives as well as their struggles.

The Chicana/o Mural Movement that started in the late 1960s also gave impetus to the Chicano Movement's activism. Gaspar de Alba explains that "murals and posters, represented the community's social problems and injustices while creating a new artistic and politically responsible sensibility" (1998, p. 39). Thus, this Mural Movement was not just a form of resistance but also encompassed an affirmation of Chicana/o collective identity (Goldman in Sperling Cockcroft and Barnett-Sánchez eds. 1993). Las Mujeres Muralistas of San Francisco arose in 1973 from this artistic Movement. This group of women was originally formed by Chicana artists Patricia Rodriguez and Graciela Carrillo de López, Guatemalan Irene Pérez, and Venezuelan Consuelo Méndez de Castillo. Later, other artists such as visual artist Ester Hernández joined them. They produced a body of work which focused on Chicana/o concerns and more specifically women's issues. Their work aimed to construct a dialogue that bridged the divide between race, gender, class and sexuality (Dávalos 2001).

Yolanda López is another visual artist whose work first appeared during the 1970s. Both, Hernández and López, are known by their re-appropriation of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the attribution to her image of an empowered female role. For example, Ester Hernández's "La Virgen de Guadalupe Defendiendo los Derechos de los Chicanos" (1975) is a print of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a karate pose and wearing karate clothing. This representation breaks with that of the traditional one in that the Virgin is no longer seen as a passive figure but as an active female that defends the rights of Chicanas/os. In the accompanying DVD, *I Love Lupe*, to Alma López and Gaspar de Alba's coedited work *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's Irreverent Apparition* (2011), Hernández explains that "[s]ome people who were very, very Catholic and very traditional were extremely offended [by this work]. Some, like men, for example, said that this was obviously the anger toward them, anger toward the Church, anger toward virginity" (2011). This reaction took her by surprise as she thought the image was humorous and not so problematic. She also states that she gained the support from open minded men as well as Chicanas.

Ellen McCracken recognises the fundamental role that narratives played from the start in the social change fuelled by 1960s Chicano/Latino rights movements. She argues that "such socio-political realignments are impossible without critical redeployments of narrative" (1999, p. 2). Among the extensive amount of narrative practices, she lists popular religious rituals,

songs, the recuperation of oral traditions and recovery of lost homelands in political narratives, visual and performing arts, murals, magazines, newspapers and literature. During the 1960s and 1970s there was an emergence of alternative press that published the narrative work of young Latinos. However, McCracken signals that most of the published writers were men and affirms that, “[t]he key issues of gender and sexuality around which large movements and national debates developed in the post 1960s decades required that alternate narrative focuses be taken up in the new writing by women” (ibid., p. 2).

Chicanas founded journals such as *Encuentro Feminil: The First Chicana Feminist Journal* and publishing companies - Third Woman Press being among the most notable - where they could present their creative activist work. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the development of a Chicana feminist movement that can be traced through their female activists’ printed work (García 1989). Writers and theorists such as Moraga, Anzaldúa or Alarcón led a generation of Chicana artists who continue to voice Chicana experiences.

Apart from this brief look at the 1960s and 1970s artistic production, I also want to highlight that, as Rodolfo F. Acuña argues, the years 1969-1973 were crucial to the formation of Chicana/o studies. During this period students delved into an opportune space to develop Chicano student organizations (Acuña 2011). He highlights the crucial contribution of the Chicano student movement to the emergence of Chicana/o Studies. Indeed, this contribution is paramount. Nonetheless, Michael Soldatenko claims that although campus politics played an important role in the development of Chicana/o Studies, he refutes the theory that it was foundational to the formation of Chicana/o Studies (Soldatenko 2012). He argues that “Chicano studies programs were a by-product, not of student protests as a movement but of the rupture of the institutional imaginary that Chicanos(as) (as well as other disenfranchised communities) created” (ibid., p. 17). He explores and documents this rupture through the examination of written dialogue between Chicanas/os from 1967 to 1970.

Similarly to Acuña’s view, Reynaldo Flores Macías attributes the creation of Chicana/o studies to students’ political activism. He explains that the fragmented research that was available on the Chicana/o community was predominantly tainted by stereotyping and distortions (Flores Macías 2012). Thus, the Chicano Student Movement’s response was the creation of Chicana/o studies programmes that reflected the reality of the Chicana/o community. Chicana/o studies created a space for cultural analysis, experience and representation.

The newly created Chicana/o studies had five main goals: The creation and sharing of new knowledge about the existent diversity within the Chicana/o community, the revisioning of

Chicana/o history and stories, the application of this new knowledge to the progress of the Chicana/o community, the support of Chicana/o cultural production and the promotion of social justice (Flores Macías 2012). Chicana/o studies not only generated a community of scholars but also formulated a common identity whilst recognising diversity within the Chicana/o community. It contributed, and still does, to the revision of Chicana history from a female perspective, as their history had been constructed from the male gaze (Blackwell 2011; García 2014; Chávez-García in Lomelí et al. eds. 2019). The inclusion of a Chicana political agenda within Chicana/o studies offered an understanding of the oppression suffered by Chicanas from their own community as well as their invisibility from mainstream theorising. As Patricia Zavella indicates, the Chicana feminist criticism that began in the late sixties emerged from within the context of both second wave feminism and the Chicano Movement. (in Arredondo et al. eds. 2003). Chicana feminists called for their own representation within the Chicano Movement and reacted against mainstream feminist movements. As Ana Castillo explains, Chicana feminists “did not identify with the white women’s movement and therefore received no intellectual verification of the injustice we felt as women [...] The strength of our collective resistance to dominant society motivated us onward” (1995, p. 94). Their activism has resulted in the local and international recognition of the multidimensional inequalities that Chicanas, and women of colour in general, have been subjected to.

Despite the existing tensions and division within the Chicano Movement, there is no doubt that it left a significant cultural legacy. The creative wave boosted by the Movement gave way to new generations of artists in subsequent decades (Maciel, Ortiz and Herrera-Sobek 2000).

Shaped by the cultural pride and political activism of the Movement, Chicanas/os have developed a wide variety of cultural expressions and have gained international acknowledgement. The emergence of multiple Chicana/o oriented publishing companies that are still active, such as Bilingual Review Press (1973), Arte Público Press (1979) and Floricanto Press (1982), is also another important indicator of the Chicano Movement’s legacy. As far as political activism is concerned, the use of the Chicano Movement protest strategies are present in today’s immigrant-rights organizations. (Rodríguez 2014). Chicanas/os activism has successfully resulted in the creation of policies that allowed them to become a recognised group within American society. Finally, the Chicana feminist consciousness that arose during the Movement has greatly contributed to the visibility of Chicanas’ concerns and to Chicana/o studies’ body of criticism.

I.2.3. Theorising the Female Brown Body

During the sixties and seventies, the Chicano Movement was predominantly directed by a male leadership. Their initial reception of Chicana activism was marked by condescendence toward female activists. As female activism grew stronger, many men regarded this movement with resentment (Moraga 1993; Castillo 1995; García 2014). The nationalism of the Movement was at times controlling and restrictive, this impacted Chicanas/os unity since those who did not conform to the traditional masculinist expectations were disregarded. As Blackwell explains, cultural nationalism “served as a regulatory apparatus to discipline deviant subjects who do not fit within those boundaries, especially in relation to sexuality, gender, and, often, race” (2011, p. 93). She considers nationalism to be “[...] a signifying practice of political meaning-making rather than strictly as a narrowly defined ideology” (ibid., p. 93). Indeed, Chicano cultural nationalism created a female imaginary that circumscribed women as the carriers of Chicano tradition and family whilst, paradoxically, female concerns and voices were omitted from the Chicano Movement discourse. As a result, a Chicana feminist movement emerged. Chicana writer and critic Alma García explains that “[d]eveloping first as cultural nationalists, these Chicanas began to see and experience some of the contradictions of Chicanismo, specifically as it applied to women” (2014, p. 3). Chicana feminism grew parallel to *Chicanismo* as a reaction to the existent sexism within the Chicano Movement. Xicanisma, a term coined by Ana Castillo, has been also used to refer to Chicana feminism. Castillo asserts that “our Xicanisma helps us to be self-confident and assertive regarding the pursuing of our needs and desires” (1995, p. 40). That is, Castillo adopted Xicanisma as a way to give authenticity to Chicanas struggles. Xicanisma is a Nahuatl-based word. The “X” in the word Xicanisma denotes the adoption of Nahuatl language, the language of the Aztecs, it is a way of reclaiming Chicanas’ indigenous roots. Thus, this term encompasses “Mexicaness” as well as race and gender discourses inscribed in Chicanas’ consciousness. Xicanistas are those women “who have 1) remained steadfastly dedicated to their work as artists and writers and 2) turned to some strain of feminism to gain support as women for their perspectives” (ibid., p. 93).

Chicanismo embraced a sexism that was contested by Chicana feminists. The Movement failed to acknowledge Chicanas’ experiences and claims by aligning to a cultural nationalism imbued on traditional notions of gender roles. Chicanas were active participants within the Movement but their role was primarily relegated to that of serving men’s needs. Consequently, despite the

active role of Chicana activists, their efforts and artistic expressions did not have public recognition until the late 1980s and early 1990s (Castillo 1995; Madsen 2000). McCracken points out that, during the 1990s, mainstream publishing companies marketed Latina writers and their works as “postmodern ethnic commodities” (in Catherine Leen and Niamh Thornton eds. 2014, p. 15). The exotic images of Mexican womanhood that populated the covers of novels such as Cisneros’ *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) were an attempt “to reabsorb writers and texts into mainstream ideology as desirable elements of postmodernity that can be purchased and, to some degree, possessed” (ibid., p. 15).

In relation to the publishing of detective fiction, it is important to highlight that since the 1980s fictional queer detectives have become more prominent in North American crime fiction. Small publishing companies started publishing works which, in most cases, were previously rejected by mainstream companies. Nava’s first novel in his Henry Ríos crime series, *The Little Death*, was rejected by twelve publishing companies before it was released in 1986 by the independent press Alyson Publications which specialises in LGBT+ literature.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the nation was described and articulated from a masculinist perspective in terms of familial relationships. The verbal and visual rhetoric of the Chicano Movement relegated Chicanas to the domestic sphere (Saldívar-Hull 2000; McMahon 2013). Thus, the redefinition of family and cultural symbols has had a crucial role since the beginning of the Chicana feminist movement and has become “a common thread in Chicana and Mexicana literature” (Sandoval 2008, p. 8).

Chicana feminists were not willing to repress their needs to align themselves with a collective identity and ideology –those claimed by *Chicanismo* or women’s movements- founded on exclusionary principles. Chicana feminists started to interrogate the gendered interpretation of *la familia*. Vidal explains that

when Chicano men talk about maintaining La Familia and the 'cultural heritage' of La Raza, they are in fact talking about maintaining the age-old concept of keeping the woman barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen. On the basis of the subordination of women, there can be no real unity. [...] The only real unity between men and women is the unity forged in the course of struggle against their oppression. And it is by supporting, rather than opposing, the struggles of women, that Chicanos and Chicanas can genuinely unite (quoted in Garcia, A. 2014, p. 21).

Chicanas were assigned a role within the family that restricted any possibility for their autonomy and self-determination, as I later explain in chapter IV throughout the analysis of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s detective narratives.

Apart from the patriarchal conception of *familia*, which renders women as passive subjects, the Chicano Movement also perpetuated restrictive female roles through a misrepresentation of the main Chicana/o and Mexican female myths. As Debra J. Blake explains, the figures of *la Malinche*, *la Llorona* and *la Virgen de Guadalupe* “have overlapped and interacted in Mexican history and memory since the sixteenth century to promote the interests of various political and religious groups, to maintain male dominance” (2008, p. 26). *La Virgen de Guadalupe* has served as an archetype of a patriarchal and religious interpretation of womanhood. In contrast, as I later examine in Chapter V, *la Malinche* and *la Llorona* have been used to demonize female autonomy.

Hurtado associates the Chicano traditional definition of womanhood with “[t]he historical experience of conquest by Spaniards and the imposition of Catholicism on indigenous people [which] dichotomized women’s womanhood into the “good woman” and the “bad woman” according to their sexuality” (2003, p. 15). Similarly, Gaspar de Alba indicates that women have been confined to three categories: the mother, the virgin and the whore. These roles perpetuate an opposition between the good and the bad woman – the good woman being the virgin or the mother that sustains *la familia*, and the bad woman being the whore or one who embraces her sexuality and autonomy –. The Chicana writer explains that “[...] the Malinche label is branded on all who would put gender or sexuality on par with race or class as sites of oppression and struggle within the Chicano movement” (2014, p. 115-116). Indeed, not conforming to the idealised representation of woman places Chicanas to the margins of the Chicano Movement and its definition of the “real woman”. As Anzaldúa explains, “[...] the true identity of all three has been subverted –*Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* [*La Malinche*] to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy” (2007, p. 53).

Norma Alarcón explains that the forging of Guadalupe as the national Virgin Mother started twelve years after Hernan Cortés’ arrival to the Americas. Alarcón argues that *la Virgen de Guadalupe* “has come to symbolize transformative powers and sublime transcendence and is the standard carried into battle in utopically inspired movements. Always viewed by believers as capable of transforming the petitioner’s status and promising sublime deliverance” (Alarcón 1989, p. 61). However, this female metaphor has never taken the place of the Aztec earth mother Tonantzin as Guadalupe’s representation as silent mediator and passive subject rather evokes the Catholic representation of the Virgin Mother.

In the essay “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess” (1996), the Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros explores how Latinas’ female sexuality has been treated as a taboo, full of guilt and shame, due to the religious and cultural interpretation of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*. Cisneros recalls that when she was a teenager “womanhood was full of mysteries” and that religion and culture “helped to create that blur, a vagueness about” her own sexuality (in Castillo ed. 1996, p. 47). Thus, she was angry every time she saw *la Virgen de Guadalupe* as she has been represented as the role model for brown women, “she was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable” (ibid., p. 47). Cisneros argues that her current view of Guadalupe is completely different, from the one of her childhood and the Catholic Church as a result of her research into this female symbol’s pre-Colombian antecedents. These include the earth goddesses Tonantzin, Coatlicue, the goddess of creation and destruction of earth, or Tlazolteotl, the goddess of fertility and sex. She sees *la Virgen de Guadalupe* as Coatlicue “not silent and passive, but silently gathering force. [Her] Virgen de Guadalupe is not the mother of God. She is God. She is a face for a god without a face, an indígena for a god without ethnicity, a female deity for a god who is genderless” and also a woman like her (ibid., p. 60).

The symbolic meaning of Guadalupe is contradictory in that she is identified with self-determination and reform movements such as the Chicano Movement but, in contrast, “she represents the piety and compliance expected of women in a culture bound up with Catholicism” (Blake 2008, p. 114).

The symbolisation of Hernán Cortés’ interpreter, *la Malinche*, as a traitor to her own people grew parallel to the emergence of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a national symbol. The desexualised portrayal of Guadalupe as a symbol of virtue contrasts with *la Malinche*’s representation as a sexually active female figure and speaking subject. Whereas patriarchal-catholic interpretations of Guadalupe somewhat described her as the neo-representative of the Virgin Mary, *la Malinche* was presented as the biblical Eve. Drawing from Rene Girard’s views on the interconnection between violence and religion, Alarcón argues that “[i]n the context of religiously organized society” *la Malinche* was unanimously declared a scapegoat and this unanimity is represented through the violence displaced onto her. This “mechanism then structures many cultural values, rituals, customs, and myths. Among people of Mexican descent, from this perspective, anyone who has transgressed the boundaries of perceived group interests and values often has been called a *malinche* or *malinchista*” (Alarcón 1989, p. 60). The representation of *la Malinche* as “Guadalupe’s monstrous double” has helped to create

nationalist perspectives behind a discourse that sees the rage against the scapegoat as an organisational mechanism that reflects the community's unity. Thus, Alarcón argues that "the contemporary recuperation and positive redefinitions of her name bespeak an effort to go beyond religiously organized Manichean thought" (ibid., p. 60). The key lies in acknowledging and representing *la Malinche* as a speaking subject and not as a submissive and silent ritualised symbol.

Chicana feminists have challenged the political use of these female symbols. Anzaldúa explains that, "[c]ulture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power –men" (2007, p. 38). Patriarchy has produced cultural discourses and symbols that have misrepresented women, who have often been seen as either passive or overbearing. Female submission is acceptable whilst female subversion and/or autonomy is demonised. The fallacious assumption of male domination and female subjugation has been deeply ingrained. Hence, through cultural production, Chicana feminists seek to destabilise male power structures. They have re-written traditional female stories to allow Chicanas to define themselves and break with the boundaries that the dominant culture have assigned to female roles. As Arredondo indicates, "Chicana feminist writings move discourse beyond binaries and toward intersectionality and hybridity" (in Arredondo et al. eds. 2003, p. 2). During the post-Chicano Movement period of the 1980s and 1990s, there is a predominant emergence of Chicana narratives, which McCracken refers to as "noncompeting narrative discourses" (1999, p. 181), where gender, ethnicity and social justice continuously interact. Works such as *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995) and Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* (1986), serve to exemplify McCracken's view. *The House on Mango Street* is a coming-of-age novel that narrates the experiences of Chicana Esperanza Cordero. This novel illustrates how private spheres – such as that of the home - as well as public ones are male dominated. Female characters are constantly controlled by male ones and Esperanza attempts to escape from this controlling environment of her home. The story's gender issues represented in the novel "are inextricably linked to the ethnic social space in which the protagonist undergoes her transformation" (McCracken 1999, p. 181). Esperanza is aware of the abuse and isolation that impacts the women of Mango Street, however she refuses to allow these patterns of harm to rule her way of life.

Under the Feet of Jesus is another coming-of-age story where the main protagonist, thirteen-year-old Chicana Estrella is depicted as a powerful female whose coming-of-age is “inseparable from the crossing of gender barriers, ethnic solidarity, and standing strong against such social evils as substandard wages, poor living condition, pesticide contamination, and lack of access to adequate health care” (McCracken 1999, p. 182).

In the play *Giving Up the Ghost*, Moraga examines lesbian desire and Chicana/o traditional cultural concepts of sexuality through the lens of her lesbian Chicana characters Marisa and Corky. Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano explains that “[t]he staging of mestiza desire in a “lesbian” context forces the deconstruction of gendered identity as heterosexual and opens the door to imagining other forms and subject/objects of desire” (2001, p. 35). In this respect, Moraga asserts that defining “the parameters of what it means to be, and love, la mestiza [...] is what being a Chicana feminist means – making bold and political the love of our women [...] No one else can or will speak for us” (2000, p. 129). Chicana writers’ exploration of their fictional characters’ sexual identities, as in the case of Moraga, reflects how age and/or culture can be determining elements for the position taken by them in regards to their sexuality. It is then the Chicana writers’ task to provide a testimony that investigates their experiences from different subject positions.

During the Chicano Movement, Chicanas also challenged dominant second wave feminist articulations. Benita Roth argues that there are three main elements contributing to the whitewashing of second wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. She explains that the first one is the fact that “scholars of post-war feminist protest have, to some extent conceptualized second-wave feminism as white by focusing on the number of feminists of color actually in the second wave, that is, on the number of feminists of color in white feminist organisations” (2007, p. 7). Roth criticises their failed attempt to explain the absence of feminists of colour within their organisation. White, middle-class feminists dominated second wave feminism and consequently excluded women of colour. Additionally, Chicana activists claimed that these white feminists had “individualistic goals that often depended on the domestic labor of Black, Brown and working-class women” (Chávez-García in Lomelí et al. 2019, p. 70). Roth’s second element with regard to the whitewashing of second wave feminism lies in the fact that white feminist scholars “have misunderstood the timing of feminist emergences. White feminism has been seen as first on the block, with Black feminism and Chicana feminism coming later to add the factor of race/ethnicity to the feminist project” (Roth 2007, p. 8). Indeed, quite often, white feminists did not acknowledge the centrality of women of colour feminism and instead, placed

it to the margins or to a secondary position. Finally, Roth asserts that “as a result of the failure to think in an intersectional fashion about second-wave feminist mobilizations, feminist scholars waded into a problem of where to draw the line in calling a movement “feminist”” (ibid., p. 8). That is, second wave feminism ideology mainly dealt with gender issues. In contrast, Third World feminist ideology has analysed and integrated other forms of oppression that are intrinsically connected to women of colour (Moraga 2000). Chicana feminists and other feminists of colour have contested the white, middle-class second wave movement and their gender strategy by challenging “multiple injustices and on affirming the varied experiences, self-definitions, and resistance practices women of color engage” (Blake 2008, p. 71). Blake also argues that the publication of Anzaldúa and Moraga’s anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*, in 1981 marked “the date of collective, public articulation of this differently theorized feminism” (ibid., p. 71). This work offers an insight into the experiences of straight and lesbian women of colour. It is a reference book that laid the foundations for third wave feminism which looks at women’s oppression from an intersectional perspective.

Chicana feminists also acknowledge that despite the fact that mainstream literary theories have contributed to broaden the knowledge on identity formation, they have also been exclusionary. That is, they have not represented or have misrepresented Chicana/o identities (Yarbro-Bejarano in Herrera-Sobek and Viramontes eds. 1996). Hence, Chicana/o criticism and literature is constantly shifting between the alternative and the mainstream. As Anzaldúa clarified back in 1990, “[t]heorists-of-color are in the process of trying to formulate 'marginal' theories that are partially outside and partially inside the Western frame of reference (if that is possible), theories that overlap many 'worlds'” (1990, p. 25). In fact, Anzaldúa’s theories are formulated from the border. That is, from a border position that is constantly negotiating between cultures, races and conflicting forces. She adds that in Chicana/o literature these liminal positions are reflected, as “social issues such as race, class and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. [...] And [they] simultaneously combat the tokenization and appropriation of [their] literatures and our writers/artists” (ibid., p. 25). Thus, by creating a literature of their own, Chicana/o writers have given voice to their multiple border-crossing experiences. This dual task of Chicana/o literature, that of representing Chicanas/os realities and reacting against mainstream conceptions of Chicana/o identities, was also acknowledged by Teresa McKenna during the first years of the Chicano Movement:

The Chicano must not only address himself to the creation of a distinct literature emergent from his own reality, he must also contribute to the further richness of his art through the development of a body of criticism and approaches to Chicano literature from a Chicano perspective (quoted in Stavans ed. 2007, p. 15).

McKenna's sole use of the masculine form also denotes the gendered articulation of the Chicano Movement and highlights the importance of Chicana feminists' use of inclusive language (Chicana/o) to address their contribution to the Movement and to Chicana/o criticism.

The Chicano Movement resulted in the production of an extensive body of Chicana/o criticism along with "a distinctive Chicana literature. Chicana writers, many of them former Movement activists, have become a powerful force in Chicano literary circles" (Maciel, Ortiz, Herrera-Sobek 2000, p. xix). The Chicano Movement and the different 1960s civil rights movements –anti-Vietnam war, women's and African-American movements- greatly influenced two generations of Chicana writers. As Edwina Barvosa-Carter explains, "[t]he first of these writers include Lucha Corpi, María Herrera-Sobek, Angela de Hoyos, Beverly Silva, and Alma Villanueva" (in *ibid.*, p. 263). Among the second generation, Barvosa-Carter highlights writers such as Lorna Dee Cervantes, Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros. She argues that Chicana writers have "also been influenced by the long and complex history of the geographical region now divided into the United States and Mexico" (*ibid.*, p. 263). Indeed, the cross border historical and political element of Chicana/o culture has always been present in Chicana writers. Additionally, their works expose how male-dominated power structures and idealistic notions on identity have contributed to violence against women and to homophobic attitudes, a recurring theme that has also been present in Chicana/o detective novels as I analyse in this dissertation.

Blake explains that Chicana writers "refute narrow views of women by creating fictional characters or writing about themselves as women who boldly and painfully confront and reject cultural prescriptions" (2008, pp. 6-7). Their writings reject a patriarchal colonial ideology on women that has been passed on and perpetuated by their community. They deconstruct male essentialist views and create a space for the reaffirmation of Chicana subjectivities and representations of diverse identities (see Chapter IV for an analysis on how Nava and Gaspar de Alba's mysteries transform mainstream detective fiction and create a space for gay Chicana/o identities).

Chicana/o writers have also been concerned with gay Chicana/o rights and Chicana/o criticism on queer identities has contributed to the transnational turn in queer studies that I analyse next.

I.2.4. Chicana/o Queer Studies in a Transnational Context

Moraga explores, from a political and cultural perspective, what it means to be a lesbian Chicana in the United States. In her essay “A Long Line of Vendidas”, she discusses Chicano nationalism and the position of lesbian Chicanas seen as traitors, as *vendidas*, not only because of their diverse identity but also because of their attempt to include sexual matters within the nationalist agenda. Moraga’s work also criticises the unilateral approach of many feminist critics in the development of feminist theories. She argues that “[i]n failing to approach feminism from any kind of materialist base, failing to take race, ethnicity, class into account in determining where women are at sexually, many feminists have created an analysis of sexual oppression (often confused with sexuality itself) which is a political dead-end” (2000, p. 118). In respect to this intersectional approach to the study of identities, Gaspar de Alba also adds that they should be examined taking into account their cultural, political and/or historical context. That is, with “a sense of self that changes depending on the situation, such that the same individual may be, for example, Chicana at home, Latina in the media, Hispanic in a grant application, and American in a passport” (in Hernández et al. eds. 2014, p. 12). Furthermore, Gaspar de Alba tries to fashion an alternative Chicana/o feminist theory through the revisioning and reconfiguration of female symbols as models of resistance. In her analysis of Sor Juana, she proposes to reconfigure her as “a symbolic foremother of Chicana lesbian feminism” because of her “subjugated condition, her struggles for autonomy, and her search for meaning and transcendence through education and cultivation of a personal/political voice” (Gaspar de Alba 2014). Indeed, Sor Juana shares with lesbian Chicana feminists the awareness of patriarchal oppression, the need of being and acting as a speaking subject who voices her subjectivity, and the sense of embodying multiple identities.

In 1993, Moraga stated that “Chicanos are an occupied nation within a nation, and women and women’s sexuality are occupied within Chicano nation” (1993, p. 150). Thus, she sought a new nationalism where heterosexism and homophobia did not take place. There is no doubt that from then until now the socio-political sphere related to gender and sexuality rights has significantly evolved. Yet, there is still a considerable way to go before full equality and recognition is achieved in certain realms. For example, since the 1980s, Chicana feminism and Chicana lesbian theory have played a pivotal role in the construction of a Chicana/o politics and criticism but, as Rolando Romero declares, some “Chicano-centered reconstructions of the

Movement continue to affirm the domestic image of Chicana participation” (2014, p. xv). Chicanas’ revisioning of cultural symbols, historical narratives and myths is still necessary to reflect a Chicana reality that has been misinterpreted or ignored. Chicanas have also found resistance by means of cultural and linguistic re-appropriation. Gaspar de Alba argues that

in this postmodern age of shifting signifiers and signifieds, [...], Chicana lesbians [and feminists] can take "Malinchista" away from the oppressive and degrading signification of patriarchy. . . . To be a Malinche is to be a traitor: to the essentializing, stereotypical, male-privileged gender codes of the race; thus, Malinche is a new mirror for Chicana posterity to look upon and in which to be reflected. From this mirror arises the mirror of Malinchismo, a new theory of Chicana resistance (1998, p. 144).

In this respect, gay and lesbian rhetoric has also re-appropriated the word “queer”. I use the term queer to highlight other forms of sexuality and gender identification that do not conform with the standard definition of the term gay. Queer is also a category that is marked by an unfixed definition, this term has inscribed the understanding that not all sexual behaviours or desires can be captured. As Sedgwick indicates, queer signifies “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (1993, p. 8). Queer contains an array of sexual identities, behaviours and desires that contest heteronormativity and transgress dominant conceptions on gender. Queer studies have served “to rethink the sexual in new ways, elsewhere and otherwise” (De Lauretis 1991, p. xvi). Hence, I see the term “queer” as a widely inclusive umbrella term that denotes various sexual and gender behaviours that challenge the hegemonic norm.

During the 1960s and 1970s, many lesbian Chicanas moved away from the Chicano Movement and from mainstream feminism to embrace Third World lesbian and Women of Colour movements (Chávez-García in Lomelí et al. eds. 2019). The first feminist approaches during the Chicano Movement were marked by a homophobic backlash that considered all Chicana feminists to be lesbians and consequently traitors to the authentic Chicana/o identity. As García explains, “Chicana feminist lesbians experienced even stronger attacks from those who viewed feminism as a divisive ideology” within the Chicano Movement (1989, p. 226). Lesbian feminists encountered the rejection of both male and female cultural nationalists who viewed their demands regarding women’s rights and sexuality as a distraction from the Chicana/o nationalist cause – that of fostering a Chicana/o collective identity – (Blake 2008). García argues that certainly “a cultural nationalist ideology that perpetuated such stereotypical images of Chicanas as “good wives and good mothers” found it difficult to accept a Chicana feminist

lesbian movement” (1989, p. 226). Consequently, feminists of colour and, particularly Chicana feminist lesbians, responded to these attacks in three different ways, as García indicates. One response was based on a “separatist strategy within their own racial and ethnic communities”. Another response was the forming of “lesbian coalitions across racial and ethnic lines” and a third response, “consisted of working within the broader nationalist movements in these communities and the feminist movements within them in order to challenge their heterosexual biases and resultant homophobia” (ibid., p. 227). I theorise that lesbian Chicanas adopted these three strategies in that, firstly their sexuality forced them to be outside their community, as Anzaldúa explains, being a lesbian is “an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous” (2007, p. 41). Secondly, lesbian Chicanas’ creation of coalitions with different ethnicities is illustrated in the publishing of the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) which compiles essays from and by different racialized lesbian groups. This anthology was later followed up with *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002), a large collection of writings that depicted a new insight from the perspective of the twenty-first century woman of colour’s consciousness.

Finally, these Chicanas have created a body of gay criticism and literature within Chicana/o studies in an attempt to represent their life experiences and challenge heterosexism. In this respect, Moraga advocates for a “theory in the flesh” that examines the oppression suffered by lesbians of colour:

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience.
We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
We are the feminists among the people of our culture.
We are often the lesbians among the straight.
We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories in our own words
(2015, p. 19).

Moraga’s “theory in the flesh” represents Chicana/o diverse sexualities where descriptions of their struggle and contestations to hegemonic views operate together. Acuña argues that “the change in consciousness of gender and sexuality is due more to the participation in Chicana/o Studies than because of it” (2011, p. 147). In fact, Chicana/o theorising on gender and sexuality extended the scope of analysis of Chicana/o studies.

Queer Chicana/o studies identify the differences gay Chicana/o individuals experience in opposition to mainstream feminist and queer studies that often fail to highlight the multidimensional aspect of gay ethnicities. Mainstream theoretical agendas have frequently

served white people's interests, as their white-centrism has shaped exclusionary theoretical formulations.

Most of the well-known Chicana feminist writers openly claim their sexual lesbian identity. Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Emma Pérez, among others, have been crucial in positioning sexuality in a central place within Chicana/o studies and literary criticism. Through coming out, these writers have achieved what Zimmerman defined as lesbian feminists' "ultimate challenge". They have inscribed their personal experiences "onto a body politic that can then take part in reconstructing the public and private institutions that presently control" lesbian lives (Zimmerman 1984, p. 682). Whereas it is important to acknowledge that the identity politics developed by these writers are "deeply committed to maintaining the cultural integrity of Chicano culture as a counterchallenge to the dominant hegemony of cultural, linguistic, and economic assimilation" (Hurtado 2003, p. 9), it is also crucial to recognise that they have voiced the rejection that they have suffered by their own community. Thus, they have articulated, at a fictional and non-fictional level, counter discourses that aim to reflect a more concise representation of the multiplicity of identities within their community. Pérez posits that "pervasive homophobia constructs sociosexual power relations in society and pervasive homophobia in our Chicana/o community limits the potential for liberation and revolution" (in Trujillo ed. 1991, p. 163). To achieve an authentic collective empowerment of Chicana/o identity it is pivotal to eradicate Chicana/o homophobic attitudes. Thus, through the lenses of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's gay detectives, these authors reveal homophobia as a way of reaffirming a diverse sexuality consciousness that has been obscured under the premise of an authentic ethnic identity.

Discussions on sexuality were actively introduced into Chicana/o studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Chabram-Dernersesian 2007). The notion of sexuality has been studied in connection with gender, race and class as Chicana/o scholars have not seen them as individual categories but complementary to each other.

In 1986, Michael Nava published *The Little Death*, the first mystery novel featuring a gay Chicano. During the 1980s, lesbian Chicana authors such as Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Gloria Anzaldúa, Trujillo or Cherríe Moraga produced fictional and non-fictional works that represented the experiences of gay Chicanas/os and laid the foundations for a queer Chicana/o theory and what has become an extensive body of queer Chicana/o criticism (see Chapter II). A transnational viewpoint on queer studies has contributed to a clearer understanding between Chicana/o and mainstream criticism. Thus, Chicana/o critics have transformed and informed

Eurocentric and white-dominated critical frameworks on sexuality. Writers, as Lomelí, Márquez and Herrera-Sobek argue, have also begun “to look beyond their respective regions and beyond their Chicano and other American circles” (in Maciel et al. eds. 2000, p. 289). By subjecting dominant criticism to a sustained analysis, Chicana/o scholars have shifted and questioned the unilateral views that defined Chicanas/os as the other, and instead, have placed themselves in a position that allows their self-definition within mainstream criticism. They have also opened new directions within queer studies that look at how migrations shape and define queer subjectivities. For example, Lionel Cantú Jr. has greatly contributed to queer migration studies with his critical works on migration, gender and sexuality within the U.S.-Mexico context². Theory by Chicanas/os has laid the foundations for a new transnational consciousness that addresses shifting and multiple identities, and reacts against the various oppressions that they are subjected to.

I. 3. On Violence and the Discursive Limits of Identity

I understand identity as an element inherently linked to a conscious system of association with and disassociation from other individuals. That is, a process based on sameness and otherness where the individual is identified according to their relation with others. As a result, identity is relational in the sense that for an identity to exist it needs another identity that differs from it. This relationality is based on binary oppositions – for example, nationalistic and non-nationalistic identity - as well as on the opposition of symbolic markings such as gender, ethnicity or sexuality. As a result, I see symbolic markings as a set of differentiating aspects that divide the self and the other. That is, a specific identity is distinguished for both what it is and what it is not.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explain that “[t]o be given an identity involves being assigned a specific place in the world” (2011, p. 132). Identity is a complex concept that resists specific definition in that it is fluid and, as such, any attempt to articulate a restricted definition would be problematic. Therefore, I do not intend to offer a specific definition of identity. Throughout this dissertation, I look at identity, and particularly at sexual identities, as being not only a biologically or behaviourally determined category but also a socially

² Lionel Cantú Jr. published *Borderlands: the socio-political dimensions of gay Latino community formation in greater Los Angeles* (2000) and was the co-editor of *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (2005). Cantú’s *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men* (2009) was posthumously published by editors Nancy Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz.

constructed one. The social construction of identity is also acknowledged by Butler, who understands identity as a performative act, “a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (2006, p. 192). Guided by a social constructionist approach, I understand identity as a category limited by an essentialist discourse produced by and from hegemonic powers. As Vivien Burr argues, “[...] a multitude of discourses are constantly at work constructing and producing our identity” (2006, p. 125). He also adds that “identity is never unitary or stable. It is more accurate to speak of a person having multiple identities which are in flux and shifting, constituted and reconstituted across the discursive terrain” (ibid., p. 126). Consequently, these discourses have established oppositional identity categories that are marked by either a sense of authenticity or deviance. For example, heterosexual identities are discursively constructed as authentic whereas homosexual ones are seen as abnormal.

I argue that the demonization of minority social groups is sustained by these binary constructions that shift between “I” and “the other” or “us” and “them”. This “other” is therefore perceived as the faulty identity; a threat to the “I” and consequently becomes the object of hatred. Woodward argues that

as individuals we have to take up identities actively, those identities are necessarily the product of the society in which we live and our relationship with others. Identity provides a link between individuals and the world in which they live. Identity combines how I see myself and how others see me (2004, p. 7).

Indeed, identities are socially constructed categories that differentiate one group from another. These identities we are assigned to - social, cultural and political identities - determine how we experience the world and our relations with others. “Identity is marked by similarity, that is, of the people like us, and by difference, of those who are not” (ibid., p. 7). Hence, a person’s identity can only be conceptualised when compared and/or in opposition to another person’s identity. Throughout my analysis of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s detective narratives, I demonstrate how identity can be used either as a tool to promote conflict or as a vehicle to advocate for diversity, inclusion and liberation. Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s fictional detectives take the standpoint of “the other” and from this position reveal the violence that the “I” exerts on the marginalised other. In this respect, *Desert Blood* illustrates the violence suffered by the poor, brown female at the U.S.- Mexico border. Additionally, this novel and Nava’s mystery series highlight the homophobic violence inflicted on gay and lesbian identities. At the same time, the viewpoint of “the other” inscribed in their detectives - and the representation of their otherness - promotes diversity and decentralises essentialist views that lead to conflict. Hence,

I consider that it is crucial to analyse sexual identity in conjunction with violence, as they are both interconnected in the work of these authors.

Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels examine homophobia along with other forms of inequality. That is, ethnicity, gender and class shape their identity as well as their status as marginalised individuals. It is then necessary to analyse their works from an intersectional perspective. As Doug Meyer explains, "[t]o focus only on homophobia would obscure the racial dynamics of anti-queer violence [...] The overlap, or intersection, of these institutional power structures is especially important to consider [...] examining race on its own or sexuality by itself would prove insufficient" (2000, pp. 3-4). From an outsider standpoint, that of the gay Chicana/o, these authors' detectives reveal the violence exerted on the multiplicity of identities embedded in female, gay and lesbian people of colour.

I.3.1. Identities that Matter

As previously explained, violence is unequivocally linked to the notion of identity. At this point, two main questions arise; to what extent identities are important in our day to day lives? How do the identities of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's fictional protagonists play a significant part in the authors' novels?

Kathryn Woodward highlights the importance of identity in that it "provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed" (2007, p. 301). That is, identification is a biased process by which we discover who we are, how others see us, and our sameness as well as difference towards them. Hence, in terms of identity, I argue that each individual is defined by their own singularity as well as by their relation to others. In this regard, Butler argues that "[t]he uniqueness of the other is exposed to me, but mine is also exposed to her. This does not mean we are the same, but only that we are bound to one another by what differentiates us, namely, our singularity" (2005, p. 34). Indeed, human beings establish a process of identification through the acknowledgement of each other's uniqueness.

In my research, I reject any essentialist notion on identity that "grounds the presumption that identities are self-identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent" (Butler 2006, p. 22). An identity is not an essence that, in the Platonian sense, does not allow for transformation. It is not determined by a monolithic behaviour and cannot be

limited. In line with Butler, the sociologist Richard Jenkins also considers that identities are not unmovable but transformable. “Individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed: in the processes of primary and subsequent socialisation, and in the ongoing interaction during which individuals define and redefine themselves and other, throughout their lives” (Jenkins 2008, p. 40). He understands identity as a process of internal and external identification. That is, a process of self-identification by an individual and the identification that others make of this individual.

In order to create an ethical system of identification that prevents marginalisation, Butler draws from the Levinasian theory on identity politics. Levinas advocates for an ethical relation between the self and the other. He claims that we should transcend our perception of the other as its very nature cannot be captured. “The relation to the other is therefore not ontology. This bond with the other [...] is not reducible to the representation of the other, but to his invocation, and [...] invocation is not preceded by an understanding”. (2017, p. 7). Levinas prompted us, as individuals, to accept the limits of our lack of understanding of the other and recognise that difference is what binds us. The self can only exist in correlation with the other, “I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an ‘I’, precisely because I am exposed to the other. It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that make me an individual ‘I’” (Levinas in Kearney 2004, p. 78). Thus, otherness should not be used as a social exclusionary tool. The self cannot fully comprehend the other but must accept to live with what it cannot understand. However, when the self decides to impose its meaning upon the other, violence takes place, as I will demonstrate through the examination of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s narratives.

Levinas uses the term totalisation to refer to the restrictive conception of the other by the self. Indeed, the other is the object of the self’s conscious mind. This reductionist idea of the other is an act of violence since the assumption of how the other is, denies its self-determination. That is, we cannot simply confine the other to an array of categories such as race, ethnicity and/or sexuality. The other and its otherness escapes our understanding.

Gaspar de Alba’s views on identity politics also parallels Levinas and Butler’s outlook. She draws from Bhabha’s conception of identity as a notion to be understood as beyond itself and proposes to focus “on the several interstices that exist between our individual and collective differences. In the friction created by the interaction of these signifiers lives the spark that we call identity” (2004, p. 107). Hence, she rejects any restrictive view on identity and argues that,

for example, “[...] nationality is not the only way to configure identity [...] in a world of globalization and transnational capitalism, a world created by markets as much as by movements of people, place of origin does not explain or define identity.” (ibid., p. 107). Thus, I argue that to analyse the interstices in Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s fictional sleuths is to examine their identities from a transnational perspective. Moreover, this research not only examines sectarian constructions of identity where the self/the normative ostracises and, consequently, exerts violence on the other/the un-conforming. It also analyses the value of these authors’ works in that they present minority and non-conforming identities within a mainstream genre and, consequently, reformulate detective fiction.

I.3.2. Identity as a Social, Cultural and Historical Construct

The interpretation of the other cannot be reduced to a culturally, historically and/or politically established meaning. As I previously explained, our relation with the other “exceeds the confines of understanding. Not only because, besides curiosity, knowledge of the other also demands sympathy or love, ways of being that are different from impassive contemplation, but also because, in our relation to the other, the latter does not affect us by means of a concept. The other is a being and counts as such” (Levinas 2017, p. 5). Notwithstanding, identities are constructed through a discourse that produces polarised binaries and, as a result, favours unequal power relations (Foucault 1990; Butler 2006). The violence that results from the process of othering is carried out by a dominant group and exists within contexts such as those of ethnocentricity, patriarchy and heteronormativity.

The poststructuralist stream of identity politics reveals and deconstructs this identity formation. On the one hand, Foucault argues that the subject has been constituted through power-based discourses that restrain its very nature. On the other hand, he asserts that the existence of power inevitably produces resistance, “[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1990, p. 95). Indeed, discursive power can be double edged in that it constrains but also empowers. Power relations are present everywhere, in a greater or lesser degree, in society and resistance is the “odd term in the relations of power” (Foucault 1990, p. 96). Authoritarian relations cannot be eradicated but resistance can transform through the power of discourse of the oppressed subject.

Butler also dismantles the discursive process of identity formation through an examination of gender. She maintains that gender “is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity

instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (1988, p. 519). Conforming gender and sexual identities are then the product of a set of performative acts that fit idealised patriarchal and heterosexual beliefs about the nature of men and women.

Butler questions these discursive and socially constructed limits imposed on identity and wonders “[t]o what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person? [...] the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity [...] the “coherence” and “continuity” of “the person” are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (2006, p. 23). The notion of identity cannot just be constituted and defined by regulatory practices as it would be a rather simplistic definition. We live in a complex world of pluralised cultures, and identities are equally complex. Accordingly, identity categories are restrictive and exclusionary as they cannot truly represent the diversity of every individual. In this research, I argue that a reductionist construction and definition of identity gives way to irreconcilable binaries, mechanisms of exclusion and consequently violence. In line with the previously examined poststructuralist views on identity formation, I examine and question how individuals have been identified through discursive relations of power and conforming performative acts.

I.3.3. Violence in the Name of Identity

Quite often, violence in the world is the result of the misconception that there are authentic identities and that non-authentic ones must be erased or subjected to submission. Therein, Amartya Sen argues that

[t]he art of constructing hatred takes the form of invoking the magical power of some allegedly predominant identity that drowns other affiliations [...] The result can be homespun elemental violence, or globally artful violence and terrorism. In fact, a major source of potential conflict in the contemporary world is the presumption that people can be uniquely categorized based on religion or culture (2015, p. xv).

Indeed, unilateral beliefs that classify identities in opposition and, consequently, in conflict are the promoters of hatred and violence. Identities are fluid and should not be ranked in a power

structure that places some identities over others, that is to say some identities being considered more legitimate than others.

Hatred towards other identities is exonerated and justified through the use of strategies such as victim-blaming or stereotyping. For example, *Desert Blood* reveals and, at the same time, demystifies the gendered representations of the “bad woman” wrongly attributed to victims of femicide. That is, this victim blaming strategy portrays the woman as promiscuous and in turn any violence towards her is somehow legitimised, as I demonstrate in Chapter V.

I understand the other as being part of a minority and often marginalised group. Otherness is not unique or static but fluid. Otherness is created by a social and discursive process. This othering process results in a hierarchical classification, that of “them” and “us”, where the other is defined in simplistic terms through stereotypes that seek to stigmatise. The discrimination of the other is based on an unbalanced power relation.

Žižek maintains that language plays an integral part in the violence existing behind identification processes. He created the term symbolic violence in reference to the intrinsic restrictive aspect of language. That is, he argues that language imposes meaning and that the result of this imposition is a form of violence. “This violence is not only at work in the obvious – and extensively studied – cases of incitement and of the relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms: there is a more fundamental form of violence still that pertains to language as such, to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning” (Žižek 2009, p. 1). This view on language as a form of violence is also shared by Levinas who indicates that “[l]anguage cannot encompass the other: the other, the concept of whom we are using at this very moment, is not invoked as a concept, but as a person. In speech, we do not just think of the interlocutor, we speak to him; we tell him the very concept we can have of him as ‘interlocutor in general’. The one to whom I speak stands farther back, behind the concept I communicate to him” (2017, p. 28). At this point, I contend that my research is not an attempt to understand the identities of the fictional Chicana/o detectives analysed but to recognise them, or in Levinas’ words to “invoke” them, and demonstrate their usefulness as a tool to give visibility to their identity interstices.

I maintain that we, as individuals, can recognise a group’s identity or the other’s identity without attempting to understand them. The problem arises when the group seeks recognition through publicising sameness within their collectiveness, when there is a reification of the

collective identity, as it would ostracize any individual that does not comply with this sameness.

The recognition of the other, of the different, does not involve any appropriation but acknowledgement and acceptance that the other has an alterity that the self cannot comprehend. Recognition is key for self-realisation and for avoiding social struggles resulting from unbalanced power relations (Taylor 1980; Honneth 1995).

I also want to emphasise that I look at this recognition in terms of equality, that is, there is not a superior or inferior relationship between the self and the other. In this regard, Fukuyama makes a distinction between two forms of recognition; megalothymia and isothymia. The former indicates the need to be recognised as superior to others and the latter refers to the need to be identified as equal to others (Fukuyama 2006). Thus, I contend that the inclusion of queer Chicana/o detectives within a mainstream genre presupposes not just a reformulation of the genre but also an equal recognition of historically ostracized identities that feeds the isothymia of Nava and Gaspar de Alba. That is, to recognise an identity as equal to others is the first step to provide a possibility for change. This demand for transformation is not only present in political activism but also in the literary activism of these Chicana/o authors, as this research will demonstrate.

I.3.4. Challenging Identities

The awareness of intersectionality in identity politics offers a more accurate knowledge and recognition of differences among individuals. As a result, the negotiation between collective and individual identities finds a balanced interaction based on inclusion and recognition. To reach this point, we first have to avoid analysing identity from a “colonial mind-set” as Pérez proposes. She argues that the colonial perspective

believes in a normative language, race, culture, gender, class, and sexuality. The colonial imaginary is a way of thinking about national histories and identities that must be disputed if contradictions are ever to be understood, much less resolved. When conceptualized in certain ways, the naming of things already leaves something out, leaves something unsaid, leaves silences and gaps that must be uncovered. [...] I argue that the colonial imaginary still determines many of our efforts to revise the past (2003, p. 123).

Thus, to decolonise Chicana/o history and historical imagination, she proposes to “uncover the voices from the past that honor multiple experiences, instead of falling prey to that which is

easy – allowing the white colonial heteronormative gaze to reconstruct and interpret our past” (ibid., p. 123). Indeed, the same way that the other’s identity cannot be understood by the self, it can neither be reinterpreted with the self’s tools.

Normalising mechanisms established by white heteronormativity cannot then be used to identify and explain Chicana/o national and queer identities. Foucault indicates that normalisation becomes one of the most important tools of power by the end of the classical age. He argues that “the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; [...] determine levels [and] fix specialities” (1991, p. 184). Thus, it is primordial to recover Chicana/o history from a decolonial viewpoint that acknowledges the multiple intersectionality of identities existing in Chicanas/os and analyses the interstices located between their diverse forms of alterity. Dávila reflects on Chicanas/os conflict between their sense of belonging and disassociation that has resulted from a constant imposed otherness, Chicanas/os have

always been that other Mexican, or that other American that few ever recognized as being specifically either [...] The Chicano’s capacity to be different, to be that elusive yet ever present “otro” may be the very reason why he has never been able to wear the “Mexican” mask or the “American” mask well. The Chicano is truly the cultural correlative for that proverbial “otro” that was always there, somewhere in between the United States and Mexico. Always there, yet somehow never noticed (in Wilkie et al. eds. 1976, p. 559).

Chicanas/os have been the nexus between two cultures but paradoxically they have been relegated outside of both of them. However, this position has become their site of resistance, as Alarcón explains, “[t]he paradoxes and contradictions between subject positions move the subject to recognize, reorganize, reconstruct, and exploit difference through political resistance and cultural production in order to reflect the subject-in-process” (in Arteaga 1994, p. 136). The Henry Ríos mystery series and *Desert Blood* call for a resistance based on an identity politics that binds subjectivities across their differences and rejects exclusionary practices such as normalisation.

In this research, I also look at the notion of deviance, in regards to sexuality, and its political implication within a stratified social system. Deconstructing the discursive formation of sexually non-conforming identities is, as Pérez states, “[a]nother way of tackling primary research for an “invisible” group” (2003, p. 127). Thus, a decolonial queer gaze that dismantles the heteronormative imaginary opens the way to “future studies with perspectives that do not deny, dismiss, or negate what is unfamiliar, but instead honors the differences between and among us” (ibid., p. 129). In this research, I argue that the inclusion of queer Chicana/o detectives in Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s works have contributed to the expansion of queer

Chicana/o empowerment and to capture the reality of Chicana/o queer subjectivities. In turn, their narratives have also assisted in the configuration of new perspectives in Chicana/o studies based on the revision of a Chicana/o culture that has been historically informed by male heteronormative perceptions.

I.4. Synthesis

Moraga argues that “Chicanos’ refusal to look at our weaknesses as a people and a movement is, in the most profound sense, an act of self-betrayal” (2000, p. 103). Chicanas and Chicana lesbians were compelled to cease their fight for “liberation against the oppressive forces of the white colonizer and the Chicano Machismo in the name of Aztlán, in order to back the Chicano movement that emerged in the latter part of the 1960s” (Sandoval in Foster 2014, p. 48). As I later argue, Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels challenge traditional gender values and behaviours perpetuated by the Chicano nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s.

The examination of Chicana/o identity has been crucial to reflect on Chicanas/os’ lived experiences and to understand the intersectionality of different oppressions that female and queer Chicanas/os have been subjected to. Individual identities are not perceived as being generated by each individual alone. Instead, they are created through dialogue and interaction with others. In this respect, social norms have served to differentiate the socially acceptable from the socially deviant. Thus, I argue that the examination of Ríos’ and Villa’s different subjectivities can only be conceived by the recognition of a failed identification system established by, and in favour of, dominant groups.

Struggles in relation to the affirmation of national, sexual, ethnic and other identities are defined by the recovering and rewriting of the individual’s history (Woodward 2007). In this respect, Chicana/o writers have reclaimed their cultural imaginary as a reaction against the dominant culture and traditional identification ideologies generally informed by the heterosexual male gaze. Chicana feminist writers have reclaimed female symbols and revised their culture’s metaphors related to these symbols as an act of resistance against the dominant culture.

Chicana/o narratives imprinted by feminist and queer thought emerged from a need to look at the complexities that a Chicana/o identity represents and to empower Chicanas/os to challenge

dominant research paradigms. In 1990, Anzaldúa wrote about the need for theories that “rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries” (1990, p. xxv). In this chapter, I have offered a review of the main theoretical framework used throughout this dissertation. As Chicana feminism agrees with dominant feminist movements in that patriarchy oppresses women, it has also offered an intersectional approach that encapsulates and contests the multiple systems of oppression that women of colour are subjected to.

Hurtado envisaged that younger Chicanas will have “much more varied social and class experiences than current writers” and wondered about the future directions of Chicana feminism in fifteen years, “[t]he question is whether our present feminisms will capture and enlighten emerging social formations” (2003, p. 21). *Desert Blood* has captured the effects of a new global capitalism and patriarchy that in turn gave way to the emergence of multiple feminist organisations. Thus, I argue that Gaspar de Alba’s novel has contributed to feminist activism and to the creation of new directions in Chicana feminism. Additionally, both Nava and Gaspar de Alba have developed through their narratives a multidimensional social discourse that has successfully captured queer Chicana/o experiences.

As I demonstrate in this research, the transnational viewpoint of their mystery works has reformulated the genre and has positioned them as valuable contributors to the current transnational formulations on feminism and queer literary feminism. Lomelí, Márquez and Herrera-Sobek suggest that “[a]s Chicana/o detective fiction writers continue to explore and transform the traditional detective formula, the Raza detective promises to become a vigorous agent for social and cultural change” (2000, p. 302). Indeed, Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s fictional detectives have been efficient agents for social and cultural change in that they reveal injustices. The widely acclaimed success of the novels they feature in has drawn local and international visibility to queer Chicana/os issues, homophobia and gendered violence at the border.

CHAPTER II

**OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE: TOWARDS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL
APPROACH**

pre-examination copy (08/07/2019)

[...] while Chicanos/as are cultural citizens of the United States, neither the mainstream art world nor the dominant popular culture is a hospitable place for Chicano/a cultural production (1998, p. xvi) – *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba –

II.1. Introduction

The queer Chicana/o detective has brought a new rhetoric that challenges the heteronormative and white-supremacist aspects ascribed to the early hard-boiled investigator. Throughout this dissertation, my examination of queer Chicana/o detectives, and particularly Nava and Gaspar de Alba's fictional sleuths, demonstrates the transformation of the detective fiction formula for cultural and socio-political ends.

The purpose of this research is to explore how queer Chicana/o detectives investigate concepts of identity politics and violence from an outsider's point of view, namely that of the queer detective in the fiction of Chicana/o writers Michael Nava and Alicia Gaspar de Alba.

This work suggests that crime fiction has been, for Nava and Gaspar de Alba, a suitable genre through which to explore issues related to sexuality within the Chicana/o community and to examine homophobia as well as violence in an intercultural context. Moreover, this study investigates the impact these novels have made within the canon of detection narratives and of Chicana/o literary tradition.

Nava's work examines the underlying violence that exists within homophobia, and the position of queer Chicano subjectivities, in a transnational environment. Gaspar de Alba's work focuses on the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and the role that globalisation plays in these violent acts against women of colour.

This chapter provides details of the methodology that will be employed to analyse these texts, as well as a review of the most significant scholarly works used to examine the research questions. The purpose of this review is to enable an understanding and generate a comparative analysis of different works in the area of detection, Chicana/o studies and queer studies. It also offers an analysis of the role of the gay Chicana/o sleuth within the detective fiction genre. With respect to the scope of the related literature being investigated, I will demonstrate the importance of using transculturally contextualised theories to explore concepts of violence and identity. Additionally, the inclusion of indigenous and non-indigenous critical theories allows this dissertation to offer an emic as well as an etic approach to Chicana/o culture. It also

negotiates differences and similarities between those theories developed from within the Chicano culture and the ones constructed from the outside.

Etic and emic approaches were first utilised in cultural anthropology. Linguist Kenneth Pike coined these terms that derive from the words *phonemic* and *phonetic*. Pike explained that “[t]he etic viewpoint studies behaviour from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behaviour as from inside the system.” (2015, p. 37). Over the last decades, these divergent perspectives have been applied in different research fields, including the literary one. This research does not explore to what extent an emic approach would be more suitable to analyse Gaspar de Alba and Nava’s work than that of an etic approach, as this would move away from the main focus of my study. Finally, I must emphasise that the subjective nature of the emic approach does not necessarily equate to a lack of neutrality and, in turn, highlights that the etic point of view does not lack subjectivity.

This chapter begins with a brief review of Michael Nava and Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s mystery works, the development of detective fiction, and the role of the new rhetoric brought by ethnic fictional detectives, in particular Chicana/o detectives. The second part looks at how queer studies addresses the multicultural and ethnic aspect of gay Chicano identities, as well as the issues they confront because of their sexual identity. The third and final section of this chapter includes an analysis of critical works and theories on violence as related to identity.

II.2. Chicana/o Detective Fiction in Context

Since the 1970s there has been a transformation in detective fiction with respect to the treatment of diverse sexual identities, principally in hard-boiled fiction, which used to portray negative stereotypes of gay characters. This transformation started with Joseph Hansen’s novel *Fadeout* (1970). Published under the pseudonym of James Colton, *Fadeout* features the gay detective Dave Brandstetter, who is considered the first mainstream gay detective. As Josh Lanyon states, this novel “changed the private detective sub-genre forever” (in Evans 2017, p. 265). Detective fiction, particularly in its early stages, as I later examine, portrayed a distorted view of homosexual characters. They were presented as sexually promiscuous individuals with few if any romantic connections, and were characterised as disturbed and unstable. In contrast, Brandstetter is an openly gay claims insurance investigator, characterised by his professionalism, intelligence and confidence. At the beginning of the novel, the reader finds Brandstetter mourning the loss of his partner of 20 years, Rod Fleming.

In his critical work on the evolution of the hard-boiled sleuth, *Cracking the Hard-boiled Detective: A Critical History from the 1920s to the Present*, Lewis D. Moore also acknowledges this transformation by comparing Raymond Chandler and Joseph Hansen's mystery narratives: "[o]ne recalls Philip Marlowe's harsh stereotyping of homosexuals in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. In contrast, Hansen describes his detective as someone who has a respected reputation as an insurance investigator" (2013, p. 104). In *The Big Sleep*, the private investigator Philip Marlowe is hired to investigate an attempted blackmailing by an erotic book store owner named Arthur Gwynn Geiger. After Marlowe finds the lifeless body of Geiger, he investigates his life and discovers his gay relationship with his chauffeur, Caesar. Throughout the novel, the disdain and stereotyping of Marlowe's views on Geiger and Caesar's sexuality becomes apparent. After Marlowe visits Geiger's house he tells Caesar that he's aware that "the fag [Geiger]" set up a room just for him (p. 73). Along with using derogatory terms, Marlowe also disapprovingly describes Caesar as "a wife to men" (p. 73). A feminising stereotype in relation to male homosexuality.

Hansen's Brandstetter correlates with Nava and Gaspar de Alba's portrayals of their fictional sleuths as highly educated and respected professionals. Henry Ríos and Ivon Villa contribute to the ongoing transformation of hard-boiled fiction and offer a discourse on identity politics that challenges the unilateral notions on identity traditionally reflected by the genre.

Ríos and Villa's sexual identities place them as outsiders, since they are individuals belonging to a marginalised minority group. This outsider's perspective is one of the main characteristics of the crime fiction genre, as analysed in the next chapter. In an interview with Katherine V. Forrest, Michael Nava states that mysteries are "[...] an especially appropriate vehicle to explore the experience of being gay in this culture because, at least in the American tradition of crime writing, the protagonist is an outsider looking in, which describes the experience of most homosexual men and women" (quoted in Gaspar de Alba ed. 2003, p. 78). As I demonstrate throughout my study, Nava and Gaspar de Alba have contributed to forging powerful and realistic images of homosexual identities whilst, from an outsider standpoint, commenting on the violence that heteronormative cultures exert on "the other". In early hard-boiled fiction, gay characters, such as Geiger *The Big Sleep*, were often portrayed with stereotypical female qualities and were not cast as the hero but the evil villain. It was a genre that used queer characters as objects of ridicule. These characters were often portrayed as marginalised subjects and had a tragic fate. In Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, for example, just after Effie Perine, Spade's secretary asserts that the villain Joel Cairo, "is queer"

(p.26) and there is a description by the narrator that characterises him as effeminate and with “high-pitched thin voice” (p. 26).

Chicana/o critics Francisco Lomelí, Teresa Márquez and María Herrera-Sobek assert that Chicana/o detective fiction writers

[...] are producing new literary models that may be viewed as forms of social criticism and cultural representation. Moreover, these writers are modifying the genre by transforming the detective protagonist from white and middle- or upper-class [...] to Raza working-class personas (in Maciel, Ortiz and Herrera-Sobek 2000, p. 298).

This transformation of the genre is captured by Nava and Gaspar de Alba through a process of disidentification, as I explain in depth in Chapter IV. That is, the themes and main characters of their novels do not conform to the traditional formulaic expressions of the genre. The intersectional perspective of their mystery works, focused on revealing different overlapping types of oppression - classism, racism, sexism and homophobia -, has contributed to providing new perspectives within detective fiction criticism.

II.2.1. Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Michael Nava’s Mystery Novels

To date, Nava and Gaspar de Alba are the most prominent Chicana/o mainstream authors to have written detective novels featuring a gay Chicana/o private eye. Other novels such as Emma Pérez’ *Electra’s Complex* (2015), which narrates the adventures of a lesbian Chicana amateur detective, have not received the same international recognition as Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s mysteries.

As analysed in depth in the next chapters, both writers have purposely reshaped the mystery genre to comment on and open up the discussion of issues related to class, culture, gender, politics and sexuality. Their detection narratives have demonstrated the continuing evolution of the detective figure and its importance as a means to reflect on identity politics and negotiations across cultures. The circumstances that surround Ríos’ and Villa’s crime investigations offer subplots that question traditional societal structures and conceptions of identity as a set of fixed notions. Nava and Gaspar de Alba exploit the mystery genre to present issues of sexual identity. As this research illustrates, their novels aim to achieve the normalisation of Chicana/o gay characters by breaking with the stereotypes that gay characters have traditionally been relegated to in detective fiction. Their mystery narratives are not just

mere entertainment but also a reflection on the fluid and changeable aspect of contemporary identities.

Next, I offer a brief summary of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels in order to contextualise the significance that violence - principally homophobia and femicide - and identity have in their work.

Michael Nava: Exploring Sexuality

Along with his mystery novels, Nava has published other fictional and non-fictional work. *The City of Palaces*, published in 2014, is Nava's first novel in the projected historical fictionalised series *The Children of Eve*. The series will be comprised of four historical fiction novels that will explore the life of the Chicano silent film star Ramón Novarro, the Mexican Revolution, and the suffering of the Yaqui Indian tribe during the presidency of Porfirio Díaz. *The City of Palaces* takes place in the years before the Mexican Revolution. With this historical period as a background, this novel narrates the lives of Doctor Miguel Sarmiento and Alicia Gavilán and their families. Despite the fact that Miguel and Alicia are very different characters - he is an atheist and she a devoted Catholic - they will marry and have a son, José. Nava's narrative is interwoven throughout the personal stories and romance between Miguel and Alicia, along with a political background that anticipates the imminent revolution that would emerge in 1910. As with Nava and Gaspar de Alba's detective narratives, fiction and reality intertwine to provide a more realistic approach.

Nava's *Street People: A Novella* (2017) narrates the life of Ben Manso who works as a rent boy. The central plot is based on Ben's interaction with an eight-year-old street kid called Bobby. Ben suspects that Bobby is the victim of a paedophile who is alleging to be his father. Whilst attempting to free Bobby from his plight, Ben faces his own difficult past.

Nava and Robert Dawidoff's non-fictional work *Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter to America* (1994) has contributed to the gay rights body of criticism. It examines the continuous attacks on gay liberties by the unrelenting religious right, how ignorance and bias are at the core of the reactions against access to equal rights for the queer community and the agenda set by sectarian religious moralities to limit freedom of expression. Nava and Dawidoff argue that North American citizenship has been constructed in a tier system which directly contrasts with the constitutional principles of equality. The different arguments in this critical work demonstrate that homophobic attitudes and actions cannot be rationally justified.

Nava's openly gay fictional private eye Henry Ríos features in a seven-volume mystery series written between 1986 and 2001. Additionally, in 2016, Nava published a new edition of the first novel of the series, *The Little Death*, under the title *Lay Your Sleeping Head*.

The series portrays Ríos' career over the course of fifteen years. The first novel of the series, *The Little Death* (1986), introduces the reader to thirty-three-year-old attorney Henry Ríos. He leaves his position as a public defender to open his own law practice and start his career as an amateur investigator. His client Hugh Paris, who was arrested for drug possession, is killed. In the course of the investigation into the murder, Ríos finds himself entangled in a web of political corruption and violence.

In *Goldenboy* (1988), the second novel in the series, Ríos has to defend Jim Pears, a gay closeted teenager accused of murdering a co-worker who threatened to "out" him. Despite having sexual encounters with other men, Pears rejects his own sexuality and despises homosexuals. When Ríos meets him in the jail to prepare the murder case, Pears explains to him that he is sharing his prison cell with "the queens [...] they are like women [...] They say things that make me sick [...] I'm not like that" (p.47). To this comment, Ríos asks him "[n]ot like what, Jim?". "Gay." He spat out the word" (p.47).

In *How Town* (1990), Henry Ríos is asked by his sister to defend Paul Windsor, Elena's friend's husband, who has been accused of being a paedophile. His sister's visit evokes memories for Ríos from his distressed childhood, where his father's alcoholism and mother's religious fanaticism forced Ríos and Elena to raise themselves.

In the fourth novel, *The Hidden Law* (1992), Ríos has to defend a Chicano teenager accused of killing a politician. As the mystery uncovers, Ríos discovers the corruption surrounding the murdered senator Agustín Peña.

In *The Death of Friends* (1996), the fifth novel in the series, Ríos faces the controversial defence of Zack Bowen who has been accused of murdering the respected California state superior court judge Chris Chandler. AIDS and its presupposed connection to homosexuality play a big part in this novel. Ríos is traumatized by the imminent death of his lover Josh Mandel when he hears Mandel's father saying to his wife Selma, "my boy is dying of a homosexual disease" (p. 57). Here, Nava exemplifies how AIDS was perceived as an exclusively gay disease during the 1980s. As Virginia Berridge states, this period "was the classic period of 'gay plague' presentation in the press" (in Aggleton et al. eds. 2004, p. 16). Despite the fact that the press rarely covered AIDS, the association of gay men with it further strengthened the perception that AIDS was a gay-only disease.

In *The Burning Plain* (1997), the sixth novel in the Ríos mystery series, Ríos fights for his life when a homophobic serial killer targets gay men. This novel exposes not only the existent subjective homophobia, represented by a serial killer, but also institutional homophobia when Ríos states that it is difficult “for gay people to get a fair hearing from the cops and the courts” (p. 382). The gay private eye knows that the system can be weighed against gay people.

Rag and Bone (2001), the last novel of the series, is the most personal. After Ríos suffers a heart attack, his sister stays with him at the hospital and reveals to him that thirty years ago she had a baby who she gave for adoption. Vicky, Elena’s daughter, seeks out Elena for help when her abusive husband is murdered. Ríos has to defend his niece, who claims to have killed her husband. I later discuss in Chapter IV that the exposure of familial secrecy and the depictions of Ríos’ childhood in an abusive home, dismantle one of the foundations of Chicano nationalism, that of *la familia*.

As previously noted, *Lay Your Sleeping Head* (2016) is a re-edited version of the first novel of the series, *The Little Death*, and the main plot does not differ from the original one. Nava offers a more in-depth analysis of themes such as personal alienation and a further development of Ríos’ relationship with his client Hugh Paris. As Nava explains, he “wanted to write more deeply about [Ríos’] affair with Hugh Paris [...] and to write explicitly about sex. This is something I didn’t feel I could do in 1985 because had I done so, I’m sure the book would have been dismissed as pornography” (Corbett Holmes 2016). Indeed Ríos and Paris’ sexual encounters are more explicit, as Ríos describes, “[n]ow I was hard, too. He slipped his hand between us and gently tugged our cocks together. [...] I let my fingers slip between his ass cheeks, pressed his hole with my index finger and slipped it in” (p. 26). The fact that this novel has been republished denotes the progression of literature and the publishing world in the last decades with regard to the positive representation of gay sex within a loving relationship.

Nava’s depictions of homophobia in his mystery series reflect not only the violence resulting from hatred towards homosexual individuals but also the violence produced as a consequence of internalised homophobia. As explained by Richard A. Rodríguez, internalised homophobia “is the culmination of the negative introjects of society and culture regarding homosexuality that becomes part of a gay person's own belief system” (1991, p. 131).

AIDS and how it was regarded during the late 1980s and 1990s is a recurring subject throughout the series. In *Goldenboy*, the author introduces the reader to the topic of AIDS through Ríos’ friend Larry Ross and in *The Death of Friends* we see the author further develop this subject matter.

Another main theme that Nava's novels focus upon is that of family relationships, particularly in *How Town* and *Rag and Bone*, where the reader discovers the most personal side of the detective as we learn about Ríos' childhood and his strained relationship with his father and his sister Elena.

Alicia Gaspar de Alba: Investigating Women

Gaspar de Alba has an extensive literary curriculum. In 1999, she published *Sor Juana's Second Dream*. This novel is a fictionalised account of the life of the Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, formerly known as Juana Ramírez de Asbaje (1648-1695). Gaspar de Alba explores Juana's intellectual and intimate life, which embodies a subversive discourse on gender norms of that era. This narrative initially portrays her journey from the age of sixteen to her adult life at the palace in Mexico City where, due to her impressive intellect, she becomes an attendant to the Marquesa de Mancera. Gaspar de Alba narrates Juana's inner battle between loving the Marquesa de Mancera and loathing the prospect of marriage. This subsequently leads her to become Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in the Convent of Santa Paula of the Order of San Jerónimo. As I illustrate in Chapter IV, through the analysis of *Dessert Blood*, the conflict between traditional conventions and sexuality is a recurring theme in Gaspar de Alba's works. *Calligraphy of the Witch* (2007) is another acclaimed novel by Gaspar de Alba. Set in 1683, this novel narrates the life and adventures of Concepción Benavidez who leaves the convent of San Jerónimo in Mexico City and, along with her friend Aléndula, is captured by pirates. She is then sold in Boston to a merchant, Nathaniel Greenwood, who intends to have her care for his disabled father-in-law. One of the key elements of this novel is that it portrays a literate woman of colour which is unusual in historical narratives that have traditionally relegated women of colour to a non-literate role.

Apart from these fictional works, Gaspar de Alba has also written the novels *The Mystery of Survival and Other Stories* (1993), the collection of poetry and essays *La Llorona on the Longfellow Bridge* (2003) and *The Curse of the Gypsy: Ten Stories and a Novella* (2018) which includes ten short stories and the historical novel *Liberata Wilgefortis: The True and Tragic Story of the Bearded Female Saint*. All of Gaspar de Alba's narratives share a strong feminist component. Her adoption of various genres demonstrates not only her versatility but also her endeavour to bring the intersection between gender, race and sexuality issues to the forefront of the Chicana/o literary canon.

This Chicana writer has also published and edited non-critical works. Amongst the most significant are *Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture and Chicana/o Sexualities* (2003), *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (2010), *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's Irreverent Apparition* (2011), edited by Gaspar de Alba and Alma López, and *[Un]framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, and Other Rebels with a Cause* (2014).

The mainstream aspect of detective narratives makes it a suitable genre for Gaspar de Alba to provide national and international visibility to the femicides in Ciudad Juárez. Gaspar de Alba's novel *Desert Blood* (2005) not only offers visibility to these murders but also, as I demonstrate in my research, attempts to criticise the representation of poor Mexican women as bodies that can be consumed and discarded with total impunity.

This novel focuses on violence, family relationships and issues related to identity. In her novel, fiction and reality are intertwined, as her characters are fictional but the serial crimes and the context surrounding them are real.

Since the early 1990s hundreds of women have been killed or remain missing in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, across the border from El Paso, Texas. Many of these women worked in border factories, known as *maquiladoras*. I use the terms *maquiladoras* or the *maquila* industry to refer to factories that initially resulted from the Border Industrialisation Program in 1965, and were established along the U.S.-Mexico border. These factories are manufacturing operations that import component parts from the U.S. or other countries and after assembling and processing, export the final product. Drawing from Diana Russell's definition of femicide as "the murder of women and girls because they are female" (2001, p. 15), I use the term femicide to refer to the killing of these women. Femicide is not only understood as an individual act of violence but also as a type of systemic violence perpetrated within globalised contexts.

The impunity and invisibility behind the Juárez femicides led Gaspar de Alba to write *Desert Blood* as she explains in her non-fictional work *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (2010) which she co-edited with Georgina Guzmán. There are different theories about who is killing these women, however, *Desert Blood* does not attempt to focus on 'the who' but on the reasons and structures that allow these killings to continue. *Making a Killing* offers various explanations as to why these crimes continue to occur. Gaspar de Alba explains that femicide in Ciudad Juárez has been linked to global capitalism, the complicity of public officials and the rising power of organized crime in Mexico. Moreover, the complicity and

corruption of the Mexican government exposes its inability to prosecute those responsible for these femicides (Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011).

Desert Blood, set in 1998, features Ivon Villa, a lesbian professor of Women's Studies who becomes an amateur detective. She travels to El Paso, where she was born, to adopt a baby from Cecilia, a Mexican *maquiladora* worker. However, she later finds out that Cecilia has been murdered. After this murder, she discovers that her own sister Irene has been kidnapped, which leads her on a journey that will reveal the systemic violence behind the Juárez femicides. Gaspar de Alba utilizes this popular culture genre as more than a way of providing excitement and entertainment. In my research, I understand popular culture, as Graeme Turner explains, as "a site where the construction of everyday life may be examined" (2003, p. 6). This examination "is not only academic – that is, as an attempt to understand a process or practice – it is also political, to examine power relations that constitute this form of everyday life and thus reveal the configurations of interests its construction serves" (ibid., p. 6). In this respect, *Desert Blood* is a channel through which the reader discovers the existent power relations and interests behind the Juárez murders.

The plot is constructed in the conventional murder mystery style to the extent that there is an investigator who seeks to solve the mystery of a disappearance. However, Gaspar de Alba's metaphysical narrative subverts traditional detective fiction conventions in that the resolution of the Juárez femicides, inherent in any mystery narrative, is absent in her novel. Gaspar de Alba cannot provide an answer as to why the killings continue, and, consequently, this lack of resolution transgresses the conventions of the genre. In her novel's acknowledgments section, Alba describes her work as an anti-detective novel. This term, that was coined by William V. Spanos in 1972, refers to those works that "evoke the impulse to 'detect' [...] in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime" (quoted in McHale 2012, p. 150). Gaspar de Alba acknowledges that Stefano Tani's work *The Doomed Detective* (1984) "helped [her] figure out the kind of book [she] was writing" (2005, p. 343). Tani argues that Postmodernism has transformed the structure and significance of the detective novel. He concludes that, to some degree, what he considers to be good contemporary fiction could be anti-detective fiction. He relates low art to classical detective fiction and considers anti-detective fiction as high art. Tani sees the anti-detective story as one that "frustrates the expectations of the reader, transforms a mass-media genre into a sophisticated expression of avant-garde sensibility, and substitutes the detective as a central and ordering character for the decentering and chaotic admission of mystery, of non-solution" (1984, p. 40). Tani's work maintains that postmodern

sensibility has transformed the structure and understanding of the detective novel, which, as a result, has become the materialisation of Postmodernism.

In chapter five of her last critical published work to date, *[Un]framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, and Other Rebels with a Cause* (2014), Alicia Gaspar de Alba discusses the three existing types of anti-detective novels according to Tani: the innovative, the deconstructive and the meta-fictional. Within this categorisation, Gaspar de Alba refers to her work as the innovative anti-detective novel. In these kind of narratives, there may be a resolution to the mystery, but it may not be a “real solution”. That is, the murderer can be unveiled but justice is not served. Tani considers this fiction to have a strong component of social criticism.

II.3. Detective Fiction: Theories and Practices

The last decades have witnessed a considerable increase in the number of critical works on detective fiction. As Stephen Knight claims, this criticism “has been expanding, apparently because of the growth of theory-informed approaches in literary criticism and the worldwide move of English studies towards a broader curriculum” (2010, p. xii). Additionally, the genre's flexibility and ability to be constantly reformulated is another reason for its wide appeal. Despite the fact that detective fiction is considered a product of mass culture, its current aim is not only to entertain the reader but also to raise awareness about contemporary socio-political issues. This politicised aspect of the genre and its adaptability have given way to multiple theoretical elements.

Traditionally, detective fiction has been presupposed to be a form of “low” literature and/or culture. However, as Martin Priestman explains, since the 1960s “the presumed barriers between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature have been progressively dismantled” (2011, p. 1). The usefulness of this genre, and crime fiction in general, as a tool for reflecting contemporary identity politics and for producing social commentary has placed it amongst the most valuable literary forms. Consequently, it is no longer framed as “low” or solely entertaining literature. In recent decades, popular culture studies have become an established discipline. Critics working on this field, such as John Scaggs or John G. Cawelti, have found in detective fiction a very enriching subject of study. Cawelti outlines the formula for detective fiction and defines formulaic and “serious” or “high” literature. He states that “[f]ormulas are more highly conventional and more clearly oriented toward some form of escapism, the creation of an

imaginary world” while serious literature would be inclined “toward some kind of encounter with our sense of the limitations of reality”, the reader will not find an escape from their own reality (2014, p. 38). However, he insists on the cultural significance of popular fiction and consequently refuses to consider it as a sub-literature or “lowbrow culture” (ibid., p. 13). He points out that formulaic literature, such as detective fiction, should also be considered “serious literature”, not only for its artistic value but also because of its cultural and historical value, “by discovering these more universal story types, we will be better able to differentiate what is particularly characteristic of an individual culture or period from those aspects of formulas that reflect more universal psychological and artistic imperatives” (ibid., p. 37). Consequently, the analysis of detective fiction will result in the understanding of social and cultural concerns. He also considers that “[b]ecause of their association with the times of relaxation, entertainment, and escape, this type of story has been largely ignored by literary scholars and historians [...] these popular formulas [are] of more complex artistic and cultural interest than most previous commentators have indicated” (ibid., p. 2).

Additionally, Cawelti offers a comparative analysis of classical and hard-boiled stories and points out the involvement of the detective and violence surrounding the story as opposed to the stories featuring a classical detective. He uses the detective story to demonstrate that formulaic genres are not only a means of escape for the reader but also a source of social and cultural attitudes, a reflection of the world in which the reader lives. The author states that his work does not “convincingly substantiate many of the speculations [...] concerning the cultural significance of the different formulas” examined (ibid., p. 298); the crime story, the Western and the social melodrama. However, it does offer an interesting insight into the complexity of formulaic genres and valuable analysis of social and cultural aspects in hard-boiled stories. Cawelti’s work informs my exploration, in Chapter III, of the significance of the detective novel as a vehicle for social critique.

Scaggs asserts that “[...] one of the defining characteristics of crime fiction is its generic (and sub-generic) flexibility and porosity” (2005, p. 2). To demonstrate the fluid aspect of the genre, he offers a critical overview of it. He presents a history of crime fiction and its subgenres within a diachronic social and historical context. In this study, I offer a general insight on the origins and development of detective fiction. I use Scaggs’ diachronic approach to establish the starting point of this genre in 1841, with the publication of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Scaggs argues that “[t]he general critical consensus is that the detective story begins with Edgar Allan Poe’s, the ‘father’ of the detective genre” (2005, p. 7). He considers Poe as the irrefutable creator of detective fiction. His insight into mystery fiction and its future direction reaffirms

the significant transformation of this genre since its conception. In line with Scaggs, I argue that the fluidity of this genre has been a crucial element for its adoption by ethnic, homosexual writers such as Nava and Gaspar de Alba.

Guided by Scaggs analysis on the evolution of the hard-boiled mode, I focus on the development of this subgenre as I consider it to have accurately reflected America's social, political and economic changes, as explained in Chapter III. I look at how a traditionally sexist and racist genre – as well as the hard-boiled subgenre - has been reformulated with the inclusion of ethnic, female and homosexual individualities. Scaggs also provides an interesting analysis of postmodern and anti-detective novels which he considers as having rejected “any notion of the certainty of knowledge and the unity of the human subject” (ibid., p. 139). This concept of a lack of certainty of knowledge in the anti-detective novel is acknowledged in Chapter V through the analysis of *Desert Blood* and the open questions this novel offers in regards to the femicides in Ciudad Juárez.

Raymond Chandler is another author considered in my analysis of the evolution of the detective. He contemplates the differences between the classical and hard-boiled genre, and presents the virtues of hard-boiled fiction as opposed to the classical narratives. Focusing more on the plot than on the writing, he criticises the classical detective stories created by English authors. He claims that

[t]he classic detective story, has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. [...] it is the same careful grouping of suspects [...] There is a very simple statement to be made about all these stories: they do not really come off intellectually as problems [...] They are too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world (1968, p. 5).

Chandler finds the classical formula too restricted and that it does not reflect any social or political aspects of the period they were written in. Indeed, the American hard-boiled formula has more possibilities of transformation as it has adapted to contemporary times to reflect socio-political realities. As a result, it has become widely adopted by social minority writers, such as the African-American Walter Mosley and several Chicana/o writers, to reveal their own experiences, as examined in chapter III.

II.3.1. The Feminist and Ethnic Turns in Detective Fiction

Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones acknowledge that in feminist hard-boiled detective fiction, female characters are not portrayed as *femme fatales* as opposed to such representations in traditional hard-boiled detective fiction. Instead, they are portrayed as “a

heroic one[s], a gesture that would have been inconceivable to the early practitioners of the genre” (1999, p. 195). Their criticism of detective fiction demonstrates how the female figure disrupts patriarchal gender discourse by providing an alternative reading where she does not fit the standards of the male-oriented traditional detective. This feminist perspective will serve my analysis in Chapter III to demonstrate how female detectives have contributed to the evolution of the detective figure and have transgressed the genre’s traditional conventions.

Walton and Jones look at the increase of female writers of detective fiction during the last decades, and at the historical and societal changes that sustained this popularity. They assert that by 1990 the female hard-boiled detective figure became widely prominent within the genre. However, this interest in the female private eye was not sudden, it “had been consistently building an author and reader base and reputation in the publishing industry – gradually since the late 1970s, and dramatically since the mid-1980s” (1999, p. 12). The creation of the female hard-boiled genre “may be traced back to the 1960s and early 1970s” (ibid., p. 12) during the emergence of feminist movements that created an awareness on women’s issues.

Walton and Jones examine the genre within its social, cultural and stylistic contexts. Through the analysis of female writers such as Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton, they explain how issues of child and women sexual abuse are more likely to be illustrated in women’s detective novels, and, consequently, female investigators serve as a channel to reflect contemporary women’s issues. In this respect, I believe that Gaspar de Alba’s detective *Villa* functions as a vehicle to reveal women’s struggles against gender-based violence at the United States-Mexico border.

The increased focus on gender criticism in detective narratives has grown in conjunction with the ascent in publishing of mystery novels written by and featuring women. Similarly, ethnic detective fiction is becoming a more prominent subject of study, due to the contemporary migratory movements that produce a transnational body of literature where race or ethnicity play an important role. However, it is important to notice that, except for the African-American mystery narratives, the “[d]iscussion of the new ethnicizing of the detective story has not attracted the same kind of attention as gender criticism” (Cawelti 2004, p. 291).

John Cullen Gruesser explains that “[d]etective fiction merits scholarly attention not solely because so many people read it, but also because it reflects the evolution of modern society [...] A comprehensive analysis of American detection [...] reveals its adaptability to a multiplicity of artistic, personal, ideological, and political programs” (2013, p. 7). Hence, ethnic authors

“have turned to detective fiction as the means to make social, political, moral, and artistic statements that otherwise might not have found an audience” (ibid., p. 139). Cullen Gruesser examines the role of race and ethnicity in the development of detective fiction. He argues how African-American writers such as Walter Mosley have used the detective fiction genre to analyse “the possibilities and the limits of black freedom” (ibid., p. 140). Similarly, the detective narratives of Chicana/o writers such as Nava and Gaspar de Alba examine the possibilities and limitations of queer Chicanas/os.

Stephen Soitos explores the inclusion of African-American cultural and theoretical traditions into the detective fiction genre. He refers to the concept of double-consciousness, understood as a disguised double identity, as a “double-conscious detection” role (1996, p. 52). He explains that African-American detectives may adopt a double consciousness to resolve the crime. “Double-conscious perceptions applied to the detective novel confirm the ability of black Americans to reinterpret and revise existing Euro-American forms with heightened consciousness” (ibid., p. 37). Drawing from William Edward Burghardt Du Bois’ theory of double-consciousness, Soitos examines how ethnic identity confers the fictional detective with a double awareness that helps them to mask his/her private eye status, shift identities and engage in code switching with the sole purpose of resolving the mystery. Soitos’ work informs my discussion in Chapter III of the African-American detective figure and its place in the evolution of the genre.

Gina Macdonald and Andrew Macdonald’s analysis on detective fiction is of special interest in relation to their views of multicultural detectives as vehicles for raising awareness. These authors argue that the capability of transformation in the detective fiction form allows a genuine representation of diverse identity and social critique. Thus, they state that “[c]urrent practitioners of ethnic detective fiction have moved toward greater complexity of character, details to reveal character as reflective of culture, and a sympathetic exploration of the cross-cultural experience” (in Gregory Klein ed. 1999, p. 62). They also explain that “detectives serve at least one of the three key functions: (1) champions of class interests; (2) intermediaries between a world of violence and the world of most readers; (3) distanced, uncommitted commentators on the foibles of mankind” (ibid., p. 78). Within this classification, I demonstrate that Henry Ríos and Ivon Villa are seen as intermediaries not only between two cultures but also, through a more global perspective, between dominant and non-hegemonic discourses. They negotiate “between the culturally assimilated and the culturally unassimilated, interpreting each for each” (Gregory Klein 1999, pp. 78-79).

There is an extensive body of criticism on detective fiction but relatively few academic works mention Chicana/o authors. In fact, the majority of the works fully or partially devoted to Chicana/o detective fiction are written or edited by Chicana/os. This shortage of critical work highlights the lack of visibility of this genre within Chicana/o literature and the insufficient acknowledgment of Chicana/o detective fiction by mainstream criticism. The limited acknowledgment of this genre within the Chicana/o literary field raises the following question; is detective fiction a suitable genre for Chicana/o writers?

Authors such as Manuel Ramos, Rolando Hinojosa, Lucha Corpi, Michael Nava and Rudolfo Anaya constructed a new discourse in detective fiction during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their adoption of this genre responds to their need to represent their culture and societal concerns in a formulaic genre that has been marked by white middle-class characters and a lack of multicultural elements. The mainstream aspect of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels introduce the readership to Chicana/o culture. The success of their novels have gained the recognition of this genre by not only Chicana/o writers and readers but also mainstream criticism.

II.3.2. Chicana/a Detective Fiction: A Quest for Identity

Thematically speaking, Corpi explains that Chicana/o crime narratives differentiate from the other detective fiction in that they

fit perfectly within Chicana/Chicano literature, exploring themes such as: Spirituality, religion [...] justice and socioeconomic equality, human and civil rights, the history of Mexican people [...] cultural and linguistic wealth [...] re-interpretation of legend and myth. Sexism, homophobia and racism [...] within the culture and in the larger context of a multicultural United States (2014, p. 53).

Carmen Flys Junquera agrees with Corpi in that she affirms that in Chicana/o detective fiction we find a “frequent denunciation of racism, discrimination, stereotyping, or calling for ideological/political involvement” (in Fischer-Hornung and Mueller eds. 2003, p. 99). Ralph, E. Rodríguez argues that “detective novels are about discerning the mysteries of identity. At the heart of their narratives, after all, is the quest to reveal who the criminal is. In a diverse array of mystery novels, however, time and again the detective also unravels a mystery about him or herself” (2005, p. 8). Indeed, these novels have become a channel to examine and comment on identity politics. Rodríguez' work is the first comprehensive study of Chicana/o detective fiction. Through the analysis of the detective novels of Chicana/o authors such as Rudolfo Anaya, Lucha Corpi and Michael Nava, among others, Rodríguez claims that this

genre is a suitable channel to express post-nationalist Chicano identities. These identities are marked by the sense of the diverse self as opposed to that unified identity claimed by most Chicanos during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. He acknowledges the rise of multifaceted identities in a post-nationalist period of “changing political and social environment” and where identity has to be understood “not as stable, but as dynamic, not as biologically determined, but as socially constructed” (ibid., p. 12). He also examines the initial reluctance of Chicana/o authors to write detective fiction as it was considered a lowbrow genre and adopting it could marginalise them. Up to the mid-eighties, this genre was underrated, and Chicana/o writers thought that “writing in a popular form would only further isolate them and trivialize their work” (ibid., p. 3).

Susan Baker Sotelo has also offered an in-depth analysis of Chicano/a detective fiction and has confirmed its contribution to the transformation of the genre. She claims that Chicana/o mystery narratives have “transformed this genre by combining it with other appropriations gathered during nomadic history through Spain and America: pre-Columbian, Spanish, Mexican and North American travels” (2005, p. 187). This transcultural and transnational aspect is reflected in Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels, as I demonstrate in the following chapters.

II.3.3. Queer Theory: The Role of the Gay Detective

Throughout the last decades, the genre’s conventions have been challenged and writers have been using it as a vehicle to disrupt traditional social conventions and patriarchal codes, as I illustrate through the analysis of *Desert Blood* and the Ríos mystery series. Gill Plain claims that “[w]hether the detective is male or female, straight or gay, she or he always exists in negotiations with a series of long-established masculine codes. The extent to which a detective conforms to or challenges these models is thus essential to an understanding of crime fiction” (2014, p. 11). Detectives such as Ríos or Villa challenge patriarchal codes along with white and Anglocentric views and conventions. That is, they create a discourse that takes into account their multi-cultural realities, the multiplicity of oppression suffered by people of colour and their own understanding of justice, as opposed to Anglocentric notions of oppression, order and fairness.

Judith A. Markowitz states that “[w]ithin the gay and lesbian community, gay/lesbian detective fiction has experienced enormous popularity and has played a tremendous role in making gay

and lesbian life visible” (2004, p. 6). Queer detective fiction writers comply with the genre’s main conventions but “like their mainstream counterparts, no longer adhere to strict guidelines [...] They obey the demands of their creative muses, experiment, violate genre boundaries, and forge unique blends with suspense, horror, science fiction, fantasy, and romance”. (ibid., p. 12). This blend of genres is illustrated in the semi-biographical point of view of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s detective fiction.

In the last three decades there have been a number of critical works published to explore how a shared understanding of gay characters in detective fiction has been constructed and how these characters are represented. They trace the portrayal of gay characters from the early hard-boiled fiction to date and examine how detective fiction writers have moved from the stereotyping and misrepresentation of gay subjectivities to a positive and more genuine representation. As writer Joseph Hansen explains, “[h]omosexuals have commonly been treated shabbily in detective fiction –vilified, pitied, at best patronized. [...] When I sat down to write *Fadeout* in 1967, I wanted to write a good, compelling whodunit, but I also wanted to right some wrongs” (quoted in Reilly 2015, p. 727). As I discuss in Chapter IV, the negative treatment of homosexual characters was exemplified through the association of the gay masculine character with the concept of femininity, building on the assumption that this femininity related to weakness or passivity.

Throughout my research, I argue that the standpoint of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s detectives is that of the outsider/insider. That is, their perspective is situational as it depends on their subject position. These characters, traditionally considered as outsiders as they belong to a deprived minority group, are working professionals who have gained some authority and status inside a dominant socio-cultural system that oppresses and stigmatises their sexual and ethnic identity. This outsider/insider duality serves my comparative analysis of the view of the traditional hard-boiled as outsider, because of the protagonists’ lack of emotional involvement, and Ríos and Villa’s subject position as outsiders, since their sexuality does not conform with the dominant social norms. Rodríguez explains that “[...] the typical hero of the detective [...] is the alienated outsider, the moral man or woman in the corrupt world [...] Despite decades of rewriting, this notion of the alienated, moral hero persists and defines the genre” (2005, p. 11). Ríos and Villa adhere to this notion of the detective as outsider not only by the very fact that they are detectives in a corrupt world but also because of their sexual and ethnic identities, which position them outside the social mainstream.

Apart from detective fiction theory, this research has also been shaped by critical approaches to sexuality, identity and violence. In the next section, I seek to offer a view on different scholarly works and theories that have explored the connections of sexual identity and gender with violence.

II.4. Identity, Sexuality and Violence

Chicana/o transnational identities have an embedded counter discourse that dismantles essentialist and monolithic notions about nation and identity. Throughout this research, I take a transnational perspective that helps to interrogate and challenge idealistic aspects attributed to national identities and to rethink the relationship between the subject identity and nation. This perspective also seeks to address differences in subjects' identities, both locally and globally.

Paul Jay asserts that “[s]ince the rise of critical theory in the 1970s, nothing has reshaped literary and cultural studies more than its embrace of transnationalism” (2010, p. 1). As I previously explained, I understand transnational relations and identities as the product of collective and individual relationships within the context of globalisation. Hence, I look at how two cultures, the United States and Mexico, intersect, conflict and engage.

Gaspar de Alba advocates for a revision of cultural studies where Chicana/o culture is not considered a subculture but an “alter-Native” culture. She claims that “[t]he methods and categories of mainstream American Popular Culture Studies are useful tools by which to organize a study of popular culture, but I believe that we have to build alternative structures to house the plurality of popular cultures that actually reside within the borders of the United States” (2003, p. xxi). Thus, she advocates for acknowledging and exploring the multiplicities resulting from interconnecting gender, sexuality and ethnicity as represented in Chicana/o cultural productions. Rodríguez' views on the concept of family in Chicana/o culture serves my argument on the contribution of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's queer detectives to the dismantling of idealistic notions of *familia* as a safe haven and nationalistic foundation.

In this respect, Luibhéid's theorising on women's sexuality and family also guides my analysis on the conceptualisation of the “authentic” family. She explains that

[f]amily reunification provisions constructed women's sexuality not just as heterosexual but also as procreative within a patriarchal framework. Consequently, they reified women's sexuality as a form of property that men owned, controlled, and

competed over, and that was most appropriately channelled into marriage and reproduction (2002, p. 3).

In Chicana/o culture, this perception of women as a passive object was perpetuated through the patriarchal interpretation of the Virgin of Guadalupe, as previously explained in Chapter I.

As a response, Chicana feminists have reclaimed cultural female symbols and given them a feminist voice. *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's Irreverent Apparition* (2011) edited by Gaspar de Alba and Alma López, addresses the controversy that emerged when in 2001 López presented a digital collage, *Our Lady*, as part of an exhibition at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The Virgin of Guadalupe adopts a confident stance, hands on hips, wearing a cloak decorated with symbols of the Aztec goddess, Coyolxauhqui, and elevated by a bare-breasted butterfly angel. This image contrasts with the submissive position and downturned face, displayed in traditional iconographies of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The book comprises eleven essays that investigate the notion of ownership in relation to this cultural symbol, the central role of revisionism in art as an organizational tool for Chicana feminists and the need to decolonise colonial images. Emma Pérez argues that to decolonise her community's views of the Virgin of Guadalupe, "members of that kinship must question and challenge the very myths and symbols that define their communal sense of identity, whether *familia* or nation" (Pérez in Gaspar de Alba and López eds. 2011, p. 160)

Pérez uses a postmodern approach to Chicano historiography in order to demystify restricted conceptions of female roles. She argues that Chicana/o history has been constructed with omissions, in particular omitting gender, and how a new historiography has to be rewritten from a decolonial perspective, rejecting the colonisers' methodological theories. In the process of decolonising theory and history, Pérez advocates for a re-vision of female myths such as *la Malinche* (Pérez 1999). This decolonial perspective informs my research and later review, in Chapter V, of the misrepresentation of the *Malinche* myth in conjunction with victims of femicide.

Resistance to dominant and/or colonial views involves not just a decolonial viewpoint but also a process of disidentification (Muñoz 1999; Pérez 2003). Pérez explains that "disidentification is that strategy of survival that occurs within a decolonial imaginary. In other words, the queer-of-color gaze is a gaze that sees, acts, reinterprets, and mocks all at once in order to survive and to reconstitute a world where s/he is not seen by the white colonial heteronormative mind" (2003, p. 124). This strategy breaks with the white colonial stereotyping constructed around race and sex that justified ostracism.

In chapter V, I draw from José Esteban Muñoz' analysis of the concept of "disidentification" to explain that the adoption of detective fiction by Nava and Gaspar de Alba has forged a new space for the representation of queer Chicana/o identities. Muñoz examines the impact of Latino, Asian and black artists' works on mainstream culture. He looks at how racial and sexual minorities transform mainstream cultural productions through what he terms a process of disidentification. He explains that "disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of the minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy" (1999, p. 25). In this respect, it is worth highlighting the Cuban-American artist Cuco Fusco. Her performances exemplify this disidentification in that they are a mordant commentary on mainstream views of the "exotic other" as represented in her piece "The Couple in the Cage: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West" (1992) performed together with her Chicano collaborator Guillermo Gómez-Peña³. In this performance, the artist and her collaborator exhibit themselves in a cage as a way of satirising the historical tradition of displaying Amerindians as entertainment. Fusco's works are also a response "to the formalists and cultural relativists who reject the proposition that racial difference is absolutely fundamental to aesthetic interpretation" (Fusco in Morra and Smith eds. 2006, p. 197). Muñoz highlights the misalignments existing between mainstream culture and minority identities. Thus, his work attempts to re-conceptualise dominant cultural forms from a minority point of view. As he defines, "[d]isidentification is about cultural, material, and psychic survival. It is a response to state and global power apparatuses that employ systems of racial, sexual, and national subjugation [...] [it] is about managing and negotiating historical trauma and systemic violence" (1999, p. 161).

Blackwell's criticism on Chicana feminism also serves as a background guide to my exploration on the disidentification of the mystery genre. Her work examines the evolution of Chicana feminism and analyses issues of gender and sexuality during the Chicano Movement. She proposes that through a process of what she defines as "retrofitted memory", Chicana feminists have created counter-narratives that have given visibility to Chicanas' concerns and experiences. She argues that "[b]y drawing from both discarded and suppressed forms of knowledge, retrofitted memory creates new forms of consciousness customized to embodied

³ This innovative performance artist is a key figure in border and cultural studies. In his critical works he embraces hybridity and interdisciplinary art. Gómez-Peña proposes a collaborative artistic approach to end divisiveness. He explores matters of nationality, language, identity and race, and discusses the political and philosophical dilemmas that thinkers and artists face within an international context controlled by political and economic power structures. These areas are examined in works such as *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, and Loqueras for the End of the Century* (1996), *Dangerous Border Crossers* (2000) and *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism and Pedagogy* (2005).

material realities, political visions, and creative desires for societal transformation” (2011, p. 2). By revealing gay Chicana/o experiences and gender oppression, Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s works create consciousness and advocate for societal transformation.

II.4.1. Queer Perspectives

The emergence of queer theories in the early 1990s have also explored the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy. Moreover, they have analysed how the violence towards “the other” has been tolerated, and to some extent encouraged, by socio-economic structures. To break with oppression, Anzaldúa develops the concept of a new *mestiza* consciousness. She explains that “[t]he work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (2007, p. 78). Anzaldúa examines the existence of those living at the border and the implications of this living between languages and cultures. She advocates for a “new mestiza” who embraces her cultural duality and multiplicity. María González explains that “for Anzaldúa dual thinking has split the individual into an unhealthy creature. This dualism has continued to reproduce itself to become the dominant system of thought” (1996, p. 29). To resist this dual thinking of Western culture, Anzaldúa suggests that we must first unlearn “the puta/virgen dichotomy” (2007, p. 84). Through an analysis of this dichotomy, I explain, in Chapter V, the contribution of the existent patriarchal culture at the Mexican-U.S. border to the continuation of the femicides through victim-blaming strategies.

Violence as related to gender lies not only in the act of violence but also in the constraints imposed by gender roles. Butler understands that gender is not “[...] a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (2006, p. 34). Butler challenges the assumptions made about sex and gender. She explains how they are not fixed concepts and exposes the limiting assumptions of identity categorization, which is discursively produced. She also criticizes the assumptions that identify male homosexuality with femininity and female homosexuality with masculinity. Accordingly, I explore these patriarchal concepts in opposition to the reinterpretation of masculinity embodied in Nava’s detective Henry Ríos. Butler further develops her theorisations about the social construction of the category of sex and forced interrelation between gender and sexuality. She argues that “sex is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time [...] a process whereby regulatory norms

materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms” (1993, p. 2). Thus, she argues that, “[...] gender designates a dense site of significations that contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix” (ibid., p. 238). However, dominant discourses have regulated sexuality “through the policing and the shaming of gender” (ibid., p. 238). Similarly, Jack Halberstam interrogates the preserved tradition of male masculinity and offers female masculinity as an alternative to it. Halberstam claims that “[...] because white male masculinity has obscured all other masculinities, we have to turn away from its construction to bring other more mobile forms of masculinity to light” (1998, p. 26). Throughout the analysis of the diversity of gender expressions, he challenges the deviant character attributed to female masculinity.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also examines the ways in which the public discussion of sexuality has developed. She argues that homosexuality tends to be represented in both society and in literature as something unstable, deviant or a perverse alternative to the fixed norm of heterosexuality. Drawing from Sedgwick’s views of the closet, I explore how gay Chicanas/os negotiate their sexuality in both local and global spheres. I also demonstrate how, since “[t]he closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (Sedgwick 2008, p. 71), the fictional representation of gay Chicana/o characters out of the closet such as Ríos or Villa, have contributed to the liberation of queer Chicanas/os.

In respect to dominant social discourses on gender and sexuality, Sedgwick argues that the association of male homosexuality to femininity has been strategically adopted by homophobic discourses in an attempt to legitimize violence against gay males. She explains that

in the context of an entire cultural network of normative definitions, definitions themselves equally unstable but responding to different sets of contiguities and often at a different rate, [...] homo/heterosexual definition has been a presiding master term of the past century, one that has the same, primary importance for all modern Western identity and social organization [...] as do the more traditionally visible cruxes of gender, class, and race (2008, p. 11)

Sedgwick looks at normative definitions of sexuality as the cause for non-authentic representations of gay and lesbian individuals as well as homophobia. As I later examine in Chapter IV, attaching a restricted definition to homo/heterosexual identities produces conflicting categories - that of the authentic and the abnormal – which promote homophobia.

Chicanas, in particular lesbian Chicanas, have not been acknowledged within feminist foundations and this has resulted in a double marginalisation. Moraga recognises that “[t]he

danger lies in ranking the oppressions. *The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression.* The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from a theoretical base” (Moraga 2000, p. 44). She advocates for conferring equal importance to white or anglo-feminism as Chicana/o feminism. Her approach to the multi-layered oppression suffered by lesbian Chicanas informs my exploration in Chapter IV of the creation of new spaces for different Chicana/o subjectivities.

Lionel Cantú understands sexuality “not as an additive component or characteristic of analysis (such as with demographic variables of sex or age) but rather as an axis of power relations” (2009, p. 21). He also offers an interesting approach on the construction of Western and non-Western gay identities. He argues that

“culture” becomes the mechanism by which difference is reified and the distance of *los otros* [the others] is reproduced. If the literature on the social construction of a Western gay identity is correct in linking sexual identities to capitalist development [...], then why should our understanding of sexual identities in the “developing world” give primacy to “culture” and divorce it from political economy? (in Cantú, Naples and Vidal-Ortiz eds. 2009, p. 75).

Hence, he claims that all sexual identities should be analysed from a multiplicity of power relations. Culture is not the only aspect to look at for an understanding on the social construction of gay and lesbian identities. This intersectional perspective also applies to my analysis on the interrelation of global capitalism and patriarchal cultures as contributors to the continuation of femicides at the United States-Mexico border. Since the early 1990s, this economic and socio-cultural interaction has generated multiple forms of violence against women at the border region of Ciudad Juárez.

II.4.2. Subjective and Objective Violence

Slavoj Žižek establishes three modes of violence: subjective, systemic and symbolic. Systemic violence is endemic to globalised societies; it is “something like the notorious ‘dark matter’ of physics” (2010, p. 2). Žižek claims that “subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that also includes two objective kinds of violence” (ibid., p. 1). He states that systemic violence “may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be ‘irrational’ explosions of subjective violence” (ibid., p. 2).

Drawing from Žižek’s explanation of the three forms of violence, Chapter V explores how violence is represented in Gaspar de Alba’s novel as related to femicide. I argue that femicides

are not only the result of the violence perpetrated by a subject but also by a socio-economic structure that facilitates, and, to some extent, normalises these violent acts. Gaspar de Alba's novel portrays a globalised and capitalist society where economic interests and political corruption promote subjective violence and render the victims invisible.

As previously explained, *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (2010) explores the femicides in Ciudad Juárez from a multidisciplinary point of view. This comprehensive study is divided in three parts. The first looks at the socio-economic context around the murders; the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the poor working conditions of those Mexican women in the *maquiladora* industry. The second part compiles four essays on activists against these femicides and explores the role of border activism from a political and transcultural perspective. Part Three, "*Testimonios*", offers real testimonies of mothers and daughters that have directly or indirectly suffered violence at the border. These testimonies and other activist action rewrite the sexist discourse that highlights the victims as being responsible for their own deaths.

This work explores the circumstances surrounding these femicides and helps to convey the various reasons behind gender-based violence at the border as well as the impunity behind them. Chapter one of this work, "Accountability for Murder in the *Maquiladoras*: Linking Corporate Indifference to Gender Violence at the U.S. –Mexico Border" by Elvia R. Arriola, discusses how the 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement between Mexico, the United States and Canada have been a major contributing aspect to the multiple femicides at the border. Arriola refers to these femicides as the *maquiladora* murders arguing that although "not all victims have been workers for the vast number of American companies" at the border, "about one-third involve *maquiladora* workers" (2011, p. 26). She eloquently highlights the fact that "the phenomenon of the Juárez murders begins with free-trade laws' licensing of a form of corporate activity" which promotes poor working conditions and abuse in these factory plants (ibid., p. 33). *Desert Blood* exemplifies this systemic abuse and concludes that, as Gaspar de Alba points out in chapter two of *Making a Killing*, "Poor Brown Female: The Miller's Compensation for "Free" Trade", "the real criminals are not just the perpetrators of the crimes, but the powers and interests that are being served by the brutal slayings of poor, brown females" (ibid., p. 63). This academic work predominantly demonstrates that the Ciudad Juárez femicides are the ultimate manifestation of a systemic violence embodied in institutions that fail to acknowledge gender-based violence. Gaspar de Alba explains that "[w]e don't know why there is a binational task force that includes immigration officers, border patrol agents,

FBI agents, and police on both sides of the border” (2014, p. 142). These binational forces fight against different types of criminal offenses but do not engage in stopping the femicide epidemic. In fact, the border state “and the systems that govern and regulate the border” not only ignore the crimes and but also enable them (ibid., p. 132). Gaspar de Alba’s valuable insight on these killings inform and support both my analysis of *Desert Blood* and that of the power structures that sustain femicide.

Deborah Weissman’s intersectional examination of global capital and the Juárez femicides supports my analysis, in Chapter V, of the interrelation between neoliberal capitalism and power inequalities. Weissman claims that a social and political economy examination of the Juárez femicides “bring[s] into perspective a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between socioeconomic systems that contribute to and depend on the subordination of poor communities and gender oppression in the form of gender-based murders” (in Fregoso and Bejarano 2010, p. 225). Apart from the inactivity of political institutions and the forces of global capital, the patriarchal representation of women as sexualised objects has contributed to this epidemic. As Alice Driver explains, “[t]he media and other cultural producers often turn to images of naked, raped, mutilated bodies, as if a confession could be extracted from the body in that matter. The demands placed on the female body in assessing and confining perceived sexuality in both life and death are evident in the discourse of feminicide” (2015, p. 9). Hence, the memory of the murdered bodies is corrupted and misrepresented. Driver analyses the representation of the Juárez femicides in multiple cultural forms. She focuses on how some cultural productions have used violence against women in a sensationalist way by representing female bodies as hypersexualised. Thus, she argues that artistic activism has been used as a tool to counteract this female representation and seek justice. *Desert Blood* embodies an exercise in activism in that it contests the hyper-sexualisation of the female body and unveils the realities behind the Juárez femicides. Other significant cultural productions that examine the femicides at the border are the documentary *Señorita Extraviada* by Lourdes Portillo (2002), the art project *Red Shoes* by Elina Chauvet, the poetry book *Sangre mía/Blood of Mine* (2013), edited by Jennifer Rathbun and Juan Armando Rojas Joo eds. and the journalistic chronicle *Huesos en el Desierto* (2002) by Sergio González.

The in-depth analysis of works like *The Daughters of Juarez: A True Story of Serial Murder South of the Border* (2007) by Teresa Rodríguez and Diana Montané, *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juarez* (2009) by Kathleen Staudt and *The Femicide Machine* (2012) by Sergio González Rodríguez, also guide my analysis on the Juárez femicides.

With regard to homophobic violence, I also look at this as a systemic issue. Whereas homophobic attitudes or violent acts are commonly perpetrated by individuals, dominant social, political and economic power structures sustain a heteronormative culture that is articulated by the conflict between oppositional binaries. Therefore, gay and lesbian identities are marked by a sense of abnormality that emphasises the “authenticity” of heterosexuality. As Carole Ruthchild explains, homophobia “is an individual response to signals which exist throughout our society and which are universally understood. Such signals suggest that lesbians and gay men do not deserve the same degree of respect as heterosexual members of the community” (in Mason and Tomsen 1997, p. 1). In line with Ruthchild, I perceive homophobia as a socially constructed mechanism based on the conflict between authenticity and deviance. That is, by attributing a deviant aspect to homosexual identities the “authenticity” of heterosexuality is reaffirmed, as I examine in Chapter IV.

As previously explained, this authenticity has often been reaffirmed by the use of cultural symbols. Hence, Chicana feminists such as Gaspar de Alba, Moraga or Anzaldúa have advocated for the reconfiguring of cultural iconography from a feminist and queer perspective. As Moraga states, “every oppressed group needs to imagine through the help of history and mythology a world where our oppression did not seem the pre-ordained order” (2000, p. 98). Myth and history play a crucial role in the construction of identity-based social movements and “often provide the basis through which community can be imagined and citizenship articulated” (Bebout 2011). Consequently, the violence exerted upon homosexual identities through the mytho-historic narratives articulated from an idealistic national and sexual identity, can cease with the contribution of narratives portraying a realistic representation of homosexual identities, as reflected in the works of Nava and Gaspar de Alba.

II.5. Synthesis:

In this chapter, I offer an overview of the critical work and approaches to detective fiction, identity and violence. I argue that to explore issues related to sexuality, the categories of gender, race, class and sexuality cannot be separated analytically as this would lead to an erroneous understanding of queer Chicana/o experiences.

In my comparative analysis of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s works, I see gender, race and sexuality as overlapping categories that have to be analysed in conjunction. Priestman claims

as the genre has “itself developed – often in challenge to its own earlier assumptions, as with the women and black detectives of the 1980s and 1990s – it became increasingly relevant to consider the gender, race and class implications of its various metamorphoses” (2011, pp. 1-2). The discussion of these implications has contributed to providing new directions within the genre. Detective fiction has undergone a significant transformation and has become an exceptional window into different cultures and socio-political systems. Its flexibility has made it a suitable genre to reflect any society and to be a social protest vehicle.

Both Chicana/o authors utilise detective fiction to represent homosexual identities and offer a more genuine view of subjectivities that have been misrepresented or are non-existent, specifically during the early stages of this genre. To analyse homophobia and the misrepresentation of homosexuality, I primarily draw from Butler’s theoretical claim for a non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender, and from Halberstam and Sedgwick’s anti-essentialist identity politics. I argue that Ríos and Villas’ rhetoric and their central position as figures of power, those of the detective heroes, play a crucial role in fracturing the foundations that sustain homophobia.

Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels produce a social discourse that stands for both power and resistance. As Foucault argues, “a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart” (1990, pp. 100-101). Thus, I argue that these authors’ novels and their protagonists function as both a site of resistance against dominant/colonial perspectives and an instrument of power. Drawing from Muñoz’ theories on the disidentification of the genre, I demonstrate how Nava and Gaspar de Alba have inscribed a power discourse in Ríos and Villa that has contributed to the decolonisation of their community minds and of the genre itself.

By applying intersectionality to the analysis of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s works, I reveal unequal power relations between dominant and minority culture groups as well as the inherent violence of hegemonic discourses on identity politics. This intersectional approach of my study is also reflected in my use of emic and etic viewpoints, in that looking at both universal and indigenous approaches conveys a meaningful interpretation of the realities of gay Chicana/o subjectivities. Instead of highlighting the differences, I have aimed to create a dialogue between the multiple perspectives in order to investigate Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels. Their interaction formulates a knowledge on identity politics and violence that informs my analysis.

CHAPTER III

THE EVOLVING IDENTITY OF THE CHICANA/O DETECTIVE

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We need to be able to escape the ennui of our lives and be reassured that no matter how tough it gets out there, the world is ultimately knowable and rational. While the pleasure of popular fiction tempts us to get lost in the diversion of the text, we, as critics, must remember that these novels speak powerfully to the moment in which they were written. They are cultural commodities that have much to tell us about the historical, social, and political milieu in which they emerged (2005, p. 3) – *Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicana/o Identity*, Ralph E. Rodríguez –

Present day detective novels ask to be treated as serious books in their own right, rather than as the ‘escape from literature’ they were once expected to be (2011, p. 172) – *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, Martin Priestman –

III.1. Introduction

Since the detective fiction genre appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, it has “evolved as modern society has evolved” (John Cullen Gruesser 2013, p. 1). The identity of the fictional detective has evolved in parallel to the emergence of contemporary political and social issues. Concepts of race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality were not considered or discussed in the mystery genre until the twentieth century when “women and African-American writers embraced detection as a means to address issues of gender and race” (Cullen Gruesser 2013, p. 79).

As will be discussed in this chapter, Chicana feminist writer Lucha Corpi set some of her Gloria Damasco mystery series during the Chicano Movement to explore and challenge national and historical memory constructed largely from the male perspective. Her private eye questions the discourse of Chicana/o identity constructed during the Chicano Movement, which did not address issues of gender and female equality, as examined in chapter I. Other Chicana/o writers, such as Nava and Gaspar de Alba, have reshaped the mystery genre in order to comment on and open up the discussion about cultural, class, gender, political and sexuality issues. They have introduced a detective figure that evolved from that of the traditional or early hard-boiled narratives. This figure has served to raise awareness of diversity politics. Their gay Chicana/o private eyes call for a greater diversity, not only within the genre but also within their nation and across any borders. Among other themes, this chapter will concentrate on the involvement of the detective within the field of Chicana/o detective fiction and the consequences of this. It will analyse how Gaspar de Alba and Nava’s sleuths seek justice within

a chaotic environment. Their task is not only to reveal the identity of the murderer but also to highlight the abuses and inequalities of the Chicana/o, Mexican and North American worlds depicted.

The cross-cultural identity of the Chicana/o detective has offered an alternative view to that of the mainstream detective. As Gina and Andrew Macdonald explain, these detectives “explore cultural differences - in perception, in way of life, in visions of the world - and act as links between cultures, interpreting each to each, mainstream to minority and minority to mainstream” (in Gregory Klein ed. 1999, p. 60). They offer a discourse that reflects on the connections their identity and culture represent within a cross-cultural and mainstream/minority dynamic.

Although the detective fiction genre has not been adopted by many Chicana/o writers, as I explore in section three of this chapter, the twenty first century has seen how this literary genre has gained Chicana/o academic attention with the publication of non-fiction works such as *Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicana/o Identity* (2005) by Ralph E. Rodriguez or *Chicano Detective Fiction: A Critical Study of Five Novelists* (2005) by Susan Baker Sotelo. Apart from these two works, I want to highlight the significance of other critical narratives that examine Chicana/o detective novels and the role of this genre as related to Chicanas/os. In chapter 6 of *Chicano Nations: The Hemispheric Origins of Mexican American Literature*, Marissa K. López explores, through the analysis of Gaspar de Alba, Martín Limón and Mario Acevedo’s detective narratives, immigration policy, the culture of paranoia and surveillance post 9/11. In Lucha Corpi’s memoir, *Confessions of a Book Burner: Personal Essays and Stories* (2014), she reflects on the level of acceptance and recognition of the detective genre by Chicana/o writers and the suitability of the genre to express Chicana/o concerns.

The diverse identity of the Chicana/o detective is the result of the transformation of a genre that is constantly reshaped. The non-static nature of the form as well as the concept of identity give way to an eventual evolution of the detective fiction and the hero detective.

III.2. Shifting Identities in Detective Fiction

As previously indicated in chapter I, fictional queer detectives have become more popular in North American crime fiction since the 1980s as a result of the backing of small publishing companies. Before the 1980s, we can only find a few openly gay detectives in the

mystery genre produced in North America. Queer detectives, such as Ríos and Hansen's Brandstetter, have challenged and shaped the crime fiction genre as well as the figure of the detective. As David Fine explains, Brandstetter "represents the antithesis of the characteristic homophobic detective in the tough-guy detective tradition from Black Mask through Hammett to Chandler [...]" (2000, p. 136). That is, in contrast to most traditional or early hard-boiled sleuths, Ríos and Brandstetter are not racist, embrace their sexuality and have female friends - who do not see them as a threat -. In an interview with Gambone, Nava asserted that Hansen had been highly influential on his work and that after reading his mystery series he believed he "could write about an openly gay character as a protagonist" (1999, p.129).

The next sections focus on the differences and similarities between the classical and hard-boiled detective as well as on the varied social commentary that has emerged from the hard-boiled formula.

III.2.1. From Classical to Hard-Boiled Detective

From the origin of the detective figure as portrayed by Edgar Allan Poe's detective C. Auguste Dupin in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), the fictional detective has evolved dramatically. Dupin is considered the first detective in literature and set the formula for the classical detective protagonist (Herbert 2003). He is the archetype of the analytical detective and marks the beginning of the literary intellectual detective (Soitos 1996). In Poe's short stories, Dupin exhibits his intellectual excellence. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the detective has to solve the mystery of the murder of two women. The witnesses heard a suspect speak, but none of them agree on what language was spoken. Dupin's detection prowess is exemplified by his examination of the corpses. After Dupin skilfully observes that the mutilated bodies of Madame L'Españaye and her daughter have nail markings embedded in their throats, he theorises that the murderer possessed a super human strength by virtue of the impact on the victims. Finally, the fingerprint impressions left on the corpses along with the tuft of hair lead him to reveal that the murderer was an orangutan.

In *The Purloined Letter*, Dupin again utilises his intellectual prowess to resolve the mystery. In this story, a cabinet minister steals a letter containing compromising information from a female member of the royal family, who he is now blackmailing. By thinking like Minister D, the detective figures out that the minister would hide the letter out in the open, where no one

would think to look for it. His stories are, as Poe observed, “tales of ratiocination” based on the detective’s ingenious ability to resolve the crime (2008, p. 351).

After the appearance of Dupin, the classical detective became predominant in European detective fiction. He is, as John Scaggs states, “[...] depicted as a reasoning and observing machine” who combines logical deduction and imagination to solve the puzzle of the crime (2005, p. 39). This type of detective is also epitomised by Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. One of the main characteristics that places Holmes in the reasoning detective mould is his ability to reason backwards to resolve the mystery, instead of forward, as he indicates to Dr. Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887):

Most people, if you describe a train of events to them, will tell you what the result would be. They can put those events together in their minds, and argue from them that something will come to pass [that is, reasoning forward]. There are few people, however, who, if you told them a result, would be able to evolve from their own inner consciousness what the steps were which led up to that result. This power is what I mean when I talk of reasoning backwards, or analytically (p. 103).

This type of detective was especially prominent in Britain during the interwar period, a time that critics such as Stephen Knight refer to as “the golden age of crime fiction” (in Priestman 2011, p. 77). This rational character slowly develops during a period when fictional investigators such as Agatha Christie’s Poirot and Miss Marple, and Lord Peter Wimsey’s Dorothy L. Sayers become highly popular (Walton 1999, p. 25). The world portrayed in these writers’ narratives is a confined one; the setting where the story occurs is usually an isolated place in the countryside with a conservative atmosphere that usually ignores the political context and social issues of the time. Within this traditional space, the detective serves as the instrument that restores order and social values by resolving the crime (Moretti 2005).

Hard-boiled detective stories emerged in the United States in the 1920s as an alternative to this classical figure and their self-contained world. The world surrounding hard-boiled detective stories, usually set in the city, is unstable and chaotic before and after the resolution of the crime. This new subgenre is characterised by its engagement with the socio-political and economic circumstances of the time. It introduces a parallel discourse to the detection procedure. For instance, in *The Big Sleep* (1939), Raymond Chandler explores the corruption and class stratification of 1920s North America, while Walter Mosley examines the racial segregation and urbanisation of the African-American community that exists during the post-war period. In *The Big Sleep*, the corrupt police receive bribes from the bookshop owner Arthur Gwynne Geiger to allow him to continue doing business in a store that serves as the front for

an illegal pornographic business. Chandler's novel also shows an America socially divided between the elite and those who support the elite. However, by the end of the novel Marlowe reflects "What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep, you were not bothered by things like that" (p.171). Marlowe's words indicate that in death we are all equal, there are no classes.

Origins of Hard-boiled Fiction

The meaning of the term hard-boiled in detective fiction originates from a diverse range of interpretations. Gene D. Phillips states that "hard-boiled fiction was so named because the tough detective-hero developed a shell like a hard-boiled egg in order to protect his feelings from being bruised by the calloused and cruel criminal types he often encountered" (2000, p. 3). Philippa Gates posits that "according to Wendy Haslem, the term originally referred to the fact that a hard-boiled story only took as long to read as it did to hard boil an egg; alternatively, she suggests that the term refers to the snappy dialogue and romance that can reach the boiling point between the hero and his love interest" (2006, p. 290).

This label is particularly associated with the toughness of the detective, as John Scaggs argues; "[t]he term 'hard-boiled', meaning 'tough' or 'shrewd', came to describe the hero of a type of detective fiction that developed in the United States in the inter-war period" (2005, p. 134).

Other critics assert that the toughness of the protagonist results in a lack of sensitive and logical skills to resolve the mystery. J. Kenneth Van Dover claims that "[t]he Hard-boiled detective was a tough everyman in a tough, everyman's world, [...] the investigator is no longer intellectual" (2005, p. 35). It would not be accurate to affirm that the toughness of the hard-boiled detectives presupposes an absence of intellectual skills. The main difference between the traditional and hard-boiled detective does not lie in the rationality-strength dichotomy but in their degree of involvement with their surroundings. As Žižek points out, "the classical detective is not "engaged" at all: he maintains an eccentric position throughout; he is excluded from the exchanges that take place among the group of suspects constituted by the corpse" (1992, p. 60). The main focus of traditional or classical detective fiction is on the murder case and the detective's investigation process, with the result that there is a predominant focus on the murder investigation over the details of the characters' lives. The classical detective does not show any emotional involvement during the investigation whereas the hard-boiled detective engages with the surrounding world and the characters, to the point that sometimes it becomes

a personal mission. This involvement also reveals the private life of the detective as the investigation unfolds.

The modern private eye's resolution of the mystery is based on questioning and getting to know the suspects. It is a dynamic process that involves the mobility of the detective. In contrast, the classical detective deduction process is based on the analysis of the clues, and there is no mobility as the story usually develops within a single location. Another differentiating aspect is the violence suffered by the hard-boiled detective, while the traditional detective only suffers the pressure of solving the puzzle. For example, writers Raymond Chandler and Mickey Spillane describe the violent encounters of their detectives Philip Marlowe and Mike Hammer. In *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), Marlowe is framed for a murder that leads to a ring of jewel thieves. After this murder, other murders follow whilst detailed descriptions of violence permeate the novel's pages. In the opening pages, Marlowe recounts the following altercation, "[h]e reached for my shoulder again. I tried to dodge him but he was as fast as a cat. He began to chew my muscles up some more with his iron fingers" (p. 3). In *I, the Jury* (1947), the first novel in Mickey Spillane's classic detective series starring Mike Hammer, the detective plans to avenge the murder of his best friend. Spillane describes how Mike Hammer, acting in self-defence, is attacked by thugs sent to prevent him from solving the murder whilst he is questioning a suspect:

I lashed out with my foot and the toe of my shoe caught the guy right in the face. He toppled over sideways, still running, and collapsed against the wall. His lower teeth were protruding through his lips. Two of his incisors were lying beside his nose, plastered there with blood (p. 78).

Apart from these significant differences, the hard-boiled formula is not completely different from the traditional one, as both types of detective fiction centre on the investigation and the detective's will to unveil the mystery. Cawelti acknowledges this by claiming that "the hard-boiled formula resembles the main outlines of the classical detective story's pattern of action" (2014, p. 142). Classical and hard-boiled detective narratives share the same structure; the story begins with an unsolved crime and moves toward its resolution. They also have the same type of characters: victim, murderer and detective. As a result, the evolution of both detective fiction and the figure of the detective lies in the combination of traditional conventions and innovation.

The hard-boiled crime fiction genre has undergone many changes since its first appearance in the 1920s to present day. In a critical study that analyses the figure of the hard-

boiled detective, Moore establishes three periods that reflect the evolution of this genre: the Early period (1927-1955), Transitional period (1964-1977) and Modern period from 1979 to present the day (Moore, 2006). However, as will be discussed in the next section, the starting year of the early period has been set by other critics as 1922 instead of 1927.

III.2.2. The Early Hard-boiled Detective (1922-1955)

Early-hardboiled detective fiction portrays a somewhat more realistic view of society and the investigation no longer takes place in a restricted setting as conveyed by the traditional detective novel. It introduces a new space for social critique and highlights governmental corruption. Moore states that, in relation to the origins of hard-boiled narratives, Carroll John Daly's 'The Snarl of the Beast' (1927), featuring Race Williams and originally serialized over several issues of *Black Mask* magazine, is the first hard-boiled detective story (Moore 2013). However, other critics such as Cullen Gruesser assert that Daly's story *The False Burton Combs* (1922), also published in *Black Mask*, is the first hard-boiled detective narrative (Cullen Gruesser 2013). Cullen Gruesser reverts the start date of the early hard-boiled detective fiction from that of 1927 to 1922. Daly's fictional character Race Williams, the first hard-boiled detective, initially appeared, in *Black Mask*, on June 1, 1923, in 'Knights of the Open Palm'. In the October issue of the same year, Dashiell Hammett's private investigator Continental Op appears in two stories; 'Arson Plus' and 'Crooked Soul'. This author is also the creator of Sam Spade, the main character of *The Maltese Falcon* (1930).

Spade and Chandler's Marlowe are considered the archetypal detectives of early hard-boiled detective fiction. Along with their dedication to the pursuit of justice, one of the main characteristics of these detectives is that they suffer from loneliness. They are social outsiders, they "have no friends unconnected to their professions and generally remain unmarried; friendship's ironic absence dominates their personal portraits" (Moore 2013, p. 100). The loneliness of the detectives emphasizes their position as social outsiders. They do not believe in legal justice and use their own rules to punish the criminal, even if this means resorting to violence. From within the institutions, these outsider detectives offer the possibility of re-establishing social order. Hence, the position of the outsider detectives is somewhat ironic as they attempt to serve a society from which they are excluded. The outsider point of view of

these sleuths allows the author to portray the social and political structures of their period in a critical manner.

The world portrayed in these novels is, as Chandler explains in the introduction to *The Simple Art of Murder*, “a world gone wrong, a world in which, long before the atom bomb, civilization had created the machinery for its own destruction [...] The law was something to be manipulated for profit and power” (1968, p. vi). The detection quest is relocated to the modern North America of the post-war period. The setting of these stories is often a big city such as New York, as seen in Hammett’s *The Thin Man* (1934), or Los Angeles, as seen in Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939). Unlike the classic mystery, in which crime is isolated and there are no external threats, hard-boiled fiction introduces an urban environment that is threatening and rife with corruption and violence.

Violence, corruption and an urban environment that is often chaotic and in decay, are some of the essential characteristics of the hard-boiled mystery. Whilst early hard-boiled fiction explores corruption and social injustice, it does not entirely reflect the reality of U.S. society. These stories do not address multiculturalism or gender inequalities. With regard to gender politics, there are plenty of negative stereotypes of women, as analysed later in this chapter. Moore claims that “the early hard-boiled detective novel is a repository of largely unselfconscious attitudes toward gender” (2013, p. 29). The masculinity of the detective was celebrated, and patriarchal values were reinforced by the genre, while gender politics were not explored.

The figure of the detective is in constant development. In the last decades, the detective has functioned as the subversive element in this new subgenre, becoming a representation of minorities and gender concerns. Despite the fact that detective fiction is considered a product of mass culture, its current aim is not only to entertain the reader but also as Cullen Gruesser declares “[...] to outwit, to enlighten, to educate, to edify, to unsettle, and to politicize” (2013, p. 54). It has developed new and challenging discourses in relation to political, social and ideological matters.

III.2.3. The Transitional Hard-boiled Detective (1964-1977)

The transitional period in hard-boiled fiction brought a change in the character of the detective in varying degrees. The figure of the detective is still seen as a heroic outsider but, as Moore points out, he/she is “less alienated than those in the Early Period” (2013, p. 10). The

traditional portrait of the isolated/outsider detectives gives way to the introduction of other people in their lives. As social and political circumstances change, so does the detective novel. If the genre is in constant development, so too is the detective character. As the modern detective reflects social realities, there is a sense of completion. Nevertheless, this accomplishment is only temporary, as it will shift over time. The fact that the figure of the detective constantly remains in a transitory state gives way to his/her future development. The transitional period works as a bridge between the early and modern hard-boiled fiction. Consequently, writers that appear during the transitional period also often had their mystery works published after the late 1970s.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will focus on diversity as it relates to gender, race and sexuality. I will demonstrate how the inclusion of a detective that challenges the conventional notions of gender and sex reformulates the genre and offers a discourse against the sexist and homophobic views existing within and outside their community. The diverse identity of the modern detective provides a visible space for a character that belongs to an oppressed minority and is doubly marginalised by their gender and their sexual identity.

III.2.4. The Modern Hard-boiled Detective: Revealing Diverse Identities (1977 to the present day)

One of the peculiarities that defines the detective in this period is that this character is no longer a stranger and lonely figure to the reader, as Chandler or Hammett's fictional heroes could be. The reader knows more about their past, and learns about the complexities of their relationships. Moore indicates that "the modern hard-boiled detective novel embraces the ideas of family, love, and friendship as natural components of the genre" (2013, p. 173). These relationships usually have greater permanence.

The fact that most modern detectives are no longer unsentimental or associated with a traditional masculinity that embraces *machista* culture does not imply a lack of toughness in these later protagonists. Thus, a masculine approach or conventional masculinity are not intrinsic characteristics of hard-boiled fiction. The boiled nature of the novel lies, according to Nyman, in the depiction of "characters who live in a hostile or violent world where traditional moral codes do not always have the significance they are supposed to have" (1997, p. 30).

With regard to gender, Munt critiques the fact that there has been a masculine and feminine canon within crime fiction where "the popular hard-boiled action text is gendered as masculine,

and the soft-boiled, emotion/psychological-centred text is gendered as feminine” (2003, p. 18). However, the diversity of the modern detectives and their stories, intermingled as much with action as emotional aspects, does not allow for such static and essentialist definitions. Also, concepts of masculinity and femininity are in constant change. For this reason, to consider a hard-boiled text as masculine or attempt to encapsulate crime fiction within a specific gender would not reflect either social or literary realities.

The linear style of the plot in the early mystery was mainly based on the resolution of the crime and did not allow for a critical subplot. The detective figure was usually represented as a heterosexual white man, such as the French detective August Dupin or Wilkie Collins’ Sergeant Cuff. The blueprint of these classical detectives rarely deviated from a one-dimensional identity whereas the modern fictional detective shows a more dynamic and diverse identity. This identity reflected the social reality of the time and served as a way of providing visibility for social minorities and repressed groups. The representation of America’s multicultural society is exemplified in ethnic, homosexual and female detectives. Moore highlights the fact that “[t]he diversity in the kinds of hard-boiled detectives, replicating the changing demographics in the United States” leads “to the dramatization of social, sexual, and racial tensions, both ominous and liberating” (2013, p. 269). This type of detective started to appear in the 1920s, during the early hard-boiled period, but became more prevalent in the 1960s with the emergence of Civil Rights Movements, a period that marks the starting point of the evolution of the detective from a socio-cultural perspective. There is an increasing engagement with questions related to identity and the focus is as much as on the social, cultural, political and historical conditions surrounding the investigation as it is on the crime.

Since the 1970s, detective fiction and the figure of the fictional detective have adapted to the needs of their cultures as expressed by social movements. During the last four decades, hard-boiled fiction has expressed and embodied diversity and a sense of self, whilst providing social and political protest. Moreover, the modern hard-boiled detective symbolises a need for transgression and subversion, while also preserving a code of conduct typical of the early hard-boiled detective. This renewed style of fiction, which reaches an extensive and diverse audience, turns into an instrument for the subversion of gender ideologies by challenging the patriarchal values of society.

III.2.5. Gen(re/de)ring the Hard-boiled Detective

Because of their identities, ethnic, female or homosexuals sleuths encounter difficulties that the white western male of the early period did not have to face. Thus, in most cases, the investigation process and the way they resolve the mystery differ from this traditional character. Their actions are usually defined by their subjectivities. It is not until the 1970s that a conscious response to social politics became predominant. The genre started to deal with ethnicity, assimilation, marginalisation and aspects of sexuality. This diverse fiction would expand the genre, preserving the traditional narrative and structural pattern, and adding new themes related to cultural differences, whilst raising questions about gender inequality and identity.

The first female hard-boiled detective, Gale Gallagher, appeared in *I Found Him Dead* (1947) written by Will Oursler and Margaret Scott, and published under the pseudonym Gale Gallagher. The number of female detectives has increased since the late 1940s and 1950s. Frances Crane's Jean Abbott or Austin Lee's Miss Hogg are examples of these female detectives. However, it is not until the late 1970s that we see a critique of patriarchal structures in the work of female writers of detective fiction. The appearance of Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* (1977) analyses gender politics in more detail. In Sharon McCone's first case, an antiques dealer, Joan Albritton is found dead, stabbed with an antique dagger. Throughout McCone's murder mystery investigation, Muller explores patriarchal structures and the challenges women had to face during the 1970s. For example, McCone has to constantly face comments that question her position as a female detective. Demeaning queries such as "Do you really have an investigator's license?" (p. 24) demonstrate this attitude.

During and after the Civil Rights era, especially since the 1970s, the attitude towards traditional hard-boiled fiction changed. Modern hard-boiled fiction provided a fictional space where social issues could be explored and awareness of social realities was acknowledged. Traditionally, female characters in detective fiction shifted between two main roles, from the domesticity of the female character of the 1940s to the *femme fatale* of the 1950s.

Heather Braun defines the *femme fatale* character of this period as "a symbol of uncertain violence, visual excess, and social unrest" (2012, p. 3). In contemporary fiction, the *femme fatale* is commonly represented as a reaction against the traditional female characters

represented by the so-called good woman. She is an independent, strong woman who rejects her submissive role in a world controlled by men, claiming a place for herself in society.

From reading early hard-boiled detective novels, it can be perceived that the portrayal of women as evil or angelic does not give them agency, autonomy or space to express themselves. The genre stereotyped gender roles by casting women in submissive or *femme fatale* roles, but never as the heroine. The combination of gender and genre in these novels was unilateral and inevitably led to the creation of male-dominated fictions. For example, in *The Big Sleep*, the sex-obsessed and murderous Carmen Sternwood was described by Marlowe as unintelligent when he refers to her as “just a dope” (p. 25).

The misogyny of the genre is also shown through Hammett’s Brigid O’Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* when Sam Spade comments on the threat she disguises beneath “the schoolgirl manner, you know, blushing, stammering, and all that... if you actually were as innocent as you pretend to be, we’d never get anywhere” (p. 46). O’Shaughnessy employs Sam Spade for protection against the criminal Casper Gutman. Later in the novel, it is revealed that, since she did not want to share the profits from the sale of the Maltese falcon with her boyfriend Floyd Thursby, she kills Miles Archer in an attempt to frame him. From these examples, we can see that viewing the role of the *femme fatale* as a reflection of female empowerment was not Hammett or Chandler’s intention, contrary to the interpretation that Moore makes in relation to early hard-boiled detective fiction. He asserts that “these four decades [of the early hard-boiled period] do not create the unequal power relationship between men and women” and “accentuate what appears as a slowly growing expansion in what women can do, especially as villains” (2013, p. 30). As Cawelti explains, the early hard-boiled “had a distinctively antifeminist and even misogynistic animus” (2004, p. 279). Although these novels do not “create” gender inequality, they seem to re-create it by relegating female characters to secondary and often stereotypical roles.

The incorporation of female detectives into the hard-boiled subgenre required a rearrangement of some of the main features of the detective. Walton acknowledges that in feminist hard-boiled detective fiction, the rebellious female, who was vilified in traditional hard-boiled detective fiction, is portrayed as “a heroic one, a gesture that would have been inconceivable to the early practitioners of the genre” (1999, p. 195). Muller’s female detective Sharon McCone or Sue Grafton’s Kinsey Millhone exemplify this type of female character. Their roles as detectives place them in a position that is no longer that of the passive woman, women subservient to male characters, or the evil *femme fatale*. They are perceived as figures

of authority who resolve murder mysteries. The female figure disrupts patriarchal gender discourse, providing an alternative reading where she does not fit the standards of the male-oriented traditional detective. Due to the patriarchal values embedded in society, for example “the cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity” as Butler observes (2006), the female detective had to make an extra effort to demonstrate her intelligence and skill as a private eye. In *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, Sharon McCone justifies her detection skills by saying to the sexist detective Greg Marcus, “I’m competent. I’d say my strong point is knowing how to ask the right questions” (p. 25).

Sarah Paretsky, Marcia Muller and Sue Grafton are among the writers who have incorporated feminist values into hard-boiled detective fiction. Their female detectives act autonomously, have agency and break with the female stereotypes established by patriarchal society, thus moving from submissive to strong independent roles. When McCone is asked if she ever thought of becoming a cop she responds with, “I did, but at the time there wasn’t much opportunity for women. Lady cops were confined to typing, taking shorthand, and the juvenile division” (*Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, p. 209). Pursuing a career as a detective allows her to transcend the limited gendered role of a police woman.

Modern hard-boiled novels give voice to the marginalised and provide new channels of expression. Post-1970s hard-boiled detective fiction has offered women the possibility to express themselves and be depicted as heroines instead of anti-heroines. Not only does detective fiction provide a space in which gender discourses and female protagonists are re-imagined, but ethnic groups have also used this form to express their realities.

III.2.6. The Ethnic Hard-boiled Detective

Ethnicity expands the detective fiction canon while creating a new subgenre. Ethnic minority groups find themselves in an inferior and subordinate position, despite being citizens of the United States, as distinguishing characteristics such as race and religion position them as outsiders. Consequently, they, as Du Bois explains, “[...] must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism” (2008, p. 133). Social inequality is portrayed in detective fiction, resulting in conflicting situations which the ethnic detective must negotiate from his/her insider/outsider roles. Walter Mosley’s African-American detective, Easy Rawlins, shifts between identities or uses code switching as a means of negotiation. When dealing with white people he does not use his dialect but speaks

“proper English”, as he terms it (in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, p. 9). By the use of these “double words”/dialects, he avoids any possible racial conflict and obtains relevant information that will help him to solve the crime.

The appropriation of the hard-boiled mode contributes to the reader’s understanding of a different culture and the negotiation between dominant social groups and minorities who coexist in the same country: it alters the dominant discourse, giving voice to the outcast. Andrew Pepper describes black crime fiction as “a portrait of the United States beset by racial, ethnic, class and gender conflict, nonetheless able to contemplate a present and future where ‘difference’ can be acknowledged” (2000, p. 8). This genre and its writers aim to portray North American society in all its diversity, and the figure of the detective functions as a link with different characters from different cultures.

The ethnic detective can function as a vehicle to question the racial hierarchy represented in traditional detective fiction. Ethnic hard-boiled detectives commonly explore and negotiate social groups that are usually in conflict with each other. Peter Freese describes how these characters “introduce the reader to an unknown ethnic culture and thus assumes the function of a cultural mediator” (1992, p. 9). Their authors use them to serve their social agenda and to highlight social injustices.

The African-American Detective

African-American detectives break away from essentialist racial discourses and confront the racial construct of detective fiction’s traditional conventions. They question the colour line superiority of the traditional mysteries and allow for racial politics to be introduced in the genre.

Chester Himes and Walter Mosley are among the most famous African-American detective fiction writers who have contributed to the rise of a racial consciousness within detective fiction. Himes’ work marks the first generation of African-American fictional detectives. His Harlem detectives Grave Digger and Coffin Ed suffer a double discrimination from both the black and white communities because of their race and their role as private investigators. Madelyn Jablon points out that they “are alienated from the Harlem community because they represent the law. Paradoxically they are alienated from their fellow police officers as well: as the only black men on the force they are perceived as representing lawlessness” (in Smith and Rieder eds. 1996, p. 26). *A Rage in Harlem* (1957), the first of Hime’s novels featuring Grave

Digger and Coffin Ed, revolves around the investigation of a fraud. One of the main characters, Jackson, is swindled by his girlfriend Imabelle in a con involving turning ten dollar bills to one hundred dollar bills. However, he ends up losing all his money. In one of the descriptions of the detectives, the narrator explains that they “weren’t crooked detectives, but they were tough. They had to be tough to work in Harlem. Colored folks didn’t respect colored cops. But they respected big shiny pistols and sudden death” (p. 49). This quote exemplifies how the only way the sleuths could gain respect from their black community was using physical violence. *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969) recounts a series of crimes during a time of racial tension and protests in Harlem. During a discussion with Lieutenant Anderson with regard to the riots and their links to the crimes, the detectives affirm that they are victims, ““Victims of what?” Anderson asked foolishly. “Victims of your skin,” Coffin Ed shouted brutally, his own patchwork of grafted black skin twitching with passion” (p. 154).

Mosley belongs to the next generation of African-American writers. His amateur sleuth Easy Rawlins is an unemployed man who accepts a job as a detective, out of economic necessity. Mosley’s *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) sees Easy offered one hundred dollars to look for Daphne Monet, the girlfriend of the wealthy Todd Carter, who runs away after stealing thirty-thousand dollars from him. The novel, set in Los Angeles, takes place after the Second World War and reflects the racial differentiation and marginalisation of the time. This divided society is reflected in private eye Rawlins’ narration: “[t]he papers hardly ever even reported a colored murder. And when they did it was way in the back pages” (p. 157). He goes on to say that “[t]o kill a white man was a real crime” (p. 157). Here, Easy acknowledges the lack of justice and inequality when it comes to “colored” people. However, Rawlins’ blackness is not always a disadvantage. While looking for Frank Green, Daphne’s half-brother, he admits that being a black man makes it easy for him to investigate inconspicuously, especially when the places that Daphne habitually goes to are frequented by black people: “Nobody knew what I was up to and that made me sort of invisible; people thought that they saw me but what they really saw was an illusion of me, something that wasn’t real” (p.127).

Mosley “turned to detective fiction as the means to make social, political, and moral statements that might not otherwise have found an audience” (Cullen Gruesser 2013, p. 4). For example, in this novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, when the African-American detective, Easy Rawlins encounters Mr. Todd Carter, a rich white man, he reflects on white people’s racism and racial stereotypes when he says

[I] didn't have the fear or contempt that most white people showed when they dealt with me [...] he didn't even consider me in human terms. He could tell me anything. I could have been a prized dog that he knelt and hugged when he felt low. It was the worst kind of racism (p. 122).

The author portrays America as a country of racial discrimination; full of injustice and marginalisation, and not as the land of opportunities existing behind the American dream that was pursued by many. As Rawlins explains, "California was like heaven for the Southern Negro. People told stories of how you could eat fruit right off the trees and get enough work to retire one day. The stories were true for the most part but the truth wasn't like a dream" (p. 28). During the 1940s many African-Americans migrated to California seeking a better life. However, "arriving in Los Angeles with high expectations, African-Americans quickly found themselves not just on the lowest rungs of the job ladders with no chance of rising but easily disposable as surplus labor whenever industrial production slackened" (Peter Gottlieb quoted in Reyes Torres 2011, p. 120). When Rawlins begins his investigation by going to a bar regularly frequented by Monet, he bumps into her old friend Coretta with whom he has sex that night. After he leaves her home the morning after, he is soon arrested as a suspect in the murder of Coretta. He then reflects that he "didn't believe that there was justice for Negroes. [He] thought that there might be some justice for a black man if he had the money to grease it" (p. 119). The suitability of hard-boiled fiction for social commentary is reflected in Mosley's narratives which accurately portray the racism of the time within U.S. institutions.

Black detective fiction writers' works established a political debate on individual minority identities. They also reshaped the genre by introducing different stylistic features in the narration, such as African-American traditions and black language, music or dance. These works and their authors transformed the formula of detective fiction by the use of double-conscious detection, black vernacular language and hoodoo⁴.

In summary, both directly and indirectly, the ethnic detective brings a new perspective to the genre whilst offering the reader an additional aspect, a subplot, to the crime investigation process underlying the main plot. Early hard-boiled detective fiction inscribed dominant cultural discourses where white race superiority was evident, as Liam Kennedy argues, "hard-

⁴ Hazzard-Donald describes hoodoo as "the folk, spiritual controlling, and healing tradition originating among and practiced primarily, but not exclusively, by captive African Americans and their descendants primarily in the southern United States" (2012, p. 2).

boiled fiction's most distinctive narrative codes, conventions, and characterizations have traditionally been structured around the consciousness of a white subject" (in Gregory Klein ed. 1999, p. 224). White characters, as well as a white philosophy based on racial hierarchy, monopolised the form. By way of contrast, African-American detective novels often explored race as a socially constructed concept. The unprecedented introduction of black detectives in hard-boiled literature gave way to the rise of other ethnic minorities within detective fiction, such as Chicana/o detectives, who mostly emerged from the mid-1980s.

III.3. Identity from Both Sides of the Border

Lomelí, Márquez and Herrera-Sobek consider that the increase of Chicana/o mystery writers during the 1990s could "[...] set off what may well be the beginning of the Raza/Aztlán detective tradition or the formation of the Chicana/o detective persona" (2000, p. 298). Whilst this genre has not been widely adopted by Chicana/o writers during the last two decades, the work of authors such as Rudolfo Anaya, Lucha Corpi, Rolando Hinojosa or Michael Nava have undeniably transformed the genre and set the foundations of the Chicana/o detective persona.

Chicana/o detective fiction is a suitable vehicle in which to reflect a new discourse about identity. As Rodríguez indicates in the foreword of his critical work *Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicana/o Identity*, Chicana/o writers' detective novels "are reflections not only on criminal mysteries, but also queries into the mystery of identity" (2009). In the mystery novels of Chicana/o writers such as Lucha Corpi, Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Michael Nava, the figure of the Chicana/o detective works as a tool to understand and explore Chicana/o identity from a postnationalist and transnational point of view. They investigate the social, cultural and political circumstances of their community, whilst also reflecting the diversity of opinions and individualities.

These Chicana/o writers' detective novels are counter-narratives of essentialist identity discourses that set boundaries to the community collective and individual identities. These boundaries are reflected in any identity discourse sustained by the notion that the assimilation to a group identity implies a negation of pluralism and/or imposes a static definition of identity. Through their texts, Chicana/o detective fiction writers expose their concerns with female empowerment, sexual and ethnic minorities, among others. They find in this subgenre a way of addressing individuals' issues, not only inside but also outside the Chicana/o community. Their writings are artistic expressions and instruments for self-expression as well as a social

and political critique. They contribute to the formation of a transnational consciousness that breaks with boundaries and fixed notions.

III.3.1. Chicana/o Detective Fiction Writers

As explained in chapter I, the 1980s and 1990s saw an explosion in Chicana/o literary publications with the support of Chicana/o publishing companies where major Chicana/o authors, such as Sandra Cisneros, Moraga, Anzaldúa, Salinas and Valdez, had their works published. The genres adopted by Chicana/o writers were diverse, however detective fiction represented a small percentage within all the narratives published.

Al Martínez' *Jigsaw John* (1975) and Rudy Apodaca's *The Waxen Image* (1977), set in New Mexico, were the first mystery novels written by Chicanas/os, but the main protagonists in these two novels were not Chicanas/os. It was not until the mid-1980s when a Chicano author, Rolando Hinojosa, introduced a Chicano detective for the first time. Rafe Buenrostro, a detective of the homicide squad in the fictional Belken County (South Texas), is the protagonist of *Partners in Crime* (1985) and also features in Hinojosa's mystery novel *Ask a Policeman* (1998). He has produced a vast body of work that spans three decades. Among his works, Hinojosa is best known for his *Klail City Death Trip Series* novels. This multivolume series comprises fifteen novels in different genres, including the Buenrostro mystery novels.

The novel *Angel Dance* (1977), by North American author Mary F. Beal, features Kat Guerrero, a Chicana lesbian investigator. Guerrero was the first lesbian feminist investigator to appear in a mystery novel as well as the first lesbian Chicana in the genre (Gavin in Rzepka and Horsley eds. 2010; Munt 2003). Detective Guerrero is hired to protect the controversial best-selling feminist author Angel Stone, who is being threatened because of the content of her work. Throughout the novel, the reader finds out how Guerrero's ethnicity, class, sexuality and gender liaise with dominant law structures and corruption in a heteropatriarchal capitalist world where justice cannot be enforced.

During the 1990s, detective fiction earned more critical acclaim, Chicanas/os saw it as a tool for expressing the oppression and injustices suffered by their community whilst searching for a national cultural identity. The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed the adoption of this genre by well-known Chicana/o writers such as Rudolfo Anaya, Lucha Corpi, Manuel Ramos

and Michael Nava, among others. These four authors, together with Hinojosa, have constructed the foundation of contemporary Chicana/o crime fiction.

Rudolfo Anaya is considered one of the most important contributors to contemporary Chicana/o literature. He has published novels, plays, non-fiction, poetry and books for children. He is best known for his bildungsroman *Bless me, Ultima* (1972), the first in a trilogy followed by *Heart of Aztlán* (1976) and *Tortuga* (1979). He has written a series of four detective novels set in New Mexico and featuring Sonny Baca; *Zia Summer* (1995), *Río Grande Fall* (1996), *Shaman Winter* (1999) and *Jemez Spring* (2005). The character Sonny Baca was first introduced in *Albuquerque* (1992) as the great-grandson of the real life lawyer and sheriff Elfego Baca (1865-1945). Elfego became one of the bravest and most fearless lawman in the Wild West. This mix of fiction and reality also resembles the mystery novels of Corpi and Gaspar de Alba, as later analysed in this chapter.

Lucha Corpi has received numerous literary awards, including the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Literary Prize in fiction and the Multicultural Publishers Exchange Book Award of Excellence in Adult Fiction. Her works include poetry, fiction and a children's book.

She has written four mystery novels featuring the Chicana detective Gloria Damasco: *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* (1992), *Cactus Blood* (1995), *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (1999) and *Death at Solstice* (2009). Her other mystery novel *Crimson Moon* (2004), features detective Dora Saldaña, who first appears in *Black Widow's Wardrobe* as Gloria Damasco's assistant.

Retired attorney Manuel Ramos has published a short story collection, *The Skull of Pancho Villa and Other Stories* (2015) and nine novels. He is one of the most commercially successful Chicano mystery writers. Most of his mystery novels feature Denver lawyer and Chicano amateur detective Luis Montez: *The Ballad of Rocky Ruiz* (1993), *The Ballad of Gato Guerrero* (1994), *The Last Client of Luis Montez* (1996) *Blues for the Buffalo* (1997) and *Brown-On-Brown* (2003).

In most of the works of these Chicana/o writers, the subplot running parallel to the investigation of a crime deals with various Chicana/o-related themes. For example, Rolando Hinojosa's *Partners in Crime* and Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood*, both set on the border, are cross-border fictions. They reveal how borders are perceived and crossed, as well as how the borderlands constitute a new space where concepts of hybridity and identity are negotiated. The various perceptions of the border are explained by the *Desert Blood* narrator when she describes that "For the locals on each side of the river, the border is nothing more than a way to get home. For those nameless women in the sand, those tortured bodies she'd just been reading about in

the Ms. Article, the border had become a deathbed. For Ivon Villa, it was the place where she was born.” (p. 7) In these two novels, the border is also represented as a site of paradoxes. *Desert Blood*, as explained in depth in chapter V, presents the border as the setting where rich multinational companies are established and where low-income individuals, mainly Mexicans, go to work in subhuman conditions. It is also a space where police forces that should serve to bring justice turn to corruption by associating with cartels, as it is portrayed in *Partners in Crime*.

Among other themes, Corpi and Ramos’ works document and analyse the Chicano Movement and its impact in the construction of a Chicana/o identity. In *The Ballad of Rocky Ruiz* (1993), set in Denver, Ramos recounts the story of four Chicano student activists who, 20 years ago, were attacked by a gang who murdered their leader Rocky Ruiz. Now the survivors are in danger and, to save them, the detective and former Chicano Movement activist Luis Montez have to revise the history of *El Movimiento* to unravel the mystery of the Rocky Ruiz murder. As will be examined in the next section, some of Lucha Corpi’s mystery novels also document the era of the Movement and as she analyses the process of identity construction from a postnationalist point of view.

Before analysing Corpi’s mysteries, I will look briefly at the work of other significant Chicana/o mystery fiction writers and the socio-political commentary of their novels.

The first excerpts of Sheila Ortiz Taylor’s *Coachella* appeared in the journal *Americas Review* in 1996 and was published in 1998. This Chicana writer draws from a real event, the contamination of a blood bank with HIV in the Coachella Valley. Set in 1983, the novel features lesbian Chicana Yolanda Ramírez, a phlebotomist at the Pam Springs Hospital, who investigates the deaths of gay men and straight men and women after receiving blood transfusions. Her novel shows how AIDS is not just a problem for gay people but for society in general. The HIV-identified world, as Aldama argues, does not just belong to the gay community, “the boundary between that sanctified as a safe space (coded as Anglo, middle-class, and private) and that deemed chaotic and unsafe (coded as gay/lesbian, working class and public) blurs in a world filled with disease” (2005, p. 109). She reflects on the socio-historical context her novel is set in and reveals how prejudices regarding homosexuals and ethnic minorities are the product of a lack of knowledge and fear of the other.

As with Taylor’s *Coachella*, Ricardo Means Ybarra also draws from real events in *Brotherhood of Dolphins* (1997). This novel is based on the unsolved fire at the Los Angeles Central Library on April 29th 1986. Detective Pete Escobedo searches for the arsonist of the library and he

soon discovers that this person could also be the perpetrator of several arson homicides. Apart from this mix of reality and fiction, it is important to note the character of the Chicana fire fighter Sylvia Cruz, Escobedo's friend, who is presented as a heroic and professional female and embodies female assertiveness.

In *Layover* (1997), featuring the Chicano Deputy Sheriff Joe Blue, Max Martínez also presents a strong and self-assured Chicana character. This novel centres around Priscilla Arrabal who moves from San Antonio to a small town in Texas after finding out that her boyfriend has cheated on her. After her arrival, she gets caught in a murder and tries to escape town as she has been signalled as the main suspect. Arrabal's resolute personality not only helps her to escape from the police and the killer but also to disentangle the mystery behind the murder.

Martin Limón uses the figure of his Chicano army detective George Sueño to criticise the military actions during and after the Korean War and the U.S. government's role in the marginalisation of ethnic minorities. Limón has written sixteen novels starring his army police duo George Sueño and his Anglo-white partner Ernie Bascom. *The Door to Bitterness* (2005), the fourth in the George Sueño and Ernie Bascom series, is set in South Korea in the 1970s. Sueño's badge and weapon are stolen by murderers who use them to kill their victims. In the course of their investigation, whilst they try to recover the badge and weapon and stop the killings, Sueño reflects on his own ethnicity and parallels it to the racial alienation that mixed-race individuals in Korea – born of U.S. militaries and Korean women- have suffered. "GI sexual activity created the mixed-race population [...] who proliferated in the wake of the Korean War and are kept far down on the social and economic ladder" (López 2011, p. 184). Women who performed sexual work for the U.S. military during and after the Korean War and who became infected with sexually transmitted diseases were detained at special centres and, as a result of this imprisonment, their children were orphaned and ostracised (Sarah Soh 2008). They "were rendered outside the scope and meaning of Koreanness" due to Korean "racial politics of "blood purity" and a gendered politics of patriarchy that works in service of an imagined Korean homogeneity" (Mary Lee 2008, p. 56). Sueño apologises to mixed-race Korean Ai-ja and her brother Kong for the treatment these children and their mothers received from the U.S. government and military, "we should have taken care of you. It was our responsibility, but we didn't live up to our responsibility. For that I shall always be ashamed" (p. 274). These Korean women were served to the U.S military and, in turn, they and their children were treated as outcasts. As López explains, "this paradox is entirely familiar to Latina/o immigrants in the United States, upon whose inexpensive labor local economies

depend but who are nevertheless subject to paranoid legislation and increasingly inhumane deportation practices at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (2011, p. 172). Thus, Limón’s novel shows how this disposable use of minorities by dominant hegemonic powers and governments has manifested throughout time.

Rudy Apocada’s *Pursuit* (2003) also questions U.S. government and military action during the war. In this case, as Baker Sotelo explains, “*Pursuit* uses the Vietnam War to question government oversight of military spending. [...] Apocada’s presentation of graft and mismanagement during the Vietnam War shows careful research” (2005, p. 151). In this novel, the attorney John Garcia is asked by the Soliz family, a former client, to defend their young son, Bernardo Soliz, who has been charged with the attempted murder of the mayor’s daughter. Running parallel to his work on this case, García’s military past resurfaces as he is being threatened by people connected to his time serving in the Vietnam War.

Mario Acevedo’s *The Nymphs of Rocky Flats* (2006) is the first of the eight novels of the Felix Gómez series. During the Iraq war, the soldier Felix Gómez accidentally killed several civilians and was punished by being turned into a vampire. Now, Gómez is a private investigator hired by an old school friend to investigate an outbreak of nymphomania in a secret government facility in Rocky Flats. This novel provides a critique on U.S. military policies and the impact of the Iraq War. It questions the perspective of the U.S. government in relation to the human loss of life during Operation Iraqi Freedom. This is conveyed as “Felix’s vampiric transformation proves the inhumanity of war; the only way he can countenance it is to leave his humanity behind” (López 2011, p. 191).

Corpi and Gaspar de Alba are among the few well-known Chicana writers who have published detective fiction works. As Corpi states in an interview, “I think the future of Chicano detective fiction is already ensured. But what about the future of Chicana detective fiction?” (Ramos 2006).

Their novels are comparable to Chicano detective fiction written by Anaya, Ramos, Hinojosa and Nava in how they depict a counter discourse on ethnic, classist and economic injustices. However, Corpi and Alba’s works add a gender discourse based on the oppression and discrimination suffered by Chicanas from their own communities and traditional social conventions. Corpi’s work specifically criticises the sexism of the 1970s Chicano Movement by exposing the contradictory character of a nationalist discourse that combats oppression but is inherently oppressive to women.

The Chicana/o detective serves as a representative of Chicana/o culture and as a figure who restores justice. Corpi states that her main reasons for writing detective fiction are her “great love for the detective story and [her] strong desire to bring about justice, even if poetic” (Ramos 2006). Chicana/o mystery writers modified and enriched the genre by introducing working-class Chicana detectives such as Corpi’s private detective Gloria Damasco.

III.3.2. Lucha Corpi’s Detective Gloria Damasco

As this section demonstrates, Corpi’s mystery works offer a Chicana feminist and postnationalist perspective on the Chicano Movement. The accounts of her fictional private eye, Gloria Damasco, provide a critical view of the creation of nationalist identities and also of gender inequality.

The Damasco series involves a social critique; exploring identity, the struggles of her community during the Chicano Movement and what it means to be Chicana in the second half of the twentieth century. Corpi explains that she “never intended to be a political writer” (Ikas 2001, p. 80). However, her mystery series reflects her socio-political consciousness and activism by denouncing the suffering of her community, specifically that of Chicanas, as well as institutional racism.

These novels also contribute to the understanding of the historical and political situation during the 1960s Civil Rights Movements. Through the experiences of Corpi’s fictional detective, the reader learns about the Chicano Movement and specific historical events of this Movement. Fiction and history interweave in her mystery novels not only to recreate historical events but also to criticise the social injustices of the time. As Rodríguez explains, “Corpi’s series seeks to better understand how history and memory shape identity and to gauge their corresponding impact on political movements” (2005, p. 55).

The first novel of her mystery series, *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*, is set in Los Angeles during the National Chicano Moratorium⁵ against the Vietnam War. Chicano anti-war activists organised demonstrations to show their rejection not only of the Vietnam War but also of social injustice. This Chicano Moratorium took place in an age characterised by different social

⁵ For more information on Chicano Moratorium see Chapter 11: The Chicano Moratorium in *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (1996) by F. Arturo Rosales and Chapter 5: A common Goal: The Chicano Moratorium March of August 1970 in *Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Vietnam War Era* (2005) by Lorena Oropeza.

movements: hippies, African-American Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements. The critic Ernesto Vigil, in his account of the Chicano Movement, explains that the Chicano Moratorium march "was the largest minority protest against the war, the largest protest gathering of Chicanos until that time, and probably the largest anti-war protest composed of working-class people." (1999, p. 138)

Cactus Blood, Corpi's second novel in her Damasco mystery series, depicts the violence exerted by the police on Chicanas/os during the Chicano Movement. The detectives Damasco and Justin investigate the death of their friend Sonny Mares, who is believed to have taken his own life. One of the clues within the novel is a taped documentary about the violence of police on farmers' marches by the United Farm Workers.

The re-creation of this historical event also allows the author to expose the sexism that Chicanas faced within the Chicano Movement before and after the Moratorium. In *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*, Damasco acknowledges that Chicano nationalism did not consider gender equality as part of their discourse; "Chicano nationalism and feminism didn't walk hand in hand before or during the summer of 1970" (p. 66).

The term *vendidas* has been utilised to label those women who disagree with patriarchal essentialist views of women as nurturers and submissive subjects, as explained in depth in the next chapter. In *Cactus Blood*, Corpi highlights feminist generational differences and points of view on women within the Chicano Movement. Damasco's daughter, Tania, conveys this alternative notion when she suggests to her mother

You should write about your experiences, too, Mom. Sometimes I think younger Chicanas and other women don't give you and the Chicanas your age any credit for what you did. They think that you sold out, that you only did what the men told you, and that you were not feminist enough (p. 39).

Along with the term *vendidas*, Chicana feminists and Chicana lesbian feminists have also been referred to as *malinchistas* (Alarcón 1989; Moraga 2000; Bebout 2011). This term is linked to the myth of the sixteenth-century indigenous woman Malinalli Tenepali also known as Malinche. Corpi's *Black Widow's Wardrobe* illustrates this myth through the character of Licia Román Lecuona, who thinks she is the reincarnation of *la Malinche*. She was accused of killing her husband Peter, and went to prison for eighteen years because "an all-male jury" (p.17) discredited her allegations of sexual, mental and physical abuse by her husband. Her lawyer, Lester Zamora, attempts to prove to the jury that Peter has sexually abused her. However "[...] the courts had not ruled that a husband could commit the crime of rape against his own wife.

When a husband forced himself on his wife, the act wasn't a rape" (p.16). Once Licia is released from prison, somebody tries to kill her and Damasco has to protect her. *Black Widow's Wardrobe* sets out to present the discrimination that Mexican and Chicana women have experienced for centuries as well as to criticise the patriarchal interpretation of La Malinche. As Damasco states, while she is researching this myth, "All the available information on her, complimentary or not, had been provided by men, from Bernal Díaz and other witnesses during the conquest, to López Gómara, Hernán Cortés's biographer. Many had quite an historic axe to grind with Malinche" (p. 97). Damasco also criticises "Mexican historians [who] had reviled La Malinche, presenting her as a traitor to her people. 'How about all those Tlaxcalteca warriors who fought the Aztecs alongside Cortes's army?' she asked. 'No-o-o-o. they were men. Men do not betray. Ha!'" (p. 73). Damasco's criticism conveys how Mexican historians have presented a sexist view of *la Malinche*. This is the case of Octavio Paz, who referred to this female character as *la chingada* - "the fucked one" in the essay's English translation (1985, p. 78) - in his book *The Labyrinth of Solitude* originally published in 1950. Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemio Cruz* also captures this disdain towards *la Malinche*. In this novel, there are several passages that portray the Mexican as the heir of *la Malinche*, "born from the *chingada*". It is apparent from this work that women are perceived as commodities, lustful and disposable. Cruz' dictatorial politics are based primarily on the degradation of women and violation of human rights.

Through her fictional detective, Corpi asserts that a reinterpretation of the myth is crucial to empower Mexican and Chicana women:

Chicana scholars and writers aimed at creating a new and more positive view of La Malinche. In doing so, they 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 chosen her own destiny (p. 97).

We see from this quote that Damasco acknowledges the work of Chicana scholars in this reinterpretation that perceives Malinche not as a signifier of betrayal or a passive individual, but as a powerful woman and active subject. The Damasco series explores the Chicano community, gender, race, class and culture from a Chicana feminist point of view. Corpi acknowledges that, for her, writing crime fiction is a way of "exposing the machinations of a "justice system" which more often than not" discriminates against women (2014, p. 59).

Corpi's series provides an insight into how certain historical events such as the Chicano Movement shaped a Chicana consciousness. The Movement revolted against the marginalization of the Chicano community but at the same time ostracised Chicanas by failing to acknowledge their inequalities, as previously analysed in chapter I. Chicana feminists united under a consciousness that reacted against the discrimination that women faced within Chicano culture.

The fictional detectives of Corpi and Gaspar de Alba negotiate their identity within discourses of political power, culture and race. Gaspar de Alba's meta-fiction *Desert Blood* also interweaves reality and fiction. As previously explained, her novel documents the reality of the femicides in Ciudad Juárez and unveils the negative aspects of globalisation, which is a main contributing factor in the perpetration of these femicides.

III.3.3. The Multifaceted Social Commentary of the Queer Chicana/o Detective

In the following chapters I will look in depth at the mystery works of Nava and Gaspar de Alba, but first I will provide a brief overview of the social and political discourse of their queer fictional detectives.

Nava and Gaspar de Alba's detectives, Ríos and Villa, share the fact that they are openly homosexual, and their discourse conveys a message on alternative sexualities. These characters are also vehicles for social critique, as I assert in my research. During the last thirty years the increase of queer writing has been, as Sharon Wheeler points out, "one of the most welcome and radical progressions in the crime-writing field" (in Martz and Higgie 2007, p. 7). Both Nava and Gaspar de Alba's mysteries have contributed to this growth.

Their detectives differ from the traditional hard-boiled figure not only in their diverse identity but also in that they are more emotionally or personally involved with the characters surrounding them. Nava and Gaspar de Alba's sleuths interact with suspects along with an extensive range of characters who are part of the crime story.

They share similarities with the traditional hard-boiled detective in that they face corruption and violence during the course of their investigations. The graphic descriptions of violence found in the traditional hard-boiled narratives previously mentioned, can also be found in Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels, particularly in *Desert Blood*. The opening sentences of this work are explicit descriptions of the corpse of a woman kidnapped at a fair by the Rio Grande; "[t]he rope tightened around her neck, and she felt her belly drag over sand and rocks, the wound on her breast pricked by sagebrush. She was numb below the waist, and her face ached from the

beating” (p. 1). However, these descriptions differ from those of Spillane’s novels in that they attempt to raise awareness of femicides and appeal to the reader’s consciousness. Hammer employs violence as a means of getting results in his investigations but these accounts of violence do not serve any other purpose than to reflect the toughness of the investigator (Moore 2013).

When talking about the main purpose of her novel, Gaspar de Alba states that she wrote it “to break that silence on the U.S. side of the border, (she) decide(d) to write a mystery novel about the crimes [...] to inform the broadest possible English-speaking public about the femicides” (2011, p. 6). As explained in chapter II, since the early 1990s female bodies have appeared in the fields of Juárez, close to the border. The impunity surrounding these femicides led Gaspar de Alba to write *Desert Blood*. There is an extensive body of literature inspired by or based on these crimes: the novels *2666* (2004) by Roberto Bolaño, *If I Die in Juárez* (2006) by Stella Pope Duarte, and *The Dead Women of Juárez* (2012) by Sam Hawken. There are also a number of critical works on the subject, including *The Daughters of Juárez* (2008) by Teresa Rodríguez and Diana Montané; *Violence and Activism at the Border* (2010) by Kathleen Staudt, *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (2010) by Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds.; and *The Femicide Machine* (2012) by Sergio González Rodríguez.

Gaspar de Alba’s novel examines, from a feminist Marxist perspective, cultural and gender issues as related to global economies which in turn offers an explanation as to why femicides at the border continue. Her work functions as a channel to explain the reasons behind these ongoing murders, one such reason being, the impact of globalisation after the signing of NAFTA, which led to unethical working conditions in the *maquilas*.

The background of *Desert Blood* portrays a world where women are relegated to positions of inferiority in relation to male workers and subject to widespread sexual harassment. The abuse and violence suffered by these factory women is the result of what Žižek has termed as systemic evil: “The fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, [...] this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their ‘evil’ intentions, but is purely ‘objective’, systemic, anonymous” (2010, p. 11). Gaspar de Alba’s narrative has contested the masculinist reports of the Juárez femicides. These reports have been based on strategies such as victim blaming. They hold victims of femicide responsible for their tragic fate as a result of not adhering to traditional gender roles. The Chicana writer offers in *Desert Blood* a feminist view whereby female characters are depicted with a strong sense of resistance and counteract that of

a female submissive patriarchal discourse. For example, the amateur detective Ivon Villa is disgusted at the amount of poorly conducted investigations in relation to missing or murdered women at the border so she takes it upon herself to find her sister.

Her work also analyses the patriarchal gender roles that regard independent women as prostitutes and uses this label as an excuse to blame the victims, as Villa declares “no wonder these crimes haven’t been solved [...]. From the prostitutes to the police, everyone thinks it’s just about sex, it’s just about the girls going off with men” (p. 186).

The corruption of the government and the destruction of evidence, in some cases, render the victim invisible. In the cases where the victim has an identity, she could be blamed for living inappropriately; “the victims are leading loose lives and putting themselves in danger” (p. 85). Gaspar de Alba shows how the truth is altered to blame the victim and how such violence is not investigated when the victim might be regarded as having an indecent lifestyle, as I argue in chapter V. She explains that these “victims are also called ‘maqui-locas’, assumed to be *maquiladora* workers living la vida loca, or una vida doble, of a border metropolis, coded language for prostitution” (2011, p. 3). This categorisation of the women is used to minimise the importance of the crime. The term *locas* (madwomen) has also been used to refer to female activists. This terminology was also used in relation to the Argentine mothers who gathered weekly in the Plaza de Mayo and protested against the atrocities of the Argentinian military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. They requested to know what had happened to their “missing” children. In response to these demonstrations, the government attempted to trivialise these women’s efforts by calling them *locas* (Josephine Fisher 1989). Activists against femicide at the border have also been targeted by governmental and political institutions. As Melissa Wright explains, they blamed activists

for exaggerating the problems in order to generate political and economic resources for themselves and for their organizations. They blamed them for tarnishing the business reputation of Mexico and for contributing to the economic downturn in maquiladora sector. They blamed them for being feminist and lesbian and just plain “bad women” (“viejas locas”/“crazy bitches”) (2017, p. 260).

As a result, their activism and criticism of neoliberal practices that renders femicide victims invisible have not been recognised, as I explained in depth in chapter V. That is, femicide has not been acknowledged as associated “with the modern cruelties of exploitative capitalism, social hatred and state terror” (ibid., p260). The bad press activists received questioned “the veracity of [their] statements and local groups’ statistics on femicide” which in turn

“exacerbated the already complicated interlocution between the state government and the local activists groups” (Staudt and Méndez 2015, p. 38).

In *Desert Blood*, the female amateur investigator has to face political and police corruption on both sides of the border. Partially based on real events, Gaspar de Alba’s novel explores how corruption has impeded the investigations of the Ciudad Juárez murders. The political complicity is so deeply embedded that the femicides cannot be resolved, which results in impunity for the perpetrators. As Villa reads in a magazine article on the plane to El Paso, “life, after all, is not a Hollywood mystery. There is no resolution, no evil madman to blame it all on. The perfect murder is, it turns out, unusually easy to commit” (p. 6).

The world that surrounds Ivon Villa is a violent one, and the author offers detailed descriptive accounts of the violent deaths of the young women of Juárez. Gaspar de Alba also includes real journalistic reports on these femicides. For example, in this article from *MS* magazine⁶ Villa reads and learns that “many of the young women had been raped, several were mutilated, and a large number had been dumped like worn-out machine parts in some isolated spot” (p. 4).

By offering a realistic insight, with fictional and non-fictional recounts, into the violence exerted on these women, the author attempts to raise public awareness. Rodríguez asserts that “the mystery genre has become a critical discursive site of contestation and interrogation of local judicial processes” (in Mendible ed. 2007, p. 246). *Desert Blood* exposes the inactivity and obstruction of governmental and legal institutions by highlighting the disparity between law and justice. This interest in revealing injustices and inequalities renders this genre a more than suitable form to give voice to diverse Chicana/o identities.

Nava’s detective Ríos adopts some of the traits of the hard-boiled detective. He is an alcoholic, a marginalised individual who is conscious of the corruption around him. He differs from the traditional hard-boiled protagonist in that he does not use violence to show strength. He conveys his strength through his endurance of painful situations, such as a difficult break-up and the death of his partner, with a great deal of emotional resilience. The tough essence of the hard-boiled detective remains, but it is no longer attributable to traditional notions of masculinity. As analysed in the next chapter, Nava’s character interrogates the construction of

⁶ The article that this excerpt is based on, titled The Maquiladora Murders, was originally written by journalist Sam Quiñones in 1998.

masculinity and breaks with “the macho mold” understood by Baker Sotelo as “a masculinity that is characterized by the use of force and as a term that describes a gendered male, who aggressively promotes his own prerogatives” (2005, p. 113). Ríos is sensitive, charming and does not use violence to get his way. He offers an alternative view to the *macho* character traditionally associated with hard-boiled fiction.

Chicana/o detective fiction not only places the Chicana/o subject at the centre but also the experiences surrounding their hybrid culture. In the case of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels, the authors exploit the mystery genre to present issues related to sexual identity. While the detective’s sexuality is not the central topic of their works, it is an important dimension of their characters. The figure of the detective is used to investigate the politics of difference and to represent diverse sexualities. As Markowitz explains, “gay/lesbian detective fiction presents a diversity of lesbian and gay lifestyles which enables a wide variety of gay and lesbian readers to see themselves and their worlds woven into the stories” (2004, p. 7).

The queer detective fiction subgenre was first introduced in the second half of the 1960s with the publication of George Baxt’s mystery novel *A Queer Kind of Death* (1966). This novel featured Pharoah Love; a gay African-American police detective working in Manhattan. However it was not until 1986, with Navas’ novel *The Little Death*, that a Chicano mainstream writer published a mystery novel featuring a gay Chicano detective.

The storylines in novels involving a homosexual detective are very similar to mainstream detective novels featuring heterosexual sleuths. The main difference is that the quest of the detective is not only to restore order but also to reflect social diversity and break with the stereotype of the white, male and heterosexual early hard-boiled detective.

The gay Chicana/o detective is not only threatened by criminals but also by homophobic and racist views. Queer detective fiction tries to achieve the “normalisation” of queer characters.

In Nava’s Henry Ríos series, Gaspar de Alba’s *Dessert Blood* and Emma Pérez’ *Electra’s Complex* the protagonist detective is described and recognised as professional and not just represented by their sexuality and the stereotypes associated with this sexual identity. In the next chapter, I further analyse these stereotypes such as the traditional view of feminine identification associated to the gay male.

Queer Chicana/o writers look at forging new identities for those Chicanas/os who have been doubly oppressed; alienated from their community and discriminated against their ethnicity

(Foster 2014). Hence, it is not coincidental that Nava, Gaspar de Alba and Pérez' fictional detectives are homosexual.

The fact that the detective's sexual orientation relegates them to a minority group creates new perspectives on the detection process. There is an underlying subplot based on the identification and interpretation of alternative sexualities, and thus the investigation of the crime runs parallel to the exploration of sexualities. In the article *Comings Out: Secrecy, Sexuality, and Murder in Michael Nava's Rag and Bone*, Zamostny states that Michael Nava's mystery series "has successfully capitalized on analogies between enigmas posed by murder and homosexual desire" (2009, p. 183). For example, Nava's novels explore and reflect on issues related to coming out. In *Rag and Bone*, Ríos' sister, Elena, explains how it took her "a long time to completely come out. I told myself it was because I wanted to protect my privacy, but really it was because I was ashamed to be a lesbian [...]" "I had to learn about compassion and tolerance when I came out because you can't ask from others what you're not prepared to give" (p. 161). Nava, Gaspar de Alba and Pérez' novels not only present a crime mystery but also an exploration on identity and a reflection on gay/lesbian subjectivity. Whilst their novels adhere to the mystery format, the investigation process shifts between the search for the killer and the analysis of issues related to gender and sexuality from a Chicano postnationalist and transcultural view. Their mysteries not only entertain but also highlight issues such as AIDS, the closet and homophobia.

The socio-political background of Nava's mystery series, particularly in relation to the novels published during the 1980s and early 1990s, is marked by the improvement in gay rights. However, the discrimination toward the homosexual community in relation to AIDS is still evident.

From Hinojosa, Corpi, Nava and Anaya's detective narratives to Acevedo's ongoing mystery series, Chicana/o detective fiction has contributed to pushing the boundaries of the genre and to transforming the detective hero figure. It has shed new light on the understanding of how Chicana/o identity redefines itself from a post-nationalist and transnational perspective, and rejects any essentialist notions imposed by nationalist, patriarchal and heteronormative rhetoric. Chicana/o detective fiction demonstrates how the genre is more than formulaic narratives, it is an exploration into the notion of the other, the outsider, embodied by the Chicana/o detective and of those boundaries that negate Chicana/o subjectivity.

These Chicana/o writers have represented the issues of their community – the problems related to migration, the threats of nationalism, as well as race, sexuality, class and gender notions

related to their multiple identities. Additionally, queer Chicana/o detectives such as those featuring in Nava and Gaspar de Alba's mysteries, have contributed to the creation of the queer Aztlán envisioned by Moraga, a space that "embrace[s] *all* its people, including its *jotería* [queer folk]" (1993, p. 147). The queer Chicana/o body of the detectives is presented as free from any normative discourse produced within and outside their community. "If women's bodies and those of men who transgress their gender roles have been historically regarded as territories to be conquered, they are also territories to be liberated" (Moraga 1993, p. 150). Nava and Gaspar de Alba have been partly responsible for this liberation in that their fictional sleuths question social constructions of identity and cultural metaphors that have historically oppressed queer subjectivities.

III.4. Synthesis

Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels are part of the socio-politically engaged detective narratives that arise with the Civil Rights Movements as a response to the hegemonic discourse of the traditional hard-boiled genre that re-affirmed white male dominance. Contemporary detectives operate according to the conventions of classical detective fiction or traditional hard-boiled fiction while offering variations and innovations to the form. Nava and Gaspar de Alba's detectives use their intellect and deduction skills to resolve the mystery crime in ways similar to the classical detective. However, their identities and the narratives they feature in significantly differ from the detectives and conventions of the early stages of detective fiction.

The Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s contributed considerably to the evolution of crime fiction, it was a key moment in the development of the genre, which became transgressive in that it reflected the break from normative identities. The boundaries established by the conventions of the genre were expanded and trespassed. This border-crossing aspect was embodied not only by the form but also by their character heroes. Gaspar de Alba and Nava's queer Chicana/o detectives serve the authors as instruments to convey a multi-dimensional discourse that analyses gender and violence base on ethnicity and sexuality from a postnationalist, transnational and transcultural perspective. This discourse also offers a new perspective on the understanding of Chicana/o identity as a multifaceted and dynamic concept. Chicana/o identity, as well as the detective fiction genre, is subject to change. Both are actively constructed through a multicultural discourse that takes place in an ever-changing social context.

Nava and Gaspar de Alba's works show that detective fiction not only has an entertainment value but it is also a political statement which because of its mainstream aspect has the ability to reach a wide population. Their narratives allow for a formation of an identity discourse that expresses gay Chicanas/os' experiences. Nava and Gaspar de Alba include a homosexual detective in their works not only to expose the oppression suffered by the gay community as a whole but also to criticise the attitude of patriarchal Chicano views towards sexual minority groups. Their cross-border narratives, produced from the encounter between nations and cultures, are socio-politically engaged. They emphasise the detectives' diverse identity to respond to issues of oppression and exclusion. Their novels are ideal sources for identity construction and transnationalism discussions. They convey a narrative that encourages diversity from a transcultural and transnational consciousness.

The Ríos series and *Desert Blood* offer a discursive space for the construction of a cross-border Chicana/o subjectivity that understands identity as a dynamically constructed concept. The varied nature of the contemporary detective could lead to a false sense of achievement in terms of diversity representation but, as Moore explains, "the fulfilment is no more than a prelude to an inevitable shift, an unforeseen destabilization in the character's image", there are always socio-political circumstances that create new identities (2013, p. 175). Nava and Gaspar the Alba's work provides a space to interrogate issues related to both self and collective identity of queer Chicanos/as whilst contributing to their self-determination. Their critique around femicide and homophobia has helped to make a local issue, that of the Juárez murders, a global one and to shake the roots of the Chicano traditional discourse on homosexuality. These aspects are key to understanding the importance of these texts within Chicana/o literature and Chicana/o literary generations to come.

CHAPTER IV

TRANSGRESSIVE IDENTITIES

pre-examination copy (08/07/2019)

What is my responsibility to my roots: both white and brown, Spanish-speaking and English? I am a woman with a foot in both worlds. I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue (2000, p. 50) – *Loving in the War Years*, Cherríe Moraga –

From the earliest historiographic essays to more current ones, scholars have consistently argued for a conceptual framework that addresses transgressive Chicano Mexicano experiences in which culture is understood globally. For me, such paradigm would analyse systems of thought that construct cultural identities carved by a complex history (1999, p. xviii) – *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, Emma Pérez –

IV.1. Introduction

There is no doubt that Nava and Gaspar de Alba have become part of the Chicana/o literary canon and their contribution to the visibility of queer Chicanas/os has been recognised. In 1979, the Chicano writer Luis Leal wrote that “the identification of Chicano literature has progressed from the narrow, sociological definition to the broad, humanistic, and universal approach. Chicano literature, by lifting the regional to a universal level, has emerged from the barrio to take its place alongside literatures of the world” (in Stavans ed. 2007, p. 32). Indeed, the Chicano Movement, as previously noted, gave way to an extensive Chicana/o literature that gained national and international acclaim. However, Chicana/o literary works exploring or featuring queer Chicana/o subjectivities were not initially recognised within the Chicana/o literary canon. Before I begin analysing the transgressive aspects of Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s fictional detective identities, I will provide a brief overview of the evolution of queer Chicana/o writings and how they became part of the Chicana/o literary canon.

Juan Bruce Novoa’s essay *Homosexuality and the Chicano Novel*, published in 1986, offers a review of Chicana/o writing in the 1970s and 1980s and analyses how queer Chicanas/os had been ignored not only by literary scholars but also by their own community. Bruce Novoa explains that “a radical belief in Chicanismo as a revolutionary process of liberation [...] should lead one to consider homosexuals as, ideologically, close fellow travellers” instead of ignoring or rejecting them (1986, p. 69). Thus, he encourages scholars to “reread some canonized texts which have not been analysed for their gay content”, such as Sheila Ortiz Taylor’s *Spring*

Forward/Fall Back, John Rechy's *City of Night*, and Arturo Islas' *The Rain God*, to name a few, as well as to acknowledge the importance of the gay Chicana/o voice (ibid., p. 69).

John Rechy's 1963 novel *City of Night* has long been considered a classic of American gay literature. The publication, as Pérez explains, was "a landmark event in the history of gay culture in the United States and abroad; it spent a number of weeks as a national best seller and has been translated into several languages." (2009, p. 16). Partially based on the Chicano author's own experiences as an itinerant male prostitute in the late 1950's, this novel blurs the lines between reality and fiction.

The entire novel is a first-person narrative told by the nameless narrator-protagonist, and all the events portrayed are filtered through his consciousness. Set in the 1960s, the book follows the travels of a young man across the country while working as a hustler. The book features chapters on locations that the boy visits and certain characters he meets there, from New York City to Los Angeles, San Francisco and New Orleans. Throughout the novel, the unnamed narrator has encounters with various peculiar characters, including another hustler, an older man, an S&M enthusiast and a bed-ridden old man. All of these relationships vary in the extent of their emotional and sexual nature as well as in their peculiarity.

Libretti states that John Rechy and James Baldwin "represent their queer identities not in isolation but in dialectical relation to and interaction with their racial and class identities" (in Meyer 2000, p. 240). Notwithstanding, Rechy's *City of Night* does not necessarily focus on ethnicity, the Mexican background of the narrator is reflected when he describes his mother as a "beautiful Mexican woman" (p. 22) or when he remembers a song popular in the Hispanic culture "Let it rain, let it rain, Virgin of the Cave" (p. 37).

City of Night broke with simplistic views on Chicano culture rooted in nationalist discourses. The change in this literary space was not acknowledged by the critics until the mid-seventies. Previously, this novel was omitted from Chicana/o writers' anthologies. Bruce Novoa exemplifies this reluctance of some Chicano critics to include gay Chicana/o writers in their canon. He explains that

[i]n 1974, just before I presented my concept of Chicano literary space in a forum outside of the classroom, I was told by the then foremost Chicano critic that I could not include John Rechy among Chicano writers. He was, I was informed in a whisper, a homosexual. Since then Rechy has been included in most of the comprehensive bibliographies of Chicano literature (1990, p. 129).

In the essay “*Tortillerismo: Work by Chicana Lesbians*” (1993), Gaspar de Alba, through an analysis of several anthologies and other works published before 1991, explains how Chicana/o critics ignored the work of lesbian Chicanas, an exclusion that consequently “promote[d] the invisibility of lesbian literature and exercise[d] the heterosexual privilege of those critics who disregarded texts that make them ‘uncomfortable’” (quoted in Bost and Aparicio eds. 2012, p. 462).

Looking at the last thirty years of lesbian Chicana literary production, she concludes that the high amount of works published featuring Chicana “authors, characters, and situations, and taking into account the centrality of what Frederick Aldama calls “queer borderlands or postcolonial” theory and discourse in academia, [...] it is fair to say that Chicana/Latina lesbian literature no longer lives in the margins or in the closet”. (in Bost and Aparicio eds. 2012, p. 474).

Gaspar de Alba also theorises that the queer Chicana/o and Latina/o renaissance may be the result of three elements: “questioning rather than protecting male privilege; the growing critical mass of queer scholars; and the current “queer is cool” factor in the publishing and culture industry” (ibid., p. 474). Queer Chicana/o identities are now much more prevalent in Chicana/o literature. This expansion of queer identities in cultural production has enriched the canon with non-normative gender and sexuality discourses.

In the 1980s several Chicana/o writers such as Arturo Islas, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Michael Nava explored through their works what it meant to be a gay Chicana/o within a nationalist environment and a world that had relegated them to a third-class status. Their writings revolt against a *machista* culture characterised by a hyper-masculinity that understands aggression and homophobia as qualities synonymous with manhood, as later explained through the analysis of the Ríos mystery series. The publication of critical works such as Moraga and Anzaldúa’s edited work *This Bridge Called My Back* in 1981 and Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* in 1987 marked a major turning point in feminist and sexuality studies. These works have been translated into different languages and reprinted several times which reiterates their global success. They not only criticise *macho* culture but also the Eurocentric view of feminist studies. In her article *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers*, Anzaldúa asserts that “The lesbian of color is not only invisible, she doesn’t even exist” (in Keating ed. 2009, p. 26). She asks herself why she is compelled to write, and states that one of her reasons is “to record what others erase when [she] speaks, to write the stories others have miswritten about [her], about you.” (ibid., p. 169). She

rejects the monolithic conception of woman by white Western feminists, whose theories she considers to be exclusionary. As Freedman states, works like *This Bridge Called My Back* “helped educate white women [...] about the effects of racism within feminism”, they do not represent the different existent realities of women of all colors (2006, p. 96). As Alarcón asserts, “Anglo-American feminist theory assumes a speaking subject who is an autonomous, self-conscious, individual woman. It takes for granted the linguistic status which founds subjectivity. In this way it appropriates woman/women for itself and turns its work into a theoretical project within which the rest of us are compelled to ‘fit’” (McCann and Kim eds. 2003, p. 411).

Some other critical and fictional works revolving around queer, specifically lesbian, Chicana/o experiences, worth highlighting are the novels *Faultline: A Novel* (1982) by Sheila Ortiz Taylor, Terri de la Peña’s *Margins* (1992), Emma Pérez’ *Gulf Dreams* (1996), and the critical works *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991) by Carla Trujillo, *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherríe Moraga* (2001) by Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, *Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture and Chicana/o Sexualities* (2003) edited by Gaspar de Alba, *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians* (2006) by Catriona Rueda Esquibel and *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire* (2012) by Sandra K. Soto.

In this chapter, I argue that Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s narratives interrogate and react against the supremacy of the nation state as well as fixed notions on identity. Moreover, to analyse the complexity of the lived experience of queer Chicana/o identities, I look at the detective fiction genre and how the sleuths Ríos and Villa reveal homophobia at a local and global level. That is, how traditional values embedded in Chicana/o communities have placed queer identities outside the margins, and how the AIDS pandemic was globally identified as exclusively queer to demonize sexual minorities.

The transnational identity of these characters, a product of cross cultural relations and global processes, is ascribed to their transgressive aspect. By transgressive, I mean moving beyond the conventional limits of the genre and discursively constructed identity boundaries. The construction of an identity within a transnational framework forces Ríos and Villa to be in constant negotiation between their subjective and collective identities. They are transgressive within the white-heterosexual male configuration and tradition of detective fiction. That is, the multiplicity of identities they embody entails dissidence and transgression within the genre. To understand and define the transgressive identity of these detectives, I take a combined approach

that includes Chicana/o criticism with a postnational perspective, transnational feminist and queer studies, and theory on violence as related to homophobia. Through the analysis of the fictional sleuths, I examine the differences between Chicano nationalist and postnationalist views on gender and sexuality.

In the next section, I analyse the foundations that have supported Chicano traditional values and have resulted in the discrimination of queer identities as illustrated in Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels. I also reflect on how their mysteries rewrite gender roles from a feminist viewpoint and reveal unequal power relations. This cultural reconfiguring plays a crucial role within the feminist counter discourse agenda. In section three, I draw from Muñoz' concept of disidentification to argue how these authors have both transgressed and taken a space within the detective fiction genre, to depict their experiences and issues emerging from their gender and sexual identities.

IV.2. Transnational Detectives

Nava and Gaspar de Alba do not mimic the genre's format and conventions; instead, they imprint their own perspective. The identity of the detective fiction genre is diverse, transnational and ever changing, and so too are the identities of these writers' gay Chicana/o detectives. Hence, that is why the genre is a suitable channel to express their social and political concerns, as well as to create a space for Chicana/o sexual minorities.

Global economic processes and migration have increased the interactions between different cultures and nations. The interconnection between nations has generated identities that are shaped by a variety of transnational political values and social norms associated with multiple and differing nations (Smith 1998; Croucher 2004). As previously explained, Nava and Gaspar de Alba's detectives discourse embodies transnational feminist and queer concerns within a cross-border context. That is, they not only have to navigate between two nations and cultures but also between their sexuality and patriarchal-homophobic mainstream discourses. They also break with a traditional national identity narrative based on immovable historical and cultural representations that privilege male over female and straight sexualities over sexual minorities. They challenge the idea that nation and identity are bound together by a single discourse that remains unchangeable throughout time.

I examine how traditional Chicano nationalist views on identity have sustained sexist and homophobic attitudes towards queer Chicanas/os. I argue that a transnational approach that goes beyond the boundaries of the nation and of hegemonic discourses on feminism and sexuality is needed to disrupt these restricted views. Before examining the transnational aspect of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's detectives, it is important to analyse the concept of nation and national identity to understand to what extent these characters have transgressed political and cultural boundaries. As previously explained in chapter I, during the Chicano Movement, the national identity became a narrative construction produced from a patriarchal and heteronormative point of view. As Bauman argues, "[t]he idea of a 'national identity' [...] did not gestate and incubate in human experience 'naturally', did not emerge out of that experience as a self-evident 'fact of life'. That idea was *forced* into [us] and arrived as a *fiction* (2010, p. 20). Indeed, "what is national identity but a freaked fixed notion of what everyone in a specific geographical domain should be like?" (Foster 2014, pp. 44-45). Consequently, as López explains, the concept of Chicano nationalism has been difficult to separate from "the homophobia and sexism of 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o politics" (2011, p. 6). During that period, "Chicana feminists addressed the sexual inequalities inherent in a homophobic and phallogocentric nationalist movement whose emphasis on family unity and the concept of *carnalismo* (brotherhood) implicitly omitted women from egalitarian positions of power within the liberation movement" (Saldívar-Hull 2000, p. 127). The nationalism of this period "sought to reify Chicana/o identity in ways similar to the workings of most ethnic nationalist movements" (López 2011, p. 6). Based on Balibar's analysis on racism and nationalism, López explains that ethnicity and race are not fixed concepts "and their very subjectivity undermines an ethnic nationalist project" (2011, p. 6). Chicano nationalism overlooks the diverse Chicana/o subjectivities as well as their concerns in favour of a collective and unmovable Chicana/o identity. It "emphasizes strategies for resolving social injustice that pivot around ethnic or cultural identities and allegiances, not gender, sexuality, and class" (Dávalos 2001, p. 99). The inherent hybrid aspect of Chicanas/os undermines this exclusive strategy in that "[...] the hybrid subject has been hailed as an anti-essentialist approach to identity, one that takes experience into account but celebrates multiplicity and fluidity over stability and singularity" (Beltran 2004, p. 596). Indeed, this anti-essentialist approach is exemplified in Ríos and Villa, in that their multiple identities challenge any rigid conceptions on subject identification.

Chicano Nationalism based identity on the concept of nationhood and constructed a national identity around it. In her essay "Queer Aztlán", Moraga criticises the nationalist exclusive

political agenda and states that “[w]hat was wrong about Chicano Nationalism was its institutionalized heterosexism, its inbred machismo, and its lack of cohesive national political strategy” (1993, p. 148). Transnationalism, as a concept and theory, has challenged these restrictive imperatives about nation and identity. The boundaries of the nation-community have been blurred. Heywood explains that “[o]n the most basic level, nations are cultural entities, collections of people bound together by shared values and traditions [and] although particular cultural features are commonly associated with nationhood [...] there is no blueprint nor any objective criteria that can establish where and when a nation exists” (2017, p. 168). Despite the ambiguity in relation to the limits of the nation as a cultural entity, this cultural nation still exists but in the form of a transnation. As Ashcroft argues, the nation is now a transnation, “a transitional, fluid interaction of nations and identities” (in Lomeli et al. eds. 2009, p. 13). Thus, our identity is not solely constructed by our nationality. Whilst we should acknowledge the “crucial dimension of self-determination, whereby individuals may establish shared horizons of significance within a collectivity”, we should also view a national identity as “contingent and relational, mobilized to center the collective self in relationship to an ever-shifting other” (Aronczyk 2013, p. 79). That is, in a world in constant flow, our national identity is in a state of endless transformation.

Detective fiction as a genre is transnational not only in the sense that it expands across cultures and nations but also because their stories reflect and depict transnational identities. The genre also crosses and transgresses its own borders, which are somewhat established by its literary conventions. For example, its initial defining features, such as locating the story within a confined and rural location, as explained in chapter III, have changed to illustrate social, political and economic transformations. Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s fictional detectives illustrate and analyse how a transnational identity negotiates their sexuality between two cultures and two nations. Morgan explains that transnationalism in literature “involves a level of cognitive dissonance as the recipient interprets and processes the differences and similarities of ‘nation’ and ‘other’, or of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Morgan 2017, p. 14). Hence, *Desert Blood* and the Henry Ríos mystery series are transnational in that through their main characters, Villa and Ríos, the authors examine the relationship between the marginalised other and the heteronormative views of the nation. Their analysis both addresses the changing international relations within a globalised context and reflects the clash between traditional Chicano cultural values and homosexuality.

Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels create a space in which the authors can put into dialogue the multiple identities of queer Chicanas/os, where they can offer their particular view of what it was to be a gay male Chicano in the 1980s and 1990s and of the experiences of brown lesbian and straight women at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

IV.2.1. Taboo in *el barrio*

Changes in the Chicano community's beliefs about gender roles and homosexual identities are apparent, more so now than when Nava published his first novel in the Henry Ríos series. However, sexism and homophobia still pervade the Chicana/o community (Acuña 1996; Habell-Pallan 2005; Gaspar de Alba 2012). For example, Gaspar de Alba denounces the homophobia of the Chicano nationalist group La Voz de Aztlán that, in 2004, attacked the director of the Fullerton Museum Center "for including 'decadent lesbian artist' Alma López in an exhibition titled "The Virgin of Guadalupe: Interpreting Devotion'" (2012, p. 10). The head of this group, Ernesto Cienfuegos, claimed that Alma's *Our Lady* denigrated Mexican values "in collusion with those in the homosexual and lesbian lifestyles and of those others who have a deep hate against us'" (ibid., p. 10). Despite the fact that changes and progress have been made in relation to gender equality and queer rights, sexist and homophobic attitudes still exist.

Hernández defines postnationalism as the "precursor to Chicana/o transnational culture, [it] presents a new direction of intellectual, social, and economic factors in the production of Chicana/o expressions" (2010, p. 9). In this respect, Anzaldúa claims a transnational space for a new mestiza consciousness and argues that homosexuality is a transnational identity. She states that "[b]eing the supreme crossers of cultures, homosexuals have strong bonds with the queer white, Black, Asian" (2007, p. 106). From a postnationalist viewpoint, she explains that "[...] for the lesbian of colour the ultimate rebellion she can make against her culture is through her sexual behaviour" (ibid., p. 41). Her statement speaks back to traditional Chicano nationalist views on diverse sexualities. She develops a discourse based on resistance to and rebellion against idealistic conceptions produced by the dominant powers within her community. Foucault argues that "there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power

relations” (1990, p. 96). Thus, I argue that Anzaldúa’s resistance, and the resistance embedded in Nava and Gaspar de Alba detectives’ discourse, is possible and necessary. It has emerged from a network of power relations and has aimed to dismantle oppression from within, rebelling against *Chicanismo*.

As previously explained, nationalism understands identity as a fixed notion and the individual must reject their subjectivity and repress their true self in the interests of the nation. It reduces Chicana/o culture and identity to a unique viewpoint informed by patriarchy and heteronormativity. The sexist representation and interpretation of female myths such as *La Malinche* have contributed to this conception of being a traitor to the nation if the individual does not conform to their views, as I examine in depth in the next chapter. Alvarez also links this sense of betrayal by homosexual Chicanos to the stereotypical weakness and passivity attributed to them as well as the fact that they lack a reproductive system, “the homosexual man is further marginalized because unlike women his sexual acts are not procreative and do not reproduce the nation. Therefore, the homosexual is a national traitor” (1997, p. 4). Indeed, there is no doubt that gender identity is a socially constructed concept and that to further understand the marginalisation of diverse sexual identities it is crucial to analyse traditional conceptions on masculinity and femininity. In her edited anthology *Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture & Chicana/o Sexualities*, Gaspar de Alba offers a compilation of essays that analyse Chicana/o popular culture productions and explore the complexities behind the intersection between race, class, gender and sexuality. In the introduction to this work, she highlights these social constructions of gender and how they have been attributed to sexuality. “To study the representation of sexualities within the genres and categories of Chicana/o popular culture [...] is to look at the ethnic performance of maleness and femaleness, the racial construction of womanhood and manhood, and the historical production of femininity and masculinity within the way of life of an alter-Native population” (2003, p. xviv). This work, as she highlights, has brought “some light into those closed places in the heart of our culture that remain in darkness” (ibid., p. xxiii). I argue that to analyse the representation of sexualities is also to look at the position that their subjectivities take, a position that varies depending on the era they live in, their cultural background and how they perceive themselves in relation to others.

Ríos and Villa’s sexuality indirectly assigns them a liminal identity in that queer Chicanas/os are at the same time outside and inside their own nation. The conflict between belonging and betrayal is reflected in Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s mysteries, as I analyse in this chapter.

Traditional Chicano values force queer Chicanos to inevitably choose between an invisible or repressed identity and a liminal one. In *The Hidden Law*, Ríos associates the lack of identity with the suppression of his sexual orientation: “When I was a child I had worked hard at making myself invisible and I emerged from it without an identity. Over the years, I had crafted one for myself” (p. 78). Ríos understands the act of making himself visible by expressing himself as the starting point for the creation of his identity. Although the sexual orientation of the detectives confirms their liminal identity, this liminality is not only associated with a kind of ostracism, it has also come to signify a place for creativity and cultural production. Anzaldúa explains that “[t]he new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity [...] Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (2007, p. 101). Indeed, Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels exemplify how literature is produced as a result of conflict. Their narratives are an exploration of queer Chicana/o experiences and the detective genre is a suitable channel to reveal the mystery and taboo behind their identities. As Ríos explains, “[i]t was the mystery of my sexual nature that a body which was the mirror image of mine could be so compelling and feel so unfamiliar, as if it belonged to a separate gender. When I was younger, it had seemed urgent to unravel this mystery because I believed that if it could be explained, the haters would stop hating us” (*The Hidden Law*, p. 55). Here, Ríos acknowledges that although his identity was no longer a mystery, the hatred was still apparent from his nation and family. Despite the visibility of queer Chicanas/os, their identities have been concealed by traditional values reinforced under the concept of *familia* and religion. This view is also shared by Moraga, which she outlines in relation to the art exhibition “Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation” which toured the United States from 1990 to 1993. “There was no visible gay and lesbian response to our chicanidad that would challenge institutionalized and mindless heterosexual coupling; no break-down and shake-up of La Familia y La Iglesia; no portrait of our isolation, of machismo as monstruo, of la Indígena erased and muted in the body of la Chicana” (1993, p. 72). Family and religion have contributed, as Gaspar de Alba explains, to “[...] that foundation of cultural myths that gave rise to our gendered understanding of “Chicanismo,” or rather, the ideology of Chicano political empowerment as a site of ethnic pride, male supremacy, queer ostracism, and female subjugation” (2003, p. xxv). As I analyse in the next two sections, Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels both reveal and challenge the systems of power that sustain oppression, both by the family and religion.

IV.2.1.1 *La Familia es la familia*

Phillipa Kafka draws from Maxine Baca Zinn's views on the Chicana/o family to argue that during the 1990s "Chicano families still identified with Mexican family values that taught generations [of women] to conform, to be obedient and submissive to authority [...] Chicano families continue to some large extent their Mexican traditions of familism, their organization of the family around binary gender role distinctions" (2000, p. 72). Baca Zinn justifies this "political familism", in that, as a result of Anglo oppression, Chicanas/os have to adhere to traditional Mexican values to maintain their cultural identity and to preserve their cultural values. In turn, this would protect them from a dominant culture that threatened to destroy their subjectivity and traditions. (Baca Zinn 1975). However, Baca Zinn's justification falls short as she places the sole responsibility of an oppressive Chicana/o familial pattern onto Anglo culture and lacks any critique of the Chicana/o community. Baca Zinn's structuralist views on the Chicana/o *familia* are also called into question by Fregoso, as she explains,

informed as it was by this logic of reversal, by the transformation of the negative into the positive, the new orthodoxy of structuralism set into motion an equally myopic logic of valorization: an uncritical celebration of the Chicano familia with a singular focus on only the "positive" aspects of culture. Structuralist interpretations shifted the paradigm in the other extreme and absolved the individual, since anything that was wrong within la familia could now be explained in terms of structure rather than agency. Moreover, the fortress that structuralism constructed around the familia hindered internal criticism of Chicano familia and culture (2003, p. 84).

Works like the play *Shadow of a Man* (1992) by Cherrie Moraga offer a Chicana feminist point of view to illustrate Chicanas' experiences and dismantle traditional family politics. Lupe, a young Chicana girl, has an alcoholic father, Manuel, who, through the use of violence, takes his frustrations out on his wife Hortensia. This anger is the result of Manuel's struggle with his sexual identity which culminates with him taking his own life. In addition to this, Lupe's brother rejects his Chicano heritage and plans to marry his *gringa* girlfriend. Moraga leads the reader through the complexities of this Chicana *familia*. *Shadow of a Man* reveals a Chicano family far from the traditional ideal conception of *familia* as the stronghold of Chicano patriarchal values.

Moraga argues that "[s]ince lesbians and gay men have often been forced out of our blood families, and since our love and sexual desire are not housed within the traditional family, we are in a critical position to address those areas within our cultural family that need to change" (1993, p. 159). Thus she offers a definition of *familia* far from the one ascribed to Chicano

traditional values, for her “[f]amily is *not* by definition the man in a dominant position over women and children. Familia is cross-generational bonding, deep emotional ties between opposite sexes and within our sex” (2000, p. 102). Hence, she claims that homosexuality “[...] challenges the very foundation of la familia” (ibid., p. 102).

Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels address the traditional family concept and, through their detectives’ discourse, dismantle the idea of family as one of the foundations of the Chicana/o community. Rodríguez states that “[F]amilia has been the operative trope for forming Chicana/o social movements, once again missing the multiple ways in which family can itself be oppressive and generating a nostalgia for a family structure that might save us from the wicked world” (in Gaspar de Alba ed. 75: 2003, p. 75). He proposes “a scratching of *familia*” (ibid., p. 75) and advocates for the creation of new personal relations that offer Chicanas/os “a language and practice of possibilities for constructing family” (ibid., p. 76). Drawing from Rodríguez’ claim of erasing the concept of *familia*, conceived as a restricted and exclusive set of relations, I argue that queer Chicana/o detectives, particularly those featuring in Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels, serve not only to give visibility to new familial relations but also to disarm the notion of *familia* as a secure and safe shelter.

Nava’s novels explore Ríos’ psychological struggles and the challenges a gay working-class Chicano faces within his family and community. The family has been at the centre of Chicana/o cultural politics since the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement emerged in the 1960s. The term *familia* is used by Chicanas/os not only to refer to a biologically related family but also to the whole Chicano community. This *familia* possessed exclusive politics where there was no space for alternative sexualities, which were not acknowledged as Nava reflects in a conversation between Ríos and the Mexican police detective Mac Gaitan in the sixth novel of the series *The Burning Plain* (1997):

“You wanted to date him? Are you homosexual?”

“Yes, detective, that’s what I’m saying. I’m gay.”

The disbelief shaded into disgust.

“But you’re Mexican, man.” (p.81)

Alex Amerian, Ríos’ date, had been murdered and Ríos was being questioned by Gaitan as a suspect. Whilst Ríos describes his evening ending up in bed with Alex, Gaitan displays obvious signs of discomfort and disgust. His reaction reflects traditional societal perceptions toward the gay community and also his inability, from his Mexican masculinist position, to accept the combination of the words “gay” and “Mexican”. He understands that if a Mexican identifies as

gay is seen as an act of betrayal to his own ethnicity. This interaction between Ríos and Gaitan helps Nava to expose those homophobic strategies that justify oppression under the premise that the subject of this violence or disgust does not adhere to general social constructions of the Mexican male.

Ríos was born in a troubled family, his childhood was far from being safe having an abusive alcoholic father and a devotee religious mother who turned a blind eye at her husband's violence towards her children. In *How Town*, Ríos' sister Elena visits to ask him to defend the husband of her friend Sara Windsor, he recalls that "[t]here had been little about our childhood that could be described as paradisiacal. Our alcoholic father was either brutal or sullenly withdrawn. Our mother retaliated with religious fanaticism" (p. 2). Ríos' relationship with his sister Elena is distant and as he explains, "Elena and I were united only in our unspoken determination to show nothing of what we felt about this embarrassment of a life that our parents had visited upon us" (p. 2). Ríos' sexuality also placed him outside the borders of the *familia* and the imaginary safety constructed around it. His Mexican father

was a hard man who had survived a hard life, and he despised the softness he detected in his only son and was determined to beat it out of me. All his beatings had accomplished was to incite in me a hatred of authority and injustice. Not until I fell in love with my best friend in high school did I begin to understand that what had driven my father's violence was every father's ultimate nightmare: a homosexual son. *A maricón. (The Burning Plain, p. 8).*

His father's aggression was fuelled by any display of softness from Ríos which he assumed to be related to homosexuality. The Chicano detective grew up in a violent environment informed by his father's refusal to come to terms with his son being gay as with this he would not achieve the expectations of standard masculinity.

Ríos' family dismantles the myth of the Chicano *familia* as a secure haven, constricted by heteronormative and patriarchal relations. Nava's depiction of a gay Chicano detective born in to a troubled family questions the very foundations of Chicana/o community and offers new directions to the reconfiguration of *la familia*.

As previously mentioned, religion has also contributed to ostracising queer Chicanas/os. Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels address how the unity of the Chicana/o familia is affirmed under religious notions which repress homosexuality.

IV.2.1.2 Religion: The Catholic Church and the Institutionalisation of Homophobia

Hurtado asserts that “[...] addressing sexuality could potentially subvert the Catholic underpinnings of Chicano culture” (2003, p. 22). The Catholic religion has long sustained an essentialist representation of the family which consists of heterosexual parents, and relegates the woman to a reproductive and passive role. As Nieto Gómez argues, “the roots of the psyche of la Chicana lay deep within the colonial period in Mexico. The conquest, the encomienda system and the colonial Catholic Church were to play a major role in forming the sexual-social roles of the Mexican woman” (in García, A. 2014, p. 22). The female figure of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, the patron saint of Mexico, has been considered to be the Mexicans and Chicanas/os protector, and a crucial part on the family foundation during the Chicano Moment, as explained in chapter II. In this respect, Alarcón maintains that

in their quest for “authenticity” Chicanos often desired the silent mediator –Guadalupe, the unquestioning transmitter of tradition and deliverer from oppression, Thus, it should not have come as a surprise that the banner of Guadalupe was one of those carried by the Chicano farm workers in their strike march of 1965 (1989, p. 69).

Her representation has signified her as the role model of heterosexual motherhood which is in direct conflict with lesbian Chicanas as their sexual identity does not conform to this mould. As Foster explains, “[...] in the case of women, homosexuality is viewed as a violation of an allegiance to the chaste womanhood of the Virgin of Guadalupe” (2013, p. 84). Being homosexual is considered to be a threat to not only the Chicano community but also to Catholic beliefs. Drawing from Trujillo’s four reasons behind this threat; sexuality, identification, motherhood, and religion, Gaspar de Alba explains that

[l]esbians reverse the religious and cultural doctrine that sexuality –for women, anyway– is meant for reproduction, not for pleasure or self-fulfilment [...] Lesbians either fail to propagate the race, and thus fail their calling as good Catholic women if they choose not to bear children, or they subvert the sanctified male-female paradigm of “*la sagrada familia*” if they do choose to raise children (2014, p. 75).

In *Desert Blood*, Villa knows that the adoption of a baby is seen by her mother as a threat to the Chicano *sagrada familia* when she explains, “I decided to drop the atom bomb and tell her about the baby. So we got into World War Three instead of eating” (p. 78). For traditional Chicanas like Villa’s mother, her daughter’s sexual orientation aligned her with the lowest social status and values. The narrator refers to this when she states that Ivon Villa’s favourite gay bar is close to the El Paso prison, “[j]ail and queers –that pretty much summed up how

folks in El Paso felt about Ivon's kind. Certainly summed up how her own mother felt" (p. 33). The mother's embedded religious beliefs influence her way of thinking toward the view that homosexuality is a sin. This association of homosexuals with thieves, murderers and other social outcasts reinforces the notion of homosexuality as a form of deviance. Gaspar de Alba highlights the lack of objectivity of the Catholic Church's views, in that it imposes heterosexual relationships as a natural order established by God.

Desert Blood offers a critical view of the Catholic Church. It reveals homophobia as a result of religious affiliation and the greed of the Church that financially benefits from Villa's adoption process. Villa's cousin, Ximena, helps her to formalise the adoption of her baby. Ximena and her friend, the priest Father Francis who works for the local NGO *Contra el Silencio*, accompanied Villa to adopt her child from the maquiladora worker Cecilia. Villa is initially surprised when Ximena tells her that Father Francis is to receive a payment out of the adoption funds. Gaspar de Alba highlights the Church's avarice through Ximena when she remarks, "[o]f course, he gets a cut. Doesn't the church always get a cut?" (p. 16).

The Catholic Church's stance and ignorance in relation to homosexuality is conveyed when Father Francis directs Villa not to talk about her sexuality as otherwise the adoption process would be in danger: "'Don't say a thing,' Father Francis said. [...] 'Whatever you do, do not tell them you're a... you're a... you're not...'" [...] He means don't go saying you're a dyke, or they'll never agree to let you adopt the baby," Ximena clarified. "They will think you're a pervert or something." (p. 36). Villa responds to this comment and says "[...] they're living in Hell's Kitchen, here, and they give a shit what I do in my private life?" "It's not a matter of privacy," said Father Francis, "it's a matter of religion. These people are very religious, very traditional." (p. 36). As Father Francis instructs Villa to keep her sexuality hidden, Gaspar de Alba highlights how the religious articulation of the traditional family is prioritised over the adoption process that would give the baby a better life out of Hell's Kitchen.

Through the lens of his fictional detective, Nava also illustrates, in *Goldenboy*, how religion has been one of the main promoters of homophobia. During the trial against Jim Pears, who was accused of killing his workmate Brian Fox because he threatened to out him, his homophobic mother, referring to the detective's sexuality, tells Ríos

"[t]here is a special place for people like you."
After she left, the bailiff looked at me. "What was that all about?"
"Theology," I replied. (p. 95)

Prompted by her extremist religious views, this place that Mrs. Pears refers to is hell. Ríos' discourse reveals as well as contests the tropes of Catholicism that regard homosexuals as sinners and, consequently, are to be condemned.

Jim Pears is in a vegetative state as he tried to kill himself while he was in jail waiting for the trial. This suicide attempt was a result of his own internalised homophobia and his parents' rejection toward his homosexuality. The disdain Pears' parents show for their son's homosexuality is reflected when they decline to pay for his hospital care whilst refusing to turn off his life support and, ultimately, end his suffering. This decision they make is based solely on their religious convictions and not on the care for their son. As Ríos asserts, "I was raised Catholic, Mrs. Pears [...] so I know all about Catholics like you who can't take a shit without consulting a priest" (p. 95). To this, Mr. Pears says to Ríos "If you were a man I'd kill you." "If you were a man," [Ríos] replied, "your son wouldn't be a goddamn vegetable in the jail ward of a charity hospital" (p. 95). In this dialogue, Ríos demonstrates the irrational attitudes associated to Catholicism when the care for an individual is outweighed by the belief that putting an end to someone's suffering is an unforgivable sin.

It is also interesting how Nava exposes the irrationality connected to a religious belief system that prioritises supernatural powers over science. Before Pears attempts to take his own life, he explains to Ríos, his lawyer, that he does not remember anything of what happened the night Fox was killed. The psychiatrist Sydney Townsend tells Ríos that this "kind of amnesia is induced by the trauma of the incident" (p. 44) and Jim has "completely disassociated himself from his homosexuality" (p. 45). Townsend affirms that Pears' parent would not bring their son to a specialist to treat him for his amnesia as "[t]hey're strict Catholics who don't trust psychiatry" (p. 45). To which Ríos angrily observes, "[t]hey'd rather believe their son is possessed by the devil" (p. 45).

In *The Burning Plain*, Nava also depicts the homophobia within religious institutions. Ríos is asked by the mother of a gay victim, Tom Jellicoe, to look for her son's murderer, a homophobic serial killer who is killing gay men in Los Angeles. Serena, the head of the DA office's Hate Crimes Unit, tells Ríos about what the priest of Tom Jellicoe's parents told them after their son was murdered: "[...] death was a blessing in disguise" (p. 214).

Prompted by the most traditional religious mandates on sin and salvation, the priest implies that the only salvation for queer subjects is their death. After the story of Jellicoe's murder makes it

to the tabloids, his mother receives hate calls. Ríos explains that people in “her town think this guy did her a favour by killing her faggot son” (p. 215).

Within the same novel, the gay teenager Rod Morse, with whom Ríos meets during the course of his investigation, calls Ríos

“to Christian witness [him]” [...] “Im calling to tell you that homosexuality is not part of God’s plan and to beg you to turn from your sinful ways and receive Jesus in your life”, [...] “in I Corinthians 6, Paul tells us that no homosexual will possess the kingdom of God.” “Don’t be ridiculous, Rod, the word ‘homosexual’ didn’t even exist until the nineteenth century” (p. 410).

Throughout Ríos’ interactions with the novels’ characters in the series, Nava questions mainstream views on religion and the impact these views have had on the perpetuation of homophobia.

Villa and Ríos’ narratives contribute to the liberation of queer Chicanas/os from restrictive roles imposed by patriarchy and religion. By placing queer Chicana/o characters at the core of their novels, these authors contribute to eradicating the marginalised position queer people have been relegated to by these power structures. Villa and Ríos are the detective heroes that solve the mystery and their discourse bridges the gap between the life experiences of queer Chicanas/os and the theoretical articulations on their identities.

In the next section, I examine how name calling has been adopted within the sexist and religious traditional Chicana/o discourse as a strategy to undermine and misrepresent queer identities. I argue that the derogatory term *vendidas*, used during the Chicano Movement, is akin to that of the term *feminazis* used at a global level.

IV.2.1.3 *Mariposas and Machorras: From Vendidas to Feminazis*

Drawing from Blackwell’s concept of retrofitted memory which “theorize[s] how new gendered political identities are produced *through* history” (2011, p. 2), I suggest that a way to confront and eradicate feminist misconceptions lies in transposing, at a transnational level, Blackwell’s ideas on the creation of a new political agenda and identity for Chicana feminists. She argues that via a process of retrofitted memory, Chicana feminists will not only reclaim “historical narratives to reflect women’s political identities but also produce them” (ibid., p. 102). Hence, I propose that the contestation to terms such as *vendidas* or *feminazis* could be approached from a feminist reinterpretation of female myths and historical accounts as well as

from the production of narratives that reflect female issues such as *Desert Blood*. To do so, it is crucial to eradicate the hegemonic feminist viewpoint that does not identify the different forms of oppression suffered by women of colour. The creation of feminist counter-narratives should have a transnational perspective that takes into consideration the complexities behind women of colour's identities and experiences.

Lesbian identity is often negatively defined by its relationship to masculinity or masculine gender codes. Notwithstanding the fact that, in a patriarchal world, masculinity is associated with positive attributes and behaviours, lesbianism is often related to masculine identification as a way of diminishing the homosexual female. This identification has been labelled by the stereotypical word butch or *machorra*. Halberstam explains that “[f]emale masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing” (1998, p. 1). She also argues that “[f]emale masculinity seems to be at its most threatening when coupled with lesbian desire” (ibid., p. 28). *Desert Blood* reflects this pejorative connection between lesbianism and masculinity. When a parking attendant stares at Villa's man's shirt the omniscient narrator explains that

Mexican men weren't used to seeing women in men's shirts, not unless they were *cholas* or lesbians. Either one was bad news in Juárez. As far as Mexicans were concerned, they meant the same thing: traitors. As Americanized Mexicans spoiled by First World liberties and behaviors, *cholas* betrayed their own culture. Lesbians, although every macho's wet dream –to voyeurize or to conquer- of course, betrayed not just their culture, but their gender, their families, and their religion (p. 134).

This excerpt also parallels the rejection of *mestizas* with that of lesbians, by some Mexicans, in that both are considered traitors. In this regard, Moraga argues that “[l]esbianism can be constructed by the race, then, as the Chicana being used by the white man, even if the man never lays a hand on her. *The choice is never seen as her own*. Homosexuality is *his* disease which he sinisterly spreads to Third World people, men and women alike” (2000, p. 104).

Parallel to the term *machorra* that identifies a lesbian with masculine behaviours, the term *mariposa* (effeminate) defines the gay male feminine stereotype. Moraga explains that “[t]he “maricón” or “joto” is the object of the Chicano/mexicano's contempt because he is consciously choosing a role his culture tells him to despise, that of a woman” (2000, p. 102). In *The Hidden Law*, Ríos recalls his father's disapproval because he did not conform to male stereotypes, “[g]rowing up, I was sensitive and strong-willed. It was a combination that didn't

make sense to his notions of being male. He thought I was simply weak and disobedient” (p. 76).

In *The Burning Plain*, the lawyer Phil Wise talks to Ríos about a psychiatric hospital that still treats homosexuality as a disorder. He explains that “[k]ids who don’t conform to gender stereotypes get diagnosed with GID [Gender Identity Disorder] and off they go into places like Foster where they’re treated with heavy psychiatric drugs” (p. 316). Wise’s statement reveals how the social construction of gender roles has led to the marginalising of individuals whose acts or sexual desires do not ascribe to the norm. Ríos ironically replies to Wise’s remarks by saying, “[t]hese hospitals claim they can cure homosexuality by making kids conform to gender stereotypes, as if teaching your son to play baseball will prevent him from growing up gay?” (p. 316). The homosexual male is associated with femininity and demeaning characteristics attributed to women such as weakness or passivity.

The Chicano traditional conception that homosexuals are traitors to their race resembles that of the *vendidas* during the Chicano Movement. Despite the exclusion Chicanas suffered, their involvement in *El Movimiento* was crucial in the rise of Chicana consciousness. As Heike Gerds indicates, it “helped Chicanas to realize their own power and to recognize the sexism within the Movement, thus encouraging many to object to their frequently assigned roles in the background” (2004, p. 86). Male Chicanos discredited these women as they believed they were not fighting for their community, focusing instead on gender concerns and, to a lesser degree, sexuality. They were seen as traitors to the Chicano cause. Chicanas were expected to sacrifice their need to change traditional gender roles imposed on them for the cause of *El Movimiento*. Those who fought for their rights and sought for the independence of Chicana women were criticised and considered *vendidas*⁷ (sell outs) (Pesquera and Segura 1992; Moraga 2000). Among those regarded as *vendidas*, Las Adelitas de Aztlán were a group of women founded in 1970 and led by Gloria Arellanes as a response to the sexism of pro-Chicano organisation the Brown Berets. It is important to highlight that Chicana feminists did fight for the community. They did not want to divide the Movement but to fight discrimination. They were conscious about the internal oppression suffered and aimed to challenge and change it. Chicanas refused to be assigned to gender roles or attributes constructed from a patriarchal point of view. As Gaspar de Alba explains,

⁷ For more information on *vendidas* see Moraga’s A Long Line of Vendidas in *Loving in the War Years* (first published in 1983).

[l]ike their Mexican counterparts, Chicano men assign three attributes to the feminine gender: motherhood, virginity, and prostitution. During the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, *mujeres* were valued, mainly, for their biological contributions to the struggle: they could provide nourishment, comfort, and sexual release for the men and future revolutionaries and workers for la Causa. Mujeres were seen, in fact, as the carriers of the culture, and their own revolutionary role was circumscribed by their procreative function.

To be an “Adelita” (or a Loyalist, as was the popular term) a Chicana could not adopt feminism as a strategy for liberation (1998, p. 127).

Chicana feminists who attempted to raise their demands during the 1960s and 1970s were considered, mostly by male Chicanos, to betray the nationalist cause. At a global level, this labelling strategy which positions females as traitors or dissidents is depicted by the use of the term *feminazi*. Like *vendidas*, the derogatory term *feminazi* aims to dismiss feminists’ concerns as irrational or radical.

In the next section, guided by Blackwell’s theory of retrofitted memory and Pérez’ decolonial theory, I use Muñoz’ analysis of the concept of “disidentification” to explain how Nava and Gaspar de Alba have adopted detective fiction genre to forge a new space for the queer Chicanas/os.

IV.3. Forging New Spaces for the Different Chicana/o Subjectivities

The counterhegemonic gender and sexuality discourses illustrated in Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels create a space for gay Chicanas/os within the genre. Anzaldúa explains that the very nature of her lesbian, mestizo and female identity leaves her

cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it. [...] I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings (2007, pp. 3-4).

This dual notion of being outside and becoming part of a culture can be translated to Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels and the role they play within the detective fiction genre. As I analyse in this section, through a process of disidentification, their novels transform and become part of a genre that had commonly obscured ethnic and sexual minorities.

During the Chicano Movement, the Hijas de Cuauhtémoc created a space to discuss women's issues and to break with the gendered political approach of the Movement which relegated their concerns to the margins. Blackwell takes the Hijas de Cuauhtémoc as the starting point to develop her theory on retrofitted memory. She explains that retrofitted memory is "a practice whereby social actors read the interstices, gaps, and silences of existing historical narratives in order to retrofit, rework, and refashion older narratives to create new historical openings, political possibilities, and genealogies of resistance" (2011, p. 102). The discourse on sexuality provided by Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels functions as a way of retrofitting and reworking the heterosexual male discourse that exists not only in the Chicano community but also globally. They break with the negative connotations assigned to homosexual individuals and also contest the restricted roles such as virgins, mothers and whores, what Gaspar de Alba calls the "Tres Marías Syndrome" (2014). Blackwell explains that "[r]etrofitted memory is a form of counter-memory that uses fragments of older histories that have been disjunctured" by a masculinist political and historical agenda, "in order to create space for women in historical traditions that erase them" (2011, p. 2). Although Nava and Gaspar de Alba's novels do not literally use fragments of older histories, their works are the resulting process of confronting and rethinking those traditional discourses based on male interpreted histories which have erased from their discourse women's contribution to their community.

Muñoz's concept of "disidentification" is similar to Blackwell's retrofitted memory in that both advocate for re-writing or modifying narratives for their own benefit to reflect their own reality. Throughout a process of disidentification, minorities seek, not to align or stand against mainstream culture, but to transform exclusionary narratives or genre's conventions for their own aspirations (Muñoz 1999). As analysed in chapter III, from the first of Poe's mysteries featuring a white middle class heterosexual detective to date, the genre and the figure of the detective have experienced a significant transformation. I argue that this transformation has been achieved through the disidentification of the genre enacted by marginalised identities. I also explore how, through disidentification, both at a genre level and at an individual level, these authors create a new space to forge and articulate queer Chicana/o subjectivities. That is, the existence of a queer Chicana/o detective challenges and transforms the detective novel and consequently creates a space where their marginalised identity can express their real self and challenge hegemonic patriarchal and feminist discourses.

Along with *Desert Blood* and the Henry Ríos mystery series' analysis, I also look at Perez's *Electra's Complex* (2015). This novel features a lesbian Chicana amateur detective and also contributes to creating a new space for Chicana/o sexual minorities within the mystery genre.

Featuring amateur Chicana detective Electra Campos, Pérez' novel offers first person narration of a murder mystery that explores the experiences and rejection suffered by Chicanas and lesbian Chicanas within the academic world. Like Villa, Campos is a professor who turns into a detective to resolve, in her case, a murder mystery. After finding her college's dean murdered, Campos becomes the main suspect. Hence, she is inevitably forced to investigate the murder, together with NYPD Detective Carolina Quinn. Apart from crediting Nava for the inspiration in her novel's acknowledgements, Pérez also references Nava's fictional detective within her novel. When asked by detective Quinn whether she would prefer detective Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe, Campos replies: "That's easy. Kinsey Millhone. Or Henry Ríos. Yeah, I'd have to say Ríos" (p. 96).

These Chicano authors, instead of distancing themselves from a genre that was initially exclusionary of minority identities, have altered it to reclaim a place for queer Chicanas/os and their complex identities.

IV.3.1. Woman and Brown: The Gendered and Racial Space

Villa and Campos are middle class, sexually active, intellectual and independent women. The attribution of these traditionally male attitudes to the female detectives contrasts with the white-heterosexual hegemonic discourse replicated in traditional detective narratives. They both have a privileged position, but this does not impede them from making women's issues personal. For example, Villa's search for her kidnapped sister turns into an investigation of the Juárez femicides. By situating her detective within the specific context of the femicides, Gaspar de Alba allows for the creation of an activist space. Chicanas have been demeaned and misrepresented in male interpretations of female cultural myths or historical narratives for their own convenience. Sexually active women like Electra Campos or Ivon Villa contrast with the male ideal of the woman as submissive and passive. A sexually active woman historically embodied in *La Malinche* does not fit the female confined roles and consequently is stigmatised by her community, as I analyse in the next chapter through a comparative analysis of the *maquiladora* women and *La Malinche*. Chicana feminist narratives not only contest Chicano masculinist views of women but also white hegemonic ones. As Blackwell explains, "[...] women of color are political actors whose feminist political analysis is based on an understanding of the simultaneity of forms of oppression. Accordingly, their movement building and political praxis tend not to privilege one oppression over another but rather has fought for them to be seen as interconnected" (2011, p. 26). Gaspar de Alba and Pérez' novels

illustrate and analyse this oppression taking into account the interconnection of their different subjectivities.

Muñoz argues that “[d]isidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning [...] [it] scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications” (1999, p. 31). Thus Villa, Campos and Ríos become instrumental in carrying out a process of disidentification within the detective fiction genre. With regards to Pérez and Gaspar de Alba’s novels, they contest the hegemonic feminism that has appropriated women of colour feminism so that women of colour’s voices have been silenced and relegated to a third space. Thus, disidentification is adopted as a strategic process to create a new space within the genre where they can articulate their own identity politics and concerns. These articulations are embodied by the queer Chicana/o character whose subjectivity and personality have transformed the genre. Pérez and Gaspar de Alba’s mystery works also contribute to a social change that strives for equality and the revisioning of cultural metaphors and discourses constructed from a male-dominant position.

Electra’s Complex offers a critique of white western cultures, specifically of the white heterosexual male. This novel is of special interest in that it focuses on the academic world and the issues that Chicanas/os experience within it because of their ethnic identity. These experiences are reflected in reality as seen by the implementation of the House Bill 2281. González explains that as a result of this Bill, passed by the Arizona State legislature in 2010, which banned Mexican-American studies in Arizona, “[a] very successful Mexican American Studies Program that had been operating in Tucson high schools for several years was eliminated” (2013, p. xxxiv). This program focused on Mexican-American literature, culture and theory. It emphasised critical thinking, identity reaffirmation and strategies of resistance that sought social justice. This discriminatory law violated students’ constitutional rights to learn about their culture and origins. It banned courses considered to “promote the overthrow of the U.S. government, promote resentment toward a race or class of people, are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group or advocate solidarity instead of the treatment of students as individuals” (quoted in González 2013, p. xxxiv). The republican promoters of this bill wrongly accused the teachers of this program of encouraging students to deplore white

people. Their understanding was that the program was causing division among students because it was aimed at being delivered to a specific group, that of Mexican-American students. On December 2017 a federal judge delivered the final blow to Arizona's contentious House Bill 2281, permanently forbidding Arizona from banning Mexican-American studies.

Pérez' mystery work also reflects on the reality of Chicanas/os and/or individuals with diverse sexual identities within academia as well as the unequal power relation between women of colour and white heterosexual men. For example, Campos complains that Professor Hugh Roberts has been hired and refers to him as "another conformist, heterosexually obligated white man to teach more conformist, heterosexually obligated white male ideologies" (p. 13).

The discrimination against women of colour is a recurrent theme in Pérez' novel. For instance, her African-American neighbour, Sasha, calls in to Campos' place late at night. Sasha explains to her that she is just back from work and that only she and the other women of colour have to work the long night shift:

"I don't know why the white boys get to have their choice of any shift they want."
"You don't know?"
"Hell yeah, I know. Don't get me started." (p. 102).

Campos' reaction to Sasha's statement denotes how unsurprised she is by this type of racism where white people take a position of superiority that entitles them to be favoured over people of colour.

Pérez's novel also critiques racism within academia. The protagonist explains that,

[s]hortly after [she] arrived on campus, [she] had to stomach Sloan and his dead white male cohorts, who vehemently protested [her] hire, stating that despite [her] degree from a reputable history department ranked top ten in the nation, in their minds, [she] hadn't earned [her] PhD but had been bestowed the title because [she] was "Hispanic." Sloan advised students to avoid [her] classes (p. 51).

Sloan and his white peers hint that Campos has got her job as part of a quota system based on the hiring of academics belonging to a minority racialized group so that the faculty shows that diversity is being addressed. This minimising strategy that disregards Campos' academic efforts and achievements contributes to the perpetuation of racism as well as the justification of racist behaviours.

Campos' discourses and reflections reveal the misogyny within the university that she works in. When Campos is appointed by President Mike to talk about her promotion, she reflects on how he never addressed women by their name:

President Mike only addressed men by their names. The rest of us –that is, the female gender, the transgender folk, anyone other than a white het man who made oodles of

money- were nonentities whose names he got wrong no matter how many times he was corrected. I no longer reminded him that my name wasn't Ellen (p. 73).

President Mike's inability to address women by their names implies that he sees them as inferior and suggests that, unlike his male colleagues, women do not deserve the same level of respect. This assumed position of superiority and disregard from the speaker toward the addressee is somewhat similar to the homogenising ways of labelling that ignore differences within a group. For example, the label "Hispanics" confines Latina/o identities to a collection of presumed beliefs and values, and, consequently, fails to acknowledge the specific demands and the need for recognition of each national groups' diversity.

Electra's Complex recreates Chicanas/os life experiences and their relegation to second-class citizens by hegemonic powers that consider them inferior. Through Campos' discourse and exchanges, this novel offers a third space feminist view, in that she has decoded a traditionally masculinist genre by giving voice to Chicanas and particularly to queer Chicanas/os.

Rebolledo asserts that "the ability to write the body and to write sexuality has been instrumental in giving Chicana writers an empowered voice" (1995, p. 183). Both Perez and Gaspar de Alba's narratives conceptualize a space in racial gendered terms, where Chicanas concerns are discussed and exposed.

In the next sections, I explore how *Desert Blood* and, with a more specific focus, Nava's detective series comment on homophobia whilst creating a space where queer Chicano voices can be articulated.

IV.3.2. Homophobic Violence and the Sexualised Space in *Desert Blood*

As previously explained, the disidentification strategy seeks to accurately represent homosexual Chicanas/os and break with the uniformity created by dominant identity politics. Thus, the genre's disidentification allows Gaspar de Alba to denounce institutional violence and social constructs around homosexuality.

Cheryl Clarke explains that "[f]or a woman to be a lesbian in a male-supremacist, capitalist, misogynist, racist, homophobic, imperialist culture, such as that of North America, is an act of resistance" (in Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015, p. 126). She considers lesbians themselves as acts of rebellion "against becoming the slave master's concubine, viz. the male-dependent female

[...]. This rebellion is dangerous business in patriarchy. [...] The lesbian has decolonized her body. She has rejected a life of servitude implicit in Western, heterosexual relationships” (ibid., p. 126). Drawing from Clarke’s concept of the lesbian body as embodying rebellion against patriarchy, I argue that Villa’s act of making her sexuality public can then be understood as rebelling against masculinist attitudes that disregard women’s private space.

For example, when Villa is flying to El Paso, a cowboy, who she later in the novel finds out masterminded her sister’s kidnapping, sits beside Villa on the plane. The narrator first explains how this man is taking over Villa’s personal space, “[h]is arms and elbows claimed instant ownership of both armrests” (p.4). After he repeatedly interrupts Villa’s reading of an article on the Juárez femicides in *MS* magazine, he glances at Villa’s magazine and reads the address label off the cover:

“8930 Palms Ave., Los Angeles. Is that near the airport?”
“Excuse you,” she said, scowling at him over the magazine.
“You don’t look Mexican.” His blue eyes looked bleary. “I didn’t mean that as an insult. Sorry. It’s just that you don’t have an accent, or anything.” (p.6)

He not only invades her personal space but also accesses her personal details. Rather than feeling intimidated and adopting a submissive role, as the cowboy might expect, Villa used her sexuality in their next exchange to be left alone and leave him speechless:

“You’re a model, right? Or in the movie business.”
What was it about straight guys who liked to pick up on butch women? She rolled her eyes and shook her head. “You lose. Not enough roles for lesbians in the business.”
That snapped his attention span. “That was a mistake,” he said, his cheeks and neck coloring a bright pink” (p.6).

Later in the novel, Villa will have another encounter with the same man from the plane, Captain Wilcox, also known as J.W. Wilcox. He considers Villa’s act of rebellion as a threat to his patriarchal and heteronormative views. After J.W. arrests her, under the accusation of trafficking in contraband images of child pornography, he tells Villa, “[r]emember I told you on the plane it was a mistake to flaunt your dyke-ness?” he whispered behind her. “Especially in Texas. Shit comes back to haunt you.” (p. 278). Wilcox’s dialogue goes on to reveal how he associates homosexuality with deviance and the AIDS pandemic. He asks one of his peers to prepare for him a Class A Medical Exclusion Certificate⁸ because she is a lesbian, to which Villa responds

⁸ Morín explains that “[a]s early as 1917, laws have been in place to keep those with “abnormal sexual instincts from coming into the country, and as late as 1990 lesbian immigrants still were deportable from the United States [...] Once an immigrant was labelled as LGBT he or she was given a Class A medical exclusion certificate by the PHS [Public Health Service] and was deported”. (2016, p. 375).

“What the fuck are you talking about?” she muttered.
“Didn’t you know,” he sneered, “that gays and lesbians are a threat to national security? All psychopaths and sexual deviants are supposed to be excluded.”
“I don’t think that’s in effect any more, Captain Wilcox,” said the officer behind the cage. “Not since 1990.”
“Look it up in the computer, Lieutenant. You’ll see what it says about HIV threats” (pp. 277-278)

Desert Blood also explores the concept of shame in relation to homophobia within the Chicana/o family and community. For example, when Villa tells her mother that she is adopting a baby, she initially goes “into shock” (p. 63) and then tells her that

[e]s una vergüenza. That’s all you do: embarrass me in front of the whole family. It’s not enough that you went away to college and turned into a marimacha with that Women’s Studies degree, or that your father took up drinking again because of you. Now you want to bring a child into that ... that immoral lifestyle of yours (p. 66).

Villa telling her mother that she is adopting a baby to form a family with her female partner is yet another challenge that she has to overcome. Her openness in relation to her sexuality is seen as a confrontation to the traditional family values and, consequently, causes family shame. Her mother’s homophobia is predominantly influenced by the inherent fear of what people might say. Through Villa’s interaction with her mother, Gaspar de Alba highlights that homophobic attitudes are not just the result of an individualistic judgement. This judgement has also been informed by a collective understanding of homosexuality as abnormal and not consistent with the values held within the traditional family and community.

The disidentity of the genre has enabled authors such as Nava and Gaspar de Alba to use it as a tool to denounce discrimination. Their novels have created a new space where Chicana/os diverse identity politics can be articulated.

IV.3.3. Henry Ríos Down These Mean Streets

Before I analyse the homophobic strategies of marginalisation used by dominant groups and Nava’s response to them, I look at the classification of homophobia according to Thompson and Zoloth. This classification guides my analysis of instances of homophobia in Nava’s Henry Ríos mystery series.

Thompson and Zoloth classify homophobia as personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. Personal homophobia is the belief that LGBT+ identities are “sinful, immoral, sick, inferior to heterosexuals, or incomplete women and men” (1990, p. 2). With regards to

interpersonal homophobia, they explain that it is the expression of hatred through “verbal and physical harassment, and other individual acts of discrimination” (ibid, p. 2). Institutional homophobia is perpetrated by governments, religions, and other institutions. Lastly, cultural homophobia “refers to social standards and norms that dictate that being heterosexual is better or more moral than being lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and that everyone is or should be heterosexual” (ibid., pp. 2-3).

Sedgwick argues that one of the anti-gay violence defense strategies “has to do with “homosexual panic”” (2008, p. 19). She explains that “[j]udicially, a “homosexual panic” defense for a person [...] implies that his responsibility for the crime was diminished by a pathological psychological condition, perhaps brought on by an unwanted sexual advance from the man whom he then attacked” (ibid., p. 9). These unsubstantiated views assume that homosexual men may be blamed for the sexual assault based merely on the nature of their sexual identity. Consequently, it legitimises violence against them. Sedgwick states that “[t]he widespread acceptance of this defense really seems to show, to the contrary, that hatred of homosexuals is even more public, more atypical, hence harder to find any leverage against that hatred of other disadvantaged groups. “Race panic” or “gender panic,” for instance, is not accepted as a defense for violence against people of color or against women” (ibid., p. 9).

Žižek proposes that to eradicate homophobia, first we have to disturb the implicit homosexual practices which sustain it. Taking an example of the homophobia that exists in the military force, he explains that the attitude toward homosexual soldiers “operates at two clearly distinct levels: explicit homosexuality is brutally attacked, those identified as gays are ostracized, beaten up every night, and so on; this explicit homophobia, however, is accompanied by an excessive implicit web of homosexual innuendos, inside jokes, obscene practices, and so on” (2009, p. 366). Thus, he argues that the approach to eradicate homophobia should focus on erasing those discriminatory practices that identify homosexuals with a specific role or attitude and consequently perpetuate homophobia.

The Henry Ríos series is filled with instances of violence and homophobic encounters which serve the author to reveal those discriminatory practices towards gay Chicanas/os from both their community and dominant cultures.

In *The Hidden Law*, Ríos defends a Chicano teenager accused of killing senator Agustín Peña. Before Peña is murdered, we learn that he killed a man while he was drunk driving. This reminds Ríos of his past as an alcoholic and his stays in rehab. The Chicano sleuth calls

Timothy Taylor, his AA sponsor. Ríos has had a bad dream about his father, who requests that he keeps his sexuality hidden from him. Ríos seeks some support from Timothy who tells him, “[y]ou know, Henry, we’re the only people who get born into the enemy camp. I mean, black babies get born into black families, Jewish babies get born into Jewish families, but gay babies, we born into straight families. How we survive it at all is a miracle” (p. 80). This statement echoes Ríos’ position, not only because his sexuality places him as the outsider within his family, but also as a Chicano working within a mainstream culture.

Homophobia from his community is reflected in this novel as Ríos explains how a group of Chicano kids, whilst denouncing police brutality, “[...] started shouting “Faggots,” and “Queers,” at the Act Up contingent” who had gathered to collect funds to combat AIDS. (p. 64). Here, Ríos reveals the stratification of violence, even from within his community, in that homophobia has become somewhat naturalised whilst violence against heterosexual Chicanas/os is unacceptable. Nava shows that violence is graded according to identities. That is, diverse sexualities are ranked at the bottom part of society, therefore violence against them is not only accepted but also legitimised.

Ríos’ series also illustrates internalised homophobia which is a recurrent theme in his novels. In *The Burning Plain*, Ríos becomes the target of an internalised homophobic serial killer, Duke Asuras, head of the filmic studio Parnassus Pictures, who murders four gay men.

In *Goldenboy*, the murder suspect, Jim Pears, is, as his psychiatrist Sidney Townsend explains, “a typical self-hating homosexual” (p. 43) who because of his inability to accept his own sexuality has lost his memory and cannot remember whether he killed his co-worker.

The Death of Friends centres on the murder of Christopher Chandler, with whom Ríos studied law and had his first homosexual encounter. Chandler subsequently marries a woman whilst also secretly sleeping with his gay lover, Zack Bowen. His inability to live openly as a gay man and attempts to masquerade as a heterosexual family man, reveals his own internalised homophobia.

The homophobia that exists in legal institutions is reflected in *The Burning Plain*. In this novel Ríos states “[...] how hard it is for gay people to get a fair hearing from the cops and the courts. You know that better than anyone” (p. 409). Ríos, being a gay Chicano lawyer who at times defends gay clients, challenges legal institutions that seek to oppress sexual minorities. For example, in *Goldenboy*, Ríos recalls how the Supreme Court made sodomy illegal in Georgia, and, although it also affected heterosexual relationship, sodomy laws were initially created to target homosexuals (William N. Eskridge Jr. 2009). Ríos and his peer Larry Ross tried to knock it with a lawsuit. They “went directly to the state Supreme Court, arguing that the initiative

violated the right to privacy guaranteed by the state constitution” (p. 12). The Supreme Court eventually ruled in their favour.

In the next section, drawing from Butler’s theoretical claim for a non-casual and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender, I analyse how the Ríos mystery series questions traditional notions of masculinity. I also argue that Nava’s contribution to the disidentification of the genre embodies a strategy to break with the sexuality and gender connection.

IV.3.3.1. Masculinity as a Social Construct

Judith Butler argues that one of the mechanisms to fight against homophobia is to put an end to the restricted association between sexuality and gender. She explains that “[h]omophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abject gender to homosexuals that is, calling gay men “feminine” or calling lesbians “masculine”” (1993, p. 238). In his doctoral thesis on internalised homophobia and same-sex domestic violence, Nava states that “homophobia is related to masculinity, fear of feminine identification” (2008, p. 15). What is interesting in Ríos is that he embraces aspects ascribed to male and female gender roles. Nava “offers alternatives to understanding what it means to be a man in the Chicana/o community, understandings that do not stigmatize homosexuality”. (Rodríguez in Gaspar de Alba ed. 2003, p. 86). Ríos is not afraid of showing his emotions and feelings.

Plain explains that “crime fiction is seen to be almost synonymous with conventional discourses of masculinity” and argues that “it is perhaps only through reconceptualising the masculine that the genre and its paradigms can be successfully recuperated” (2014, p. 11). Notwithstanding, Ríos’ mystery series is not an attempt to recuperate the genre but to transform it through a process of disidentification. Nava places a gay Chicano detective at the centre of his narratives, thus reimagining the socially constructed roles attributed to homosexual identities as well as reconceptualising the masculine. That is, the detective hero embodies aspects attributed to both the masculine and the feminine, and consequently breaks with the image of the masculine and heroic masculinity associated to the genre. Ríos’ embodiment of an alternative masculinity counteracts this patriarchal conception of heroic masculinities, in that he, the detective hero, is a figure of authority and power who does not conform to a heteronormative masculinity. The social construction of gender attitudes and links between

gender and sexuality are challenged by the detective's discourse and symbolic acts. Ríos not only embodies a multiplicity of identities but also a multiplicity of aspects that do not necessarily fit within dominant social discourses and constructions based on antagonistic binaries.

The association of the gay male subject with typically female or feminine aspects as a demeaning tactic is illustrated in Nava's novels. In *Goldenboy*, in an exchange between Jim Pears and Henry Ríos, after Ríos confirms to Pears that he is gay, Pears says mockingly "Gay lawyer," [...] "Do you wear a dress to court?" (p. 47). This perception of relating femininity or attributing traditional female aspects to male homosexuals is also exemplified in Pears' words, who, paradoxically, as a gay man, claims that he is "not like that", "like women" (p. 47). Pear's statement reinforces this gender belief system that ostracises those who are perceived as contradicting traditional gender roles. The perception of non-conformity to gender roles has been associated with homosexuality. Nava argues that the stereotypical beliefs in relation to homosexuals are as much about gender as they are about sexuality (in Nava and Dawidoff, 2014). Normative rhetoric on masculinity assumes that men are expected to suppress any aspect in them that may be associated with femininity. In this interaction between Pears and Ríos, Nava denounces stereotypical perceptions of male homosexuals that stem from the attempt to categorise them within a gender belief system. This system regards women as inferior to men and identifies gay men as insufficiently masculine.

In *The Death of Friends*, he describes his first sexual encounter with Josh and how he "had held him naked against [his] own naked body, the erotic shock that had passed through [him] bringing him back to the life of the sense after so many years of living in [his] head, like someone starving in the garret of a mansion" (p. 32). Nava attempts to reinforce and naturalise in men any aspects that are typically identified as feminine. As Ríos' embraces his emotional side, he simultaneously breaks with the binary understanding that men and women differ in relation to expressing their emotions. Ríos forges an alternative notion of masculinity by showing his vulnerable and sensitive side. Within a mainstream genre, Nava criticises traditional conceptions of masculinity and the narrative of his fictional detective shows the instability of the rhetoric ascribed to Chicano male and masculinity.

In *The Little Death*, Ríos also reveals how homosexuality was somewhat a mystery to him in that stereotypes had given him a misconception of male to male sex:

What I remembered most clearly from my first sex with another man was the unexpected tenderness. It disturbed me-disoriented me, I guess, I had expected homosexuality to be dark and furtive, but it wasn't. (p. 44).

His statement indicates how homosexuality has traditionally been reduced to sexual practices. The heterosexual gaze that has constructed a view of homosexual sex as predatory, impulsive and lacking in intimacy has been so ingrained in society that even Ríos had held that same view prior to having his first gay sexual encounter.

According to Sedgwick, “homophobia is a mechanism for regulating the behavior of the many by the specific oppression of a few” (2015, p. 88). As I analyse in the next section, this mechanism has used the AIDS pandemic to further marginalise sexual minorities.

IV.3.3.2. Deviance, AIDS Pandemic and Hate Crimes

Sedgwick explains how “the terrible accident of the HIV epidemic and the terrifying societal threats constructed around it,” exacerbated the category of “deviance” as related to homosexuality (2008, p. 38). The American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) classified homosexuality in 1952 as “a sociopathic personality disturbance” and later in 1968 as a “nonpsychotic mental disorder” (quoted in Worthen 2016, p. 165). The attribution of deviance to the concept of homosexuality gave way to various “justified” violent medical methods such as lobotomies and electric shock treatments. Drawing from Levinas’ examination on the ethical justification of violence, Butler theorises that violence is produced when the other is seen as a threat to one’s own existence and/or to hegemonic stability and argues that the use of violence “in the name of self-preservation is not justified, that self-preservation is never a sufficient condition for the ethical justification of violence” (2006, p. 136). In their attempts to understand and define homosexuality, normative discourses have contributed to attributing deviance to the non-normative subject/the other. However, we can only understand the other “in terms of his history, his environment, his habits. What escapes understanding in him is himself, the being” (Levinas 2017, p. 8). Reducing the other to the subjective view and understanding of the self is a way of denying the other’s alterity and consequently an act of violence. Instead, Levinas advocates for what he calls “the humanism of the other man” which is based on putting the other first by not imposing a definition on them articulated by the consciousness of the self. Thus, I argue that any attempt to understand the other is connected to a process of objectification of this different other. Foucault described

three ways of objectification -scientific classification, subjectification and dividing practices- to explain how subjects have been socially constructed. He explains that dividing practices comprise the ways in which people who are perceived as a threat to the community are excluded (Foucault in Rabinow ed. 1998). These dividing practices differentiate the normal from the abnormal. Hence, the interpretation of homosexual identities as deviant and the consequent violence placed onto them are the result of a reification process of the subject.

Dominant social discourses have fully attributed the emergence of the AIDS crisis to the LGBT+ community (Altman 2013). Additionally, religion has had a major impact on the perpetuation of this linkage between AIDS and homosexuality. In *The Burning Plain*, Rod Morse explains to Ríos how AIDS has been God's punishment to homosexuals, "“Homosexuality is evil,” he said. “It’s an abomination condemned by God. He sent the plague of AIDS as a judgement on your lifestyle”” (p. 411).

The discussion on the AIDS pandemic and its consequences is one of the central topics to the Ríos series. This is illustrated through the character of Josh, a HIV positive middle-class Jewish man, who becomes Ríos' partner in *Goldenboy*. Their love relationship continues in the third novel of the series, *How Town*, and in the fourth, *The Hidden Law*, they separate. In the next novel of the series, *The Death of Friends*, whilst Ríos is defending Zack Bowen of having murdered Judge Chris Chandler, he also stays with Josh through his final days as Josh was dying of AIDS. In *Goldenboy*, Ríos explains how Josh told his parents that he was in a gay relationship with Ríos and that he was HIV positive. He also recounts how they both spoke to Josh's parents about AIDS and “argued that AIDS wasn't divine retribution on gay people any more than Tay-Sachs disease was God's commentary on Jews” (p. 149).

Nava intends to re-edit the seven novels in the series because he “wrote them in the trenches, as it were, not knowing how or if the AIDS epidemic would end or what the future held for our rights. Now, with that knowledge” he wants to bring a new informed perspective to the novels, that of AIDS during the 1980s, which had been obscured. (Corbett Holmes 2016). He is currently working on the eighth novel of the series called *Carved in Bone*, portraying the original effects of the AIDS pandemic in homosexual men as he acknowledges that when he initially tackled the subject he did not have the historical insight that he has now. Despite the lack of this insight in his original series, the fact that he included the theme of AIDS in his novels played a part in shining a spotlight on such a crucial time.

The association between paedophilia and homosexuality is another way to emphasise the deviant character wrongly imprinted in diverse sexual identities. In *How Town*, Ríos wonders if, Sara Windsor, the wife of an accused paedophile, chose him because he is gay and as a result he has “some special insight into paedophiles?” (p. 10). Ríos talks to her sister Elena about “the popular delusion that all gay men are paedophiles” (p. 10).

Violence against homosexual individuals is too often disregarded and not considered a hate crime. Conversely, they are seen as a threat to the dominant group. In *The Burning Plain*, Ríos reads an article in *L.A. Mode* that discusses the institutional contribution to make hate crimes invisible. It explains how Alex Amerian, after being attacked, “managed to get to a phone and call 911. [...] As he was being loaded into the ambulance, he attempted to report the attack to a deputy sheriff. The deputy had refused either to take the report or to explain why” (p. 26). The article’s writer and, indirectly, Nava claim that “the reason was that by refusing to take hate-crime reports in West Hollywood, the sheriffs could then claim no such crimes occurred” (p. 26). Indeed, the invisibility of homophobic acts prevents any pressure being put on political institutions to develop a plan of action to eradicate homophobia. This novel also offers another instance that illustrates police forces institutional homophobia. Ríos denounces “[...] a pervasive homophobia in the sheriff’s department personified by the lead detective in the case, Mac Gaitan. Because of this bias against homosexuals, the sheriff has ignored the obvious fact that these murders were hate crimes” (p. 125). In failing to classify these attacks as hate crimes, the sheriff refuses to acknowledge that they are motivated by sexual orientation prejudices. Ríos’ criticism of the police approach to homophobic attacks brings to light the importance of specifically identifying homophobic crimes to build comprehensive statistics that can facilitate the analysis of the crime and the subsequent development of a policing response against them. Ríos’ adoption of a discourse that disassociates homosexuality to ‘evil’ practices and causalities is key to dismantle these hegemonic conceptions that relate deviance to diverse sexualities.

IV.4. Synthesis

In relation to gay Chicana/o identities, Moraga explains that “[t]he one aspect of our identity which has been uniformly ignored by every existing political movement in this country is sexuality, as both a source of oppression and a means of liberation. [...] Sexuality, race and sex have usually been presented in contradiction to each other, rather than as part and parcel of

a complex web of personal and political identity and oppression” (2000, p. 100). Hence, a transnational analysis of sexuality has been significant, in this chapter, to understand how sexuality is shaped by racial, gender and class discourses. It has also helped to explore the multiple marginalisation that transnational queer Chicana/o identities suffer and the mechanisms they use to counteract them.

The exploration in this chapter on the sexism and homophobia within the Chicana/o community does not intend to perpetuate a negative image of Chicana/o people. Instead, it is a way of giving visibility to gay Chicanas/os experiences. Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels offer a narrative that recognizes the needs and living experiences of gay Chicanas/os. To not recognise such violence at a global or local level, would be a disservice to its existence.

Through a process of disidentification of the genre, these novels have created a space where traditionally oppressed identities can express themselves freely. Muñoz states that his “desire is to perpetuate disidentification and offer it as not only a hermeneutic but also as a possibility for freedom” (1999, p. 179). Indeed, Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s mysteries have accomplished Muñoz’ wish, as I have examined. They have created a site of transformation, a queer Chicana/o-centered place where they have articulated their multiplicity and experiences. This imaginary site is not fixed nor closed, it is in constant evolution for the very reason that new issues continue to emerge with regard to women and LGBT+ rights. Consequently, the identity of the fictional detective is continually trespassing its own boundaries in an attempt to reflect social and political realities. Plain argues that “[d]etecting issues of gender and sexuality in twentieth-century formula fiction all too often results in the uncovering of a ‘crime’” (2014, p. 11). In conjunction with the main crime mystery of their novels, Nava and Gaspar de Alba reveal the blueprints of homophobia, misogyny and racism.

These authors give way to local and international public recognition of queer Chicano identities by placing their novels not only amongst the most significant Chicana/o literary works but also mystery narratives. Their novels’ success has demonstrated that whilst dominant popular culture might not be a hospitable place, their transformation of the detective fiction genre has placed Chicana/o literature among the most highly regarded within the mainstream canon.

CHAPTER V

VIOLENCE AND VIOLATIONS: THE DETECTIVE'S COUNTER DISCOURSE

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And at that moment, you realize that you would much rather stay there, in that space between nations. Stuck in that moment, without going forward or backward (2015, p. 120) – *One Day I'll Tell You the Things I've Seen* Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez –

Juárez is not a dusty border town. It is Mexico's largest border city with nearly two million souls and about 300 assembly plants known as maquiladoras, most of them owned by Fortune 500 companies. People work and carry out the normal activities of life. Yet, high-order criminals also operate in the city, and they appear to have free rein (2006, p. 4) – *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women* Diana Washington Valdez –

V.1. Introduction

Violence is intrinsic to detective fiction, particularly in the hard-boiled novel where it “acts as a defining characteristic” (Moore 2013, p. 50). Violent scenes and encounters are characteristic of this genre and are not solely limited to attacks on the victim. Apart from the violence inflicted by the murderer or any other criminal characters, the detective may also be subjected to violence, especially the detective in the hard-boiled genre. This kind of detective “loses his immunity, gets beaten up, badly hurt, constantly risks his life, in short, he is integrated into the universe of the other characters, instead of being an independent observer” (Todorov 1977, p. 51). Through the experience of verbal and/or physical attacks, these detectives not only show their vulnerability but also their involvement with the world around them. Nava and Gaspar de Alba's detectives are not mere spectators who attempt to resolve the crime from the outside. Consequently, their engagement drives them to be continually exposed to different forms of violence.

The hard-boiled sleuths not only withstand, but also inflict violence. Despite the moral questions that the use of violence may raise, the physical or verbal attack imprinted by the detective is considered legitimate because it has a fair aim, that of restoring a certain order. As Betz explains, “[t]he pervasiveness of violence, then, demands that someone make the attempt to limit the presence of violence within society” (2006, p. 111). The detective is somewhat permitted to use violence during the investigation process as a means to restore societal order. In other words, reinstating law requires aggressive and

confrontational actions. In the detection genre, violence is usually naturalised, as Cawelti explains, it is “normative rather than exceptional, and the hero who can use it for just and valuable purposes is inevitably a leading citizen” (2004, p. 167). Hard-boiled detectives are seen to be justified in using violence as a means to establish order and in self-defence.

In this chapter, I examine the different forms of violence; subjective, objective and systemic, as classified by Žižek in his work *Violence* (2007), with a particular focus on systemic violence and its fatal consequences in the Juárez femicides, as represented in *Desert Blood*. Moreover, I will explore how the fictional detective Villa offers a discourse that makes the exploitation and oppression of economic, political and social structures visible. Gaspar de Alba understands that the detection genre and specifically their detectives are the perfect vehicle through which denounce the violence behind corrupt institutions, globalised systems and *macho* cultures (Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011). The discourse of her fictional detective heroine speaks out against visible and invisible forms of violence.

To understand the femicide phenomenon in Ciudad Juárez and why these killings keep happening, Villa unveils the flaws of globalised structures. She also reveals, as I will examine in the next section, the contribution of global capitalism towards an unequal society where women are regarded as consumable objects.

V.2. Femicide in the Era of Globalisation

Detective fiction has become a globalised genre, inasmuch as authors from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds create fictional accounts where diverse subjectivities, *i.e.* female or homosexual characters, break with the heteropatriarchal as well as with the heteronormative moulds and address global issues such as femicide.

Accordingly, this genre’s globalisation not only means the adoption of this literary form across the world but also involves “[...] the global implications of the crimes being depicted (*e.g.*, the link between individual or collective criminal acts and the exigencies of global capitalism) [which] require new forms and new strategies of representation in order to do justice to a changed and changing world” (Pepper and Schmid 2016, p. 3). I argue that the metafictional aspect of *Desert Blood* exemplifies Pepper and Schmid’s view of the global genre. This anti-detective novel examines the femicide phenomenon at the Juárez border within the context of globalisation and capitalism. It provides a

consistent account of the socio-economic condition in Ciudad Juárez and the negative impact of a poorly managed globalised capitalism. An account “that is not possible in real life where the murders are mired in chaotic, fragmented disputes about globalization and the role of women located on the borderline writ large as a space of violent death” (Nuala Finnegan in Leen and Thornton eds. 2014, p. 104).

The detective offers a counter discourse to the capitalist culture of consumption where the female body is treated as an expendable commodity to be exploited and consumed. As the protagonist theorises, “[a]lthough we love having all that surplus labor to exploit, once it becomes reproductive rather than just productive, it stops being profitable. How do we continue to make a profit from these women’s bodies and also curtail the threat of their reproductive power?” (p. 332). The answer to this question lies in the linkage of *maquiladora* women to consumable objects. Once these women are no longer considered productive, the profit is made through the consumption of their bodies, and violence plays a major role on this global business.

Thomas Friedman asserts that globalisation is cyclical and that we currently live in a period of globalisation which began in the 1950s. During this era the world has “regionalise(d) strongly into three major zones, APEC, NAFTA, and EU” (2012, p. 4). The 1994 treaty signed by North America, Mexico and Canada, known as NAFTA, was publicised by the country’s leaders as a successful free trade agreement for its economic benefits and its potential to reduce unemployment. Contrary to this belief, only multinationals and the elite have benefited from this agreement whilst the poor have suffered deficient working conditions under NAFTA. As Arriola states “cross-border trade has expanded, with new factories being built and jobs created. However, fewer rights for workers at the Mexican border have been guaranteed” (in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011, p. 31). As later discussed, Gaspar de Alba’s novel provides a critical view on this agreement and focuses on the negative impact that it has had on lower income classes and particularly on brown females.

Globalisation and crime are intimately related, “[a]s much as any other social entity, crime, its representations and its impact are part of globalisation. [...] Essential to globalisation and crime is the internationalisation of capital, the generalisation of consumerism and the unification of economies” (Findlay 1999, p. viii). If, as Findlay understands, crime is a natural consequence of globalisation, then impunity,

governmental corruption and invisibility in a globalised context have been key factors in making Ciudad Juárez the perfect landscape for femicide. Additionally, the Mexican-U.S. border, the place where most of the dead female bodies are found, also plays an important part. The liminality of the border has created a place of cultural production and exchange. However, this location is also a dichotomous space in that its transnational economy and the institutional interests around free trade have turned it into a “deathbed” as pointed out by Gaspar de Alba in *Desert Blood* (p. 7). Her novel presents a counter discourse that demystifies the benefits of globalised systems as the amateur detective Ivon Villa reveals the existent systemic violence behind the *maquilas*⁹, the manufacturing companies placed at the border, and the femicides in Ciudad Juárez.

As previously indicated in chapter V, *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (2010) analyses how femicide in Ciudad Juárez is linked to the global capitalism exemplified by the signing of NAFTA and the rising power of organized crime in Mexico. She argues that the jobs created by NAFTA “have brought so many hundreds of young women from southern Mexico” and that, instead of the “American Border Dream”, they have found at the border “a ground zero of femicides where they and women who look like them find a gruesome and early death” (2011, p. 65). This American Border Dream of getting a job at one of the *maquiladoras* located at the border, has turned, as I later analyse, into a lie – due to the poor working conditions and low wages – and into a machine that “produces” disposable bodies (Taylor 2010).

In *Desert Blood*, the ground zero where the femicides take place is referred by the narrator as “the open wound of the border” (p. 335). The dividing line that the border traces has created an institutional conflict or, more specifically, a lack of institutional action where authorities at both sides of the border remain passive in relation to the femicides and, consequently, leave an “open wound” that keeps bleeding. It is important to highlight that an activist border culture has emerged along with these femicides and, as I intend to demonstrate in this chapter, *Desert Blood* is a significant exponent within this activism. This novel provides a discourse based on civil resistance and contestation. In line with Sarah Awad, Brady Wagoner and Vlad Glaveanu, I understand resistance as a “social and individual phenomenon, a constructive process that articulates continuity and change, and

⁹ Also known as *maquiladoras*. Note that *maquiladoras* is also commonly used to refer to workers at the *maquilas*. *Maquilas* are manufacturing operations located at the free trade zone of the Mexican/United States border. These factories import duty-free components and export the assembled product.

as an act oriented towards an imagined future of different communities” (in Chaudhary et al. eds. 2017, p. 171). Thus, Gaspar de Alba’s novel takes part in this constructive process, encapsulated under art activism, which advocates for transformation. By highlighting the various factors that sustain femicides at the border, this narrative highlights the key points toward combatting femicides and, as a result, paves the way for a future.

Another reason behind the continuation of these femicides is the complicity and corruption of the Mexican government, exposing its inability to prosecute those responsible for the murders. As I later argue, these complexities behind the femicides have resulted in what Žižek has termed as systemic violence, a “violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence” (2010, p. 8). These female killings are perpetrated by individuals but supported and perpetuated by governmental and economic institutions. The interconnection between neoliberal globalisation, *macho* culture and the geopolitical context of the border area have contributed to violence against women and female reification.

V.2.1. The Mexican Border Industrialisation Program, NAFTA and the *Maquila* Industry

The current poor working conditions in the *maquila* industry, depicted in Gaspar de Alba’s novel, have their origin in the Mexican Border Industrialisation Program as analysed in this section. Although *Desert Blood* does not explicitly mention this program, the diegesis of the novel alludes to the way factories and sweatshops located at the border - which resulted from the Mexican Border Industrialisation Program - created an industrial landscape based on exploitation. Despite the fact that the *maquila* industry has been one of the drivers of the Mexican economic progress since the 1960s, the exploitation of cheap labour has generated negative social effects. (Slawomir Dorocki in Wójtowicz and Winiarczyk-Rażniak eds. 2014). In 1965, the Mexican government opened the border to foreign-owned manufacturing companies, predominantly U.S. companies. Since this time, the quiet border town of Juárez has seen its population gradually growing as central and southern Mexicans migrated to the north in search of jobs at the *maquilas*. This maquiladora industrialisation “shaped the city’s geography in

ways that facilitated, absorbed, and, perhaps, promoted femicide” due to the gendered and racialized political economy applied in these factories (Volk and Schlotterbeck in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011, p. 126).

The Mexican Border Industrialisation Program, also known as the *Maquiladora* Program, aimed to reduce unemployment in the Northern Mexican regions. This program attracted foreign investment and the border city of Juárez was seen as a land of opportunity; as Lee explains the program was “[...] instituted to develop employment opportunities for Mexican workers displaced by the 1964 termination of the Bracero Program” (2010, p. 159). Women constituted the majority of workers in the *maquilas* established under this program. These female workers symbolised the human cost of the flexible capital structure adopted by neoliberal companies during crisis periods. Multinational firms took advantage of the cheap labour and the measures that the Mexican government took to lower costs, such as tax reduction or elimination of duties

While not all women killed and dumped at the border have been *maquiladora* workers, it is important to examine the role of NAFTA and the *maquila* industry in the reification of women. Weissman examines the relationship of global economics with the Juárez femicides and its contribution to the production of victims and perpetrators. She argues that “[i]n the maquila sector, the image of women possessing inherent tendencies within (or outside of) the labor force has been constructed as a means to justify low wages [...] women are represented as unsuitable for training and unworthy of any investment by virtue of their gender” (in Fregoso and Bejarano eds. 2010, p. 226). The *maquila* industry has constructed an undervalued image of women as a way to justify their poor working conditions and any savage act exerted on them. “Violence is perpetrated against women whose place in the hierarchy of market values renders them readily interchangeable cogs in the wheel of production” (Weissman in Fregoso and Bejarano eds. 2010, p. 226). Weissman also claims that conditions of inequality and underdevelopment produce estranged subjects who end up being killers. However, it is important not to blame it all on the correlation between economic issues and violence against women. She adds that “[i]t is crucial to examine the function of gender conflict as a motivation for homicide to obtain a comprehensive account of femicide” (ibid., p. 230). This gender conflict, and the resulting violence, is the product of the intersection between global capitalism and the existent *machista* culture, as Steven Volk and Marian Schlotterbeck explain, “*maquiladora* managers turned to young Mexican women as their primary labor force.

[...] But the replacement of male with female workers challenged existing patriarchal structures and generated a deep well of male resentment and female vulnerability” (in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011, p. 127). Women having paid employment symbolized independency. Mexican women’s work was usually limited to their work at home, working outside it was in direct conflict with the submissive and subordinate role attributed to them by a patriarchal Mexican culture. Consequently, this attempt of autonomy generated animosity among Mexican males (Taylor 2010).

This is reflected in *Desert Blood*, when Father Francis explains, as he is being interviewed by the journalist Rubí Reina, that in relation to the border femicides

Juárez is not ready for the liberated woman, at least not in the lower classes. Their traditions are being disrupted in complete disproportion to changes in their economic status. They are expected to alter their value system, to operate within the cultural and political economy of the First World, at the same time that they do not move up on the social ladder. The Mexican gender system cannot accommodate the First World division labour or the First World freedoms given to women. (p. 252)

Father Francis’ statement helps Gaspar de Alba to describe the social context of the crimes and to point out traditional masculinist views on female roles as one of the reasons for the femicides.

In the same interview, Father Francis also places some of the accountability of NAFTA on these femicides, as Rubí asks him “[a]re you suggesting, then, Father, that these murders are a consequence of the North American Free Trade Agreement?” (p. 253). To what the priest responds

[i]t’s very possible [...] Young women are lured here in droves, and yet the city can’t accommodate them all. There’s no subsidized housing for them, so they have to live in these godforsaken shantytowns hours away from their jobs, and their lives are in constant danger [...] The twin plant industry has got to take responsibility for the havoc they’re wreaking on this border (p. 253).

Whilst politicians or business people at the border may assert that NAFTA brought wealth to Juárez, *Desert Blood* portrays this agreement and the poor working conditions in the *maquilas* among the main contributors to the femicides at the border. The signing of NAFTA did not bring with it the measures needed to allocate for all the southern Mexicans that migrated to the border.

V.2.1.1. NAFTA and Global *Maquilas*

The global model applied to the *maquilas* corresponds to one where workers' health, safety and fair remuneration are not part of the factories' agenda. The *maquiladora* industry illustrates a global capitalist model that promotes profits over people and "[t]he U.S.-Mexico border became a pioneering test for a neoliberal free-trade regime. The borderline restricts the movement of people and workers separated into labor enclaves of enormous pay differentials, while commerce and goods cross more freely than people" (Staudt 2009, p. 10). Certainly, free trade has not resulted in free movement and consequently neoliberalism can be understood as a kind of benevolent imperialism. That is, NAFTA has created a neo-colonial structure where the citizens of an independent country such as Mexico are subjugated to an economic system that submits them to such poor working conditions which could be considered a type of neo-slavery (Westfall 2009). *Maquila* owners resemble Frantz Fanon's view of the national bourgeoisie in developing countries, the one whose "mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between nation and capitalism, rampant through camouflaged, which today puts the mask of neo-colonialism." (2001, p. 122). To that end, free trade only benefits a privileged minority, that of the elite.

NAFTA was a controversial agreement from its conception because Mexico "was not the mirror twin of the U.S. and Canada [...] differences exist between the dominant Anglophile U.S. and Canadian cultures *vis-à-vis* the Indian-blooded mestizo culture of Mexico" (French and Manzanárez 2004, p. 1). NAFTA continues to be controversial as "[c]rime and violence are other unintended factors within this rapidly growing tri-cultural (Mexican, Mexican-American, Anglo-American), bilingual (English/Spanish) region" (French and Manzanárez *ibid.*, p. 8).

In *Desert Blood*, Villa acknowledges this agreement to be the main contributor to the poor working conditions in the *maquila* industry: "'the *maquilas* themselves have been shoved down Mexico's throat ..." added Ximena. "... because of NAFTA," Ivon finished the sentence" (p. 252). The amateur detective also points out the harassment and lack of privacy these women are subjected to in the name of profit; "[i]sn't that why the women's periods are monitored so closely at the *maquilas*, because the companies don't want to be paying maternity leave and cutting into their profits" (p. 254).

This contradictory agreement that was initially seen by Mexican females as a way of escaping from poor living conditions has turned into their trap. As the amateur detective, Villa, surmises and writes down, there is a direct connection between the femicides and NAFTA: “Exploitation – NAFTA – maquiladoras – workers – victims” (p. 115). This cryptic way of summarising the reasons behind the perpetuation of femicide follows the traditional detective analysis to resolve the mystery but at the same time offers the reader a clear understanding of the situations surrounding these murders.

Global capitalism and more directly NAFTA, became another element of Villa’s investigation. On a personal level she investigates her sister’s kidnapping, parallel to this she carries on with an investigation at a macro level, that of NAFTA and its role on the Juárez femicides.

V.2.1.2. NAFTA and Gender

The gender ratio in export manufacturing sweatshops favours women but there is a wage disparity where women are paid less than men for the same job. The feminization in the *maquilas* is the result of what is known as flexible capitalism. Among the social implications of flexible capitalism, we find that *maquiladora* female workers are required to be flexible in relation to acceptance of lower wage, harassment and exploitation. In free trade zones, such as the Mexican-United States border, “strictures to economic competition in terms of taxes, wages and legislation are deliberately eased to attract foreign-based production”. These zones have “become icons of the kind of offshore production often highlighted as a core feature of global flexible capitalism” (Kjaerulff in Kjaerulff ed. 2015, p. 23). Under the justification of being more competitive and, consequently, deterring foreign investors from investing in other countries, in the guise of flexibility the *maquila* industry is oppressing workers instead of freeing them.

Another type of capitalism that negatively impacts *maquiladora* women is known as gore capitalism, a term coined by Mexican philosopher Sayak Valencia. In her work *Gore Capitalism* (2018), she explains how there is a capitalism based on the consumption and murder of Third world bodies. She argues how ultra-violence, an extreme violence reminiscent of snuff movies, has become inherent to neoliberal capitalism. Tortured bodies, especially those of women in border territories, have become profitable.

Globalisation has forged identities based on hyper-consumption and the dead body is considered their merchandise. Valencia sees those who make profit from these bodies as monstrous subjects. Within the global machine of capitalism these subjects are considered legitimate entrepreneurs who strengthen the pillars of the economy. Economic profit has overshadowed the violation of fair working conditions as well as the harassment and violence towards female workers. Additionally, these corporations that largely benefit from a female labour force do not even provide the measures to facilitate women's safety as they go back and forth between their work and the colonies, on the outskirts of the city, where most of them live. As Gaspar de Alba sarcastically states, "safety is a commodity the workers cannot afford. Nor, it seems, can their employers despite the huge profits they make" (2011, p. 65). Gaspar de Alba lists safety measures such as making sure that the bus drivers of the shuttles used by the female workers to go to work are not sex offenders, providing lighting on the way to work and improve the conditions in the colonies where the workers live so they can have basic services such as electricity.

The poor living conditions surrounding the *maquilas* is also shown in *Desert Blood*. When Ximena, Father Francis and Villa go to Puerto de Anapra, in Lomas de Poleo, where Cecilia lives, the priest mentions that this area with no roads, electricity or water "is one of the cheapest *colonias* in which to live" (p. 38). Ximena also explains to Villa that the poor conditions of the place and its remote location turn it into "a black hole of danger, especially for women" (p. 22). These conditions lead Villa to consider the bigger picture:

Why were the bodies of one-hundred-thirty-nine *hijas de Juárez* rotting somewhere in the desert or the morgue? Who were they? [...] girls from the south: poor, young migrant women [...] Underpaid, sexually exploited, forced to live in hovels made of *maquiladora* scrap in the middle of the desert [...] the tragedy of their lives did not begin when their desecrated bodies were found in a deserted lot. The tragedy began as soon as they got jobs at the *maquiladoras* (p. 331).

Villa offers a discourse that goes beyond the search for answers, in analysing the transnational systems of powers that produce violence, her narrative provides the knowledge and tools to challenge social inequality within a globalised context.

The border epitomises the effects of globalisation and represents the division between the rich and the poor. The dividing line traced by the border is not only geographical but also political, economic and social. Paradoxically, globalisation does not imply borderless geographies nor economies.

V.2.2. The Dichotomous Border

The border is a twofold location, as Gay Young explains “[t]he border area forms a site for the production of social inequalities, *and* the border may open space in which local working women can challenge inequalities of gender and class” (2014, p. 8). Thus, it is not my intention to demonize the border but to examine its significance within the Juárez femicides.

The border is constantly crossed back and forth, and this constant transgression is reflected on Chicana/o identities. As with any other subjectivity that transcends duality – such as queer subjectivity –, Chicanas/os embody a discourse that dismantles the borders constructed from oppressive strategies – racism, homophobia, classism, etc. – which divide the self from the other. The border is the place where identities, as Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez argues, “can be reinscribed, re-formed, revalued. It asks us to step right up, to partake in its multiple representations, and examine our own histories and identities in relation to the border” (2006, p. 713). This concept of the border as a site where new identities develop has been thoroughly analysed by Anzaldúa. She claims that the border is an open wound where two worlds combine “to form a third country – a border culture” (2007, p. 25). Anzaldúa celebrates the border cultural hybridity. She re-conceptualizes the notion of the border in that she perceives it as a site of production resulting from the confluence of two cultures, two cities and two identities, instead of a site of division. This border notion has been the basis of multicultural and postcolonial theories. It has set the foundations for Border-Cultural Studies and Chicana/o as well as Latina/o Studies. (María Socorro Tabuenca in Lomelí et al. eds. 2019).

The border, that liminal space where the *maquiladoras* are located, plays an important role in the Juárez femicides. As Gaspar de Alba argues, “the femicides are not just a Mexican problem, they are a border problem, and they implicate the Border Patrol as much as the Juárez Police, the *Maquiladora* industry as much as the Texas Parole Board” (in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán 2011, p. 63).

At this border, “two hypermasculinity variants collide and collude: one related to national security and the consequent militarization of everyday life [...] and the other related to a backlash against real and perceived threats (men’s backlash against women, and xenophobes’ backlash against migrants)” (Staudt in Staudt et al. eds. 2009, p. 4). Ironically, police authorities and the border patrol produce insecurity rather than security.

Moreover, their inaction and, to some extent, collaboration have made the border a dump site where female bodies are being trashed.

Authorities on both sides of the border do not respond to femicides as reflected in *Desert Blood*. When Irene disappears, the El Paso police tell Villa that “the case is not in their jurisdiction” (p. 166). Yet, the Mexican police argue that “because Irene was last seen sitting on the El Paso river bank, this is probably a case for the American authorities, not the Juárez police” (p. 165).

Father Francis argues that the reason why he started the activist group *Contra el Silencio* was because the police forces did not investigate the femicides, “[t]he FBI has no evidence of malfeasance, they say. They can’t get involved without evidence. Girls ran off with their boyfriends –that’s the line of the judicial police” (p. 41). Due to this inactivity, families and friends of the girls and women murdered “have taken matters into their own hands”, as Ximena explains to Villa (p. 24).

The novel also shows how these activists’ efforts have been belittled by the police. After Cecilia is murdered, Ximena, Father Francis and Villa go to the city morgue where there was a protest by a group of women to stop violence against Juárez’ women. When Father Francis asked a policeman if there was a strike, the policeman referred to these women as “*Estas Viejas escandalosas* [...] It’s not a strike, it’s these crazy women wanting attention, that’s all” (p. 44).

The border then becomes a lawless place where neither Mexican authorities nor U.S. ones take any action or take the family victims seriously. As a result, the locals, especially women, suffer the consequences. As Staudt explains: “[...] border people’s voices have historically been muted. But border women’s voices have been silenced longer within the mainstream of both Mexico and the United States and at both national frontiers” (2009, p. 80). Whilst the novel reflects this silence by highlighting the inaction of the authorities, it also gives the victims a voice and global scope. That is, through the course of her investigation, Ivon Villa reveals to the reader not only the powers that hide these crimes but also gives agency to individual women such as the murdered *maquiladora* workers Mireya or Cecilia in a mainstream genre. Moreover, the journalistic pieces in the novel serve as a reminder to the reader these are not just women of fiction, they are a reality.

The border represents the division between power and wealth, and the poor and brown females have been the most negatively impacted. In the next section, I intend to analyse the profile of these femicide victims.

V.2.3. Poor Brown Female at the Border: Disposable Bodies

Gaspar de Alba explains in her critical work on the Juárez femicides that most of the victims are poor brown women working in the *maquiladoras* set on the border between Mexico and the United States (Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011). Their profile is also reflected in her novel: “NAFTA’s brought thousands of poor, brown, fertile female bodies to the border to work at a *maquiladora*” (p. 332). *Desert Blood* paints a vivid picture on how these women have been disposed of, “[m]any of the young women had been raped, several were mutilated, and a large number had been dumped like worn-out machine parts in some isolated spots” (p. 4). The denigration of women has become naturalised as a result of the sexist attitudes carried over in the *maquiladoras* and by those who see these border women as mere commodities. Moreover, Juárez women are also marginalised because of their brown skin and the fact that they are impoverished. There is a triple hatred towards them; they are not only subjected to sexism but also to racism and aporophobia. The term aporophobia was coined by philosopher Adela Cortina in the 1990s to signify the hatred towards poor individuals. Cortina argues that the aversion towards foreigners or people from different ethnic groups mainly occurs when the subject of disdain is poor. When immigrants or diverse racial subjects have a high economic status, there is no phobia (Cortina 2017).

The combination of these three aspects fuelled by global capitalist politics results in the creation of the disposable Third World woman. Women’s value is only measured by their productivity, and continuous femicides remind them that they can be abused and disposed of at any time. Whilst Villa, Father Francis, Ximena, the reporter Ruby Reyna and other activists search for missing women in Lomas de Poleo, Father Francis finds the body of a *maquiladora* worker named Mireya. Staring at her dead mutilated body, Ivon reflects on “[t]he irony of it: an assembly worker disassembled in the desert” (p. 255). She also contemplates that the kidnappers could do the same to her sister because, despite the fact that her sister was not a *maquiladora* worker, all they could see “was another thin, dark-skinned, dark-haired young Mexican woman, and didn’t realize she was a Mexican with the privilege of U.S. citizenship. For all the perps cared, she was just another expendable penny” (p. 255). Whilst it cannot be denied that women can be killed because of their gender, race or social status, the case of Juárez femicides is a compilation of all three as Gaspar de Alba’s novel demonstrates. In fact, to investigate the motives behind these

femicides, an intersectional analysis is necessary to examine the politics of gender, ethnicity and economy.

There has been a proliferation of the idea that female workers in Third World factories of global companies are disposable. Wright refers to this idea as “the myth of the disposable third world woman” (Wright 2013). She argues that “[t]his woman turns into a form of industrial waste, at which point she is discarded and replaced. [...] Yet, paradoxically, even as this protagonist turns into a living form of human waste, the myth explains how she simultaneously produces many valuable things with her labor” (ibid., p. 2). Indeed, this paradox reflects how a valuable subject also becomes a disposable object. Moreover, I argue that the roles imposed on women have also contributed to their reification. The patriarchal discourse on the virgin-whore dichotomy serves as a way to justify femicides in Ciudad Juárez. The virgin model is signified in the mother, the hard worker female, the ‘good woman’. On the contrary, the ‘whore’ is the loose woman who does not act according to the patriarchal interpretation of gender roles and is consequently held responsible for the violence exerted on her. As later analysed, *Desert Blood* offers a critique of the concept of *maquiloca* as related to this restricted interpretation elicited through the cultural metaphor of the ‘bad woman’.

Many of the women employed by the *maquiladoras* know they are replaceable, and their need for employment keeps them from turning down male workers’ advances or reporting harassment, resulting in what Fernandez-Kelly refers to as a “factory harem mentality” (1983, p. 129). In *Desert Blood* the character of Cecilia functions as the archetype of this *maquiladora* worker. Gaspar de Alba’s depiction of the extreme violence of Cecilia’s murder is accurate in conveying the real-life femicides: “she was killed the night I arrived... raped and tortured, stabbed to death, baby carved out of her belly, really brutal shit” (p. 232). The background to her novel shows a world where women are not only exploited and being relegated to positions of inferiority to male workers, but also subject to widespread sexual harassment and violence. Often these women are hired based on their appearance, youth, and inexperience.

When naked tortured bodies are found in desolated arid spaces, their identity is taken from them and they become, as Monárrez Fragoso points out, ‘sexually fetished commodities’, they “symbolize the women’s low human value as less than women” (in Fregoso and Bejarano eds. 2010, p. 59). Their bodies are degraded, consumed and

deposed. The narrator's description on the state Mireya's body was found in illustrates this concept of women as sexually fetished commodities:

Tucked into the mesquite bushes, in a nest of garbage and human hair, the body was lying facedown, legs spread-eagled, wrists hand-cuffed over her head, a bloodstained blue smock thrown over her head and shoulders. The exposed part of the back, like the legs and the buttocks, had been picked over scavengers, what was left of the cartilage charred black by the sun. A bottle of J&B had been inserted in her anus. The ground stank of urine and rotted flesh (p. 244).

Drawing from Kristeva's theory on abjection, I argue that these tortured bodies are the abject. The feeling of abjection is "at once somatic and symbolic, and [...] above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from the inside" (in Baruch and Serrano 1991, pp. 135-136). These abject female bodies are deprived of any human dignity, they are dehumanized. In *The Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva explains how a person creates borders between the self and the other. This separation between the "I" and the other is made through the process of abjection. The abject is then what is expelled from oneself. Consequently, she sees the corpse as the abject. A dead body violates the border between the "I" and the other, between rejection and attraction, it is "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982, p. 4). The subject creates the separation between the "I" and the other to acquire a sense of oneself. However, abjection cannot be reduced to the act of division. The abject is not just the result of polarisation, the abject is the border, the in-between. The corpse breaks the border between life and death. The dead body is "[...] the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (ibid., p. 4). In *Desert Blood*, the descriptions of corpses exemplify this feeling of abjection. For example, when Villa "looked at Mireya's face, but the movement of the maggots turned her stomach and she lost the coffee and *pan dulce* she'd had for breakfast" (p. 255). Mireya's body symbolises the death that infects the life of Juárez women, it is that abject "other" that cannot be separated from the "I" represented in the *maquiladora* workers. During Cecilia's autopsy, Rubí Reina asks the medical examiner "Why is the skin green? Is that a normal color for a dead body?" (p. 50). To which the examiner replies, "It's a normal color for a body that's been inside a closed car in forty-centigrade heat for more than eight hours. [...] We're lucky the head didn't explode" (p. 50).

Despite the fact that these abject bodies are rejected or seen as external entities, as the other, they are part of our culture and society. The role that violence takes on their production is primordial. Femicides are the ultimate consequence of violence exerted on women. Hence, it is important to understand the different forms of violence in the novel, its representation and how it is perceived. In the next section, I look at the typology of violence and analyse the notion of systemic violence as related to the Juárez femicides represented in Gaspar de Alba's work.

V.2.4. Systemic Violence

Žižek states that violence takes three forms: subjective, objective and systemic. Subjective violence "is seen as a perturbation of the 'normal', peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this 'normal' state of things" (2010, p. 2). Subjective violence can be both perpetrated by one individual or collectively. Systemic violence is the harm inflicted on individuals through political and economic institutions. This form of violence is also condoned by a social system based on a *macho* culture.

Žižek understands that global capital structures exert a systemic violence which involves individuals in subjective violence. Systemic violence is endemic in globalised societies, where it operates "something like the notorious 'dark matter' of physics" (ibid, p. 2). In *Desert Blood*, Ivon Villa refers to this 'dark matter' as "[a] huge malignant tumor of silence, meant to protect not the perpetrators, themselves, but the profit reaped by the handiwork of the perpetrators" (p. 335). Villa argues that behind the femicides at the United States-Mexican border there is "[a] bilateral assembly line of perpetrators, from the actual agents of the crime to the law enforcement agents on both sides of the border to the agents that made binational immigration policy and trade agreements" (p. 335).

The abuse and violence suffered by these factory women is the result of what Žižek has termed as systemic evil; "[t]he fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, [...] this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their 'evil' intentions, but is purely 'objective', systemic, anonymous" (2010, p. 11). Žižek maintains that systemic violence "may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seems to be 'irrational' explosions of subjective violence" (ibid., p. 2). The Juárez femicides are not only the result of the violence perpetrated by a subject but

also by a socio-economic structure that facilitates and to some extent normalises these violent acts.

The absence of regulation to protect the *maquiladora* workers perpetuates their degradation and creates a hostile working environment for these women, including discrimination, toxicity in the workplace and threats of fatal assault.

The child that Villa and her partner finally adopt, Jorgito, is the son of a maquiladora worker, Elsa, who eventually dies of cancer because of the medical testing she was subjected to. As Ximena explain to Villa

Elsa got some injection at this *maquila* she was applying to a few years ago. You know, they make them do a pregnancy test when they apply for a job over there ... and they make them take birth control shots and stuff ... but she got pregnant so she didn't get the job. After Jorgito was born, she developed these weird tumors. Doctors thought it was a really bad case of endometriosis or maybe even cervical cysits, but it turned out to be ovarian cancer (p. 82).

Villa also learns about this hostile working environment from Elsa: “[t]hey give them birth control shots, they make them show their sanitary napkins every month, they pass around amphetamines to speed up their productivity. Hell, they’ve even got Planned Parenthood coming over to insert Norplant, which basically sterilizes the women for months” (p. 90). The North America Free Trade Agreement has led to a systematic evil, that of capitalism, where female workers are merely seen as producers and their reproductive aspect is violently annihilated in the interest of benefit. In the cases of women who get pregnant, most of them, are fired from their jobs or have to end up giving their babies up for adoption because their wages are so low that they cannot afford to feed their baby. As father Francis explains to Villa, “[t]hey can’t afford another mouth to feed, they make five dollars a day in those American factories [...] They have to work eleven hours just to buy a box of diapers and four hours to buy a gallon of milk” (p. 39).

V.2.5. Contributing Factors to the Juárez Femicides: *Macho* Culture at the Border, Impunity and Corruption

In her co-editorial work, Gaspar de Alba offers various explanations as to why these crimes continue to occur. She explains that femicide in Ciudad Juárez has been linked to global capitalism, the complicity of public officials and the rising power of organized crime in Mexico. Moreover, the complicity and corruption of the Mexican

government exposes its inability to prosecute those responsible for these femicides (Gaspar de Alba 2011). In fact, all of these conditions have contributed to the perpetuation of femicides and, as I explain in this section, it is also important to consider the border as well as the existent patriarchal culture as additional contributors.

Violence is not inherent to the male subject but to the *macho* culture which has set the parameters of masculinity based on the association of power and violence. Consequently, the weakness that this type of culture attributes to the feminine, to the female, is seen as a menace to manhood. This narrow view is portrayed and criticised in mystery narratives. As Aziz argues, “[...] woman as a threat to masculinity is as prominent in the canonical noir thriller narrative as in both Gothic and detective fiction” (2012, p. 150).

The culture surrounding the femicide phenomenon in Ciudad Juárez is one where violence is seen as a natural expression of masculinity and one where violence against females is legitimised through victim blaming strategies. As Córdoba argues, “the women who dared to go out at night to dance until dawn transgressed men’s space and therefore died or deserved to die” (in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011, p. 106). Blaming the victim is translated as impunity and this strategy has been adopted by political, legal and economic institutions. Impunity and corruption prevent visibility of the murders and consequently political and legal institutions are responsible for these deaths.

Gaspar de Alba’s novel reflects the corruption and lack of investigation of these institutions. The following excerpt shows how police institutions fail to give any priority to these crimes and consequently the investigation process is far from efficient:

““*Por qué hay tanto humo?*” asked the priest. “*Queman los cuerpos?*”
“No, they’re not burning the bodies,” the policeman said. “It’s the clothes. They had it all piled up in the patio, and it got infested with rats.”
[...]
“But that’s evidence,” said Ximena.
[...]
“Evidence of what, señora?”” (p. 45).

Desert Blood points out at this lack of interest, as a consequence of a patriarchal and corrupt system that renders women invisible and insignificant.

Another aspect linked to impunity in the *maquiladora* murders is the underestimation and devaluation of women. In a political and economic patriarchal system, women are considered to be inferior to men. The low value attributed to them transforms their bodies into expendable commodities. This conception is exemplified by how some female bodies have been found in garbage dumps. Indeed, González Rodríguez sees this act as

to resignify the body within indifference and abjection [...] the victim is reminded of her restricted statuses in domestic and industrial spheres; within the administration of dirt. Her identity is predestined not to exist. Or it is a utilitarian, replaceable existence that transcend individualism (2012, p. 92).

This reification of women legitimatises violence against them and in turn leads to impunity. Nussbaum explains that there are seven notions involved in the idea of treating a human being as an object: Instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership and denial of subjectivity (Nussbaum 1995). These notions can be applied not only to the individual perpetrators of femicide but also to the structures that allow impunity. In respect to instrumentality, the perpetrators treat women as a tool for their own benefit. The second aspect, denial of autonomy, is understood as women's lack of any autonomy. That is, patriarchal norms have imposed on them restricted gender roles that they cannot cross. Inertness identifies how perpetrators conceive women as lacking agency. Fungibility is the attribution of an interchangeable aspect to the female body, that is, it can be tradeable and consumed. Violability identifies women as not having boundary-integrity and consequently it is acceptable to rape, mutilate and kill them. Ownership denotes that the perpetrators own women and, as such, they can treat them as they please. Finally, denial of subjectivity is identified by how murderers treat women "as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account" (Nussbaum 1995, p. 257). These notions, inscribed in the objectification of women, have promoted the conception of the femicide victims as low value "items" that are not worth the investigation of institutions in power.

It is also important to recognise the economic implications of widespread violence. There is growing evidence that a culture of violence can contribute to what Diana Pearce coined in 1978 as the "feminization of poverty", which refers to the fact that women represent a majority of the world's poor. In fact, when women are continuously harassed, assaulted and murdered they acquire an internalised sense of fear, which may prevent them from promoting gender equality in all the spheres of life. Additionally, women in *macho* cultures and environments face substantially less economic opportunity because of the difficulty of entering traditionally male-dominated industries (Pearce 1989). Gay Young also recognises the role of *macho* cultures in the violence exerted towards women, but he argues that explanations rooted in the gendered construction of neoliberalism offer a better understanding on the devalorization of women and, consequently, on the violence they are subjected to. He maintains that "the global political economy is imbued with an organizing code that privileges masculinity, and all that is associated with masculinity,

over the “naturally” devalorized feminine” (Young 2014, p. xi). Thus, this devalorization shapes the thought and practices, – as related to gender relations –, of those local ideologies found within the context of global neoliberal processes. Indeed, the linkage between devalorization and women gives way to the naturalisation of violence against women. In *Desert Blood*, the devaluation of women is reflected as one of the reasons for government inactivity. During journalist Rubí Reyna’s television show, which focused on the Juárez murders, two guests, lawyer Dorinda Sáenz and activist Paula del Río, talk about the femicides. Paula del Río explains that

[i]n a society in which women are second-class citizens and in which the poor are no better than animals, a society where cows and cars are worth more than the lives of women, we are talking about the complete devaluation of the feminine gender, as well as the utter depreciation of the female labouring class. Were these crimes happening to men, were men being kidnapped, raped, mutilated, and dismembered, no matter what their class, we would already know the answers to the question of ‘Who is killing the women of Juárez?’ The authorities would not be wasting their time doing interviews. They would be out on the streets hunting the killers (p. 323).

Desert Blood reveals the sexism and racism behind the Ciudad Juárez femicides. Gaspar de Alba depicts the unequal gender power relations and the undervaluing of poor Mexican women which have led to the femicides.

After analysing the different aspects contributing to systemic violence and consequently femicide at the border, I will examine how Žižek offers a response to systemic violence and how the counter discourse offered by Gaspar de Alba’s novel contributes to the local and global “activist” strategy against femicide at the border. The interweaving between fiction and reality has helped Gaspar de Alba illustrate in *Desert Blood* the dangers of unequal gender power systems within a globalised economy context.

V.3. When Fiction Crosses Reality:

Žižek claims that those whose actions result in systemic violence should be subjected to revolutionary violence, also termed as emancipatory violence. He states in his work *Violence*, that he “tackled directly the emancipatory dimension of the category of *divine violence*, as it was articulated by Walter Benjamin” (2010, p. 174). Žižek reconciles Walter Benjamin's conception of divine violence with acts of revolutionary

violence and claims that “we should fearlessly identify divine violence with positively existing historical phenomena, thus avoiding any obscurantist mystification” (ibid., p. 167). He also explains that the violence exerted by the oppressor is different to the one exerted by the oppressed. The violence of the oppressed can be seen as a way of liberation while the oppressor exerts violence to achieve domination or reinforce its power status. “[...] in the emancipatory struggle, it is not the cultures in their identity which join hands, it is the repressed, the exploited and suffering, the ‘parts of no-part’ of every culture which come together in a shared struggle” (ibid., pp. 133-134). He understands counter-violence as a reactionary action intended to overcome an oppressive situation and legitimises it.

I claim that revolutionary violence is not mandatory to disrupt the structures that sustain systemic violence and argue that the rejection of revolutionary violence is not only based on a moralistic point of view but also on a functional one. The use of violence would not break with the global capitalist *status quo*. The end in systemic and revolutionary violence is different. However, the means are the same. Žižek’s concept of revolutionary violence as counter-violence promotes an oppressive view that in some way parallels that violence of economic institutions, which is somewhat allowed and justified.

When asked “[h]ow does this fascination with violence [...] stem[s] from the radical left tradition?” in reference to thinkers such as Žižek. Noam Chomsky states that “there are a lot of radical left traditions. The ones that made any sense, in my view, were not committed to violence except in self defense. [...] I don’t think you should stop defending yourself when you are under attack, but under very special circumstances. The idea of overthrowing existing forces by violence is very questionable” (Helali 2013). He argues that the “revolution, meaning a significant change in institutions that’s going to carry us forward, rather than backwards” cannot be achieved through violence but through the support of a large population, by “what’s called reformism” and through “popular democracy in all institutions” (Helali ibid).

I argue that art is a way of fighting against systemic violence and changing the culture of silence and impunity behind institutions that fail to address femicide.

Works such as *Desert Blood* function as a vehicle to expose and to raise awareness, it has “widened the visibility of the murders to broad audiences. [...] Activists soon set bigger stages that Mexican officials and politicians could not easily contain or co-opt with the typical strategies of minimizing and trivializing the crimes” (Staudt 2009, pp. 89-90).

Activism and artivism¹⁰ have unveiled the intersection between police forces at the border, government institutions, organised crime and global economic forces as regards to femicide in Ciudad Juárez.

As previously explained, *Desert Blood* not only attempts to give international visibility to these crimes but also denounces the abusive practices and working conditions in the *maquilas*, the institutional corruption that contributes to its continuation as well as patriarchal capitalist imperatives. By interweaving fact and fiction, Gaspar de Alba reveals the realities behind the Juárez femicides and exposes the threats of globalisation and patriarchal structures.

Desert Blood analyses the patriarchal gender roles that regard independent women as prostitutes and are used as an excuse to blame the victims of these crimes. The corruption of the government and the destruction of evidence, in some cases, render the victim invisible and in the cases where the victim has an identity, she could be blamed for living inappropriately. Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán show how the truth is altered to blame the victim and how such violence is not investigated when the victim might be regarded as having an indecent lifestyle. “[...] (These) victims are also called ‘*maqui-locas*,’ assumed to be *maquiladora* workers living *la vida loca*, or *una vida doble*, of a border metropolis, coded language for prostitution” (2011, p. 3). This categorisation of women is used to minimise the importance of the crime.

Staudt explains that the contributing factors to violence against women are underlined by the existing patriarchal views conformed by the state and rooted in society: “violence against women is an exposé of the state, masculine privilege embedded therein, and unequal gender power relations in state and society” (Staudt 2009, p. 19). This male privilege has been supported by the misinterpretation of female myths that regard independent women as “bad women” and consequently justify any type of violence against them. The dual categorisation of women serves a masculinist purpose. The rigidly defined binaries angel/evil ascribed to women restrict their independence.

¹⁰ In this study, I refer to artivism as a “hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism” (Guisela Latorre and Chela Sandoval 2008, p. 82).

V.3.1. *Maquiloca: The Brown Femme Fatale*

Maquiloca is the term given to *maquiladora* workers to imply that they are prostitutes and consequently justify any violent act against them. *Maquilocas* are *maquiladora* workers “who, as a result of her close contact with the libertine ways of *el norte*:

- Tries to behave like an American.
- Loses her good Mexican girl morality and, therefore, her value as a woman.
- Wears short skirts, high heels, and bright lipstick to attract or provoke men [...]
- Goes out with any man who approaches her [...]
- Is asking for trouble and usually finds it” (Gaspar de Alba 2011, pp. 80-81).

As this quote shows, women’s agency is seen as a threat to their own being and, consequently, this female autonomy is used as a strategy for social legitimisation of violence against them.

This view of the *maquiladora* worker, whose autonomy makes her a prostitute, resembles that of the literary *femme fatale*. The character of the *femme fatale*, introduced by hardboiled detective writers and whose “antecedent is the 19th century melodramatic character of the vamp [has been] the antithesis of the narrative function of women as princesses in fiction” (Schill 2007, p. 83). The concept of the *femme fatale* has its origin in the evil/good twofold representation of women. As Senelick explains, “[t]he *femme fatale*/prostitute image established itself as the visual representation of one side of the binary concept of Woman, wherein she was defined either as asexual and domestic or erotic and independent” (1992, p. 75). Thus, according to this patriarchal archetype, the designation of a woman as a *femme fatale* or *maquiloca* is a way of degrading her and blaming her, it deceitfully rationalises any form of violence against her as *Desert Blood* examines.

Gutmann explains that the link between sexism and nationalism raised during the 1940s when “the male accent itself came to prominence as a national(ist) symbol. For better or worse, Mexico came to mean machismo and machismo to mean Mexico” (2006, p. 224). The sexist interpretation of *la Malinche* - as a traitor, as the fucked one and as the one to blame - has shaped the unequal power relations in both Mexican and Chicana/o cultures, during and after the Chicano Movement (Mary Louise Pratt, 1993). This interpretation has helped to reduce the representation of women, especially the Mexican women, to two roles, those of the bad and good woman.

Carlos Fuentes' short story, *Malintzin of the Maquilas*, one of the stories in his work *The Crystal Frontier* (1995), narrates in a day the experiences of four *maquiladora* workers; Marina, Dinorah, Candelaria and Rosa Lupe. After a night clubbing, they hear the news that Dinorah's son has accidentally strangled himself because Dinorah left him tied up to the table, at home, as she had to work all day. In this short story, Fuentes exhibits *maquiladora* workers as the paradigm of *Malinche's* patriarchal representation. He explains how the four *maquila* workers go to dance at the Malibú club, hinting that if they are sexually attacked or killed it is because they exposed themselves to that danger: "all gringos, desirable little gringos, adorable, for me, for you.[...] In my bed, just imagine. In yours. If he'd only take me, I'm ready. If he'd only kidnap me. I'm kidnappable" (p. 114). For Fuentes "“Malintzins,” are signifiers of disorder. The tragedies that they bear witness to are calamities that they have brought on themselves. Goddesses of the blood feud, they have trespassed the boundaries of tradition and therefore share responsibility for the disaster that has befallen them, Juárez, and Mexico” (Volk and Schlotterbeck in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011, p. 141). Hence, Gaspar de Alba argues that “the frame of the “bad woman” is replicated not only transnationally, transculturally, and transhistorically, but also intracategorically, within discourses of antiracist resistance and gender/sexual liberation, that is, the sexism and homophobia in the Chicano movement” (2014, p. 25).

Apart from Fuentes' novel, there are other cultural producers such as the photojournalist Julián Cardona and the band Los Tigres del Norte who have contributed to the revictimization of femicide victims. The photojournalism of Cardona on the Juárez murders and Los Tigres del Norte's song *Las Mujeres de Juárez*, offer a masculinist point of view on these women and consequently have held them accountable for their tragic fate, in that they infer that women's incorporation into the labour force brought chaos to Juárez and that this chaos can only be reinstated when women work in their domestic arena alone (Volk and Schlotterbeck 2007).

The patriarchal interpretation of la *Malinche* has also had an impact on Chicana's awareness of their sexuality, as Moraga explains, "[c]hicanas' negative perceptions of ourselves as sexual persons and our consequential betrayal of each other finds its roots in a four-hundred-year-long Mexican history and mythology" (2000, p. 91).

In *Desert Blood*, Villa finds, in the toilet of the “Ladies Bar” Casa Roja (p. 210), two graffiti with the statements ““No cholas or maqui-locas here” and “The new governor sucks the Border Patrol’s cock”” (p. 211). After reading them, Villa

“remembered the little boy in *las colonias* the other day selling old Barbie dolls as “maqui-locas.” Ximena had said that was the vernacular way of referring to maquiladora workers who become Americanized and turn into whores. “Do they *turn* into whores, Ximena, or is that just how people perceive them because they have jobs outside the home?” (p. 211).

Villa refutes this misconception of *maquiladora* workers by pointing out at the extended perception of independent and autonomous women being seen as whores. By examining the Juárez femicides and narrating what happened to the murdered *maquiladora* workers such as Cecilia or Mireia, Villa offers an alternative view of these workers. She positions them as the victims and not as the ones to blame.

Toilet graffiti as a public discourse, “which functions at the same time like a closed discursive system”, is Villa’s dissertation subject matter (Gaspar de Alba 2014, p. 186). In the next section, I will argue how some public discourses that confront and make violence against women visible have originated from a coded private language. This concept will be informed by both the analysis of Gaspar de Alba’s novel and its use of graffiti to reveal the machinery behind the Juárez femicides and the analysis of the #metoo campaign in cyberspace.

V.3.2. Private Languages and Public Discourses: Bathroom Graffiti and Hashtag Era

Villa’s dissertation analyses graffiti in public bathrooms as “part of a structure of signification –phrases, drawings, and numbers that signify something very specific for the population that utilizes those spaces” (Gaspar the Alba 2014, p. 185). She argues that this graffiti “can be read semiotically to analyse the social construction of class and gender identity in what Marx called the “community of women”” (p. 18). This community of women refers to Marx’s view of women being treated by the upper classes as private property, exploited and abused: “Our bourgeois, not content with having wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other’s wives” (1998, p. 60). Villa translates Marx’s

criticism on the use of women as disposable objects to her own reality and circumstances; that of the femicides and her attempt to find her sister. By analysing toilet graffiti, she discovers not only tips to locate Irene but also a specific language that reveals the apparatus that contributes to the femicides of *maquiladora* workers and its continuation. Villa finds on the walls of a public toilet the sentence pronounced by “Mexican president Porfirio Díaz: *Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States.*” and below it “written in red nail polish and shaky lettering, *Poor Juárez, so close to Hell, so far from Jesus*” (p. 98). She decodes this graffiti as signifying “the representation of class and gender [...]. Violence against women, the economic exploitation of the border, even the politics of religion” (ibid., p. 98). Once this exclusive language, formulated by locals, is decoded, it becomes a public discourse on femicide and the circumstances around it. Thus, Gaspar de Alba sees graffiti not only as a way to illustrate reality but also as a vehicle for resistance. This artistic expression “circumvents censorship and gives voice to this resistance [...]. The actual production of graffiti occurs within the context of censorship, breaking rules, and creating public space” (Fedorak 2009, p. 69). This context of censorship is created and promoted by the very power structures that contribute to the continuation of femicides. Graffiti, then, has to be understood within the context in which it is created in order to be interpreted and/or decoded.

This language that signifies political and social views in public spaces has also been translated to cyberspace. Indeed, the new symbolic language of hashtags, particularly the #metoo campaign that denounces female sexual harassment, can be interpreted as a kind of digital graffiti. Like the bathroom graffiti in *Desert Blood*, the #metoo movement provides a discourse on a form of violence against women, and is signified by a language, that of the hashtag, that needs to be decoded in order to understand its connotation. The words “me too” *per se* do not imply an anti-violence rhetoric. However, preceded by a hashtag in the context of cyberspace they are read as a public discourse against sexual harassment. This new form of activism has been termed as hashtivism.

The empowerment of women in cyberspace and the raise of visibility of gender-related issues has its origin in the 1990s, within the theoretical framework of Cyberfeminism. As explained by Gajjala and Mamidipudi “[c]yberfeminists urge women all over the world to learn how to use computers, to get ‘connected’, and to use the Internet as a tool for feminist causes and individual empowerment” (in Sweetman 1998, pp. 8-9). This movement was a common ground for activists, feminist critics, artists and anonymous people, especially women, to express their concerns on gender inequalities. This

Cyberfeminism has evolved into what Helen Hester has termed in her essay “After the Future: n Hypotheses of Post-Cyber Feminism” (2017) as Cyberfeminism 2.0 or Post-Cyber Feminism. Hester critically argues that the transition from cyberfeminism to post-cyberfeminism based on the fact that social and political conditions have changed since the 1990s. Indeed, this new activism faces issues such as sexual harassment or gender inequalities which remained invisible since the conception of Cyberfeminism up to the recent years mainly because they were naturalised. Cyberspace has become an ally for activism but it is important to notice that it has also been used to replicate patriarchal views on females. As Hawthorne and Klein state, “women are portrayed as cyber-Barbies, cyber-*femmes-fatales* (in Stewart Millar 1998, p. 106) and cybersex objects” (1999, p. 1). Indeed, this backlash urges feminists to keep re-examining their strategies to offer a public discourse that creates a collective awareness on female-related issues such as femicide and eradicates victim-blaming mechanisms. In *Desert Blood*, Villa’s investigation process and interactions with the different characters of the novel offer a counter discourse that contributes to this collective awareness and breaks with those stereotyping heteropatriarchal strategies that aim to leave the victim voiceless.

As explained in the next section, public discourse of contestation of femicides has also been produced by victims’ families and artists. Anti-femicide activists have contributed to the visibility of women killing in Ciudad Juárez and artists have internationalised this issue.

V.3. 3. Other Public Discourses: Artivism and Activism

In reaction to the growing presence of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, activism across the U.S.-Mexico border has embodied more than the traditional protest demonstrations and marches. Cross-border activist organizations and independent artists have recognised the need to adopt more innovative and unique forms of protest to capture public attention and demand justice. These organizations and activists produce visual art for both local audiences and broader art exhibitions, which traverses political borders and encourages collective awareness. This social movement has become transnational to make the struggle for social justice politically relevant in the broader context of globalisation and bring international pressure on the Mexican-U.S. border institutions. As Hansen and Qualtire argue, “[b]ecause local efforts by the mothers and families of the murdered and

disappeared women of Juárez were unsuccessful in stopping the femicide, they turned increasingly to the international community for help” (in Staudt et al. eds. 2009, p. 129). In conjunction with international human rights institutions and activists, these organisations have provided a platform for restoring agency to victims, that is, to give voice to those affected by femicide and gender-based violence and proclaim that the violence would not remain invisible. As a result of this joint effort, “[t]he twenty-first century saw a noticeable increase in international public awareness of femicide in Ciudad Juárez” (Patterson in Pollak et al. eds. 2016, p. 119). Patterson attributes the transnational aspect of the Juárez femicides to the “press coverage of the Cotton Field Murders in 2001” where eight mutilated female bodies were found in a Ciudad Juárez cotton field (ibid., p. 119). As a way of preserving family and collective memory, activists placed eight pink crucifixes at this field which featured prominently in the international media coverage. Patterson also associates Lourdes Portillo’s documentary *Señorita Extraviada* (2001) (*Missing Young Woman*), to the increase in international awareness. He claims that “[i]magery and symbolism as a medium for communication and exposition were significant in breaking the international silence and stigmatization surrounding femicide” (ibid, p. 119). Portillo’s documentary calls for the intervention of local and global institutions to put an end to these killings. It bears witness to the suffering of the femicide victims’ families. It also examines the unsolved murders of the women killed at the border. Through the testimonies of the families, the spectator discovers the circumstances surrounding the disappearances of these murdered women. They discuss their frustrated interactions with the police and political institutions. Critically acclaimed internationally, it has received several awards such as the Special Jury Prize in Sundance Film Festival, Best Documentary in Malaga Film Festival and audience award in Festival International de Films de Femmes. It has also been screened in countless cities around the world. This exposure has contributed to international awareness.

In *Desert Blood*, Father Francis starts the activist group *Contra el Silencio* “for the friends and relatives of the American girls” missing or killed at the border, “[b]ut the media, or rather, the mayor, doesn’t want people in El Paso to know what’s really going on. So once in a while, I get these little threatening phone calls about minding my own business” (p. 41). This attempt to make these murders invisible has also been denounced by Juárez activist groups, hence the need to internationalise this phenomenon.

As previously explained, Gaspar de Alba’ novel interweaves fiction and reality. This blending is exemplified in the inclusion of real activist organisations in her novel. The

fictional character of Paula del Río features in the novel as the founder of a Juárez association against female sex crimes and domestic abuse. During a television interview, she lists the real world activists groups: “CARIDAD, 8 de Marzo, Mujeres por Juárez, Voces sin Eco, and Contra el Silencio in El Paso” (p. 319). This addition allows the writer to promote their work, which has contributed to the discovery of many victims, both nationally and internationally.

The activist aspect of *Desert Blood* lies in the fact that it denounces the Juárez femicides and opens up a space for transformation as well as for a joined participation between the writer and the audience. Art functions as a vehicle to expose and raise awareness, it has “widened the visibility of the murders to broad audiences [...]. Activists soon set bigger stages that Mexican officials and politicians could not easily contain or co-opt with the typical strategies of minimizing and trivializing the crimes” (Staudt 2009, pp. 89-90).

These trivialising strategies are also reflected in *Desert Blood* when in the talk show *Mujeres sin Fronteras* Dorinda Sáenz, the prosecutor in the case of the murdered woman and Paula del Río, founder of activist group CARIDAD, discuss the border femicides. Sáenz diminishes the work of activist feminist groups such as CARIDAD and accuses them of simply wanting to get money out of the government:

You feminist groups think it's always about patriarchy, and the majority of the people you are advocating for don't even know the meaning of the word [...] Patriarchy doesn't mean anything to them, and groups like CARIDAD are just using these people and the tragic loss of their daughters to push their feminist agendas and raise money for themselves. [...] Convincing people that patriarchy is at fault does not bring us any closer to finding the killer (p. 323).

Sáenz denies the role that patriarchy plays in the Juárez femicides and maintains that feminist activists are to blame for the bad publicity given to the town and country.

The Mexican government has also accused feminist activist groups of profiting from their fight against femicide. As González Rodríguez argues, “the attention paid to the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, both in and outside Mexico, has provoked denial from the Mexican government. This attitude reflects the discourse of oligarchy in Ciudad Juárez, which rejects or disqualifies a demand for justice surrounding these crimes as a “for-profit industry” (2012, p. 84).

Besides the role and signification of graffiti in the novel, this art form has also played an important role to give visibility and denounce existent femicide. The female Juárez group Kolectiva Fronteriza have used graffiti to demand justice for the victims. Activism and artivism have been primordial not only to give voice to the murdered females but also to shape a collective memory. “These minor glories –wooden crosses made by family members of victims, the graffiti produced by art collectives, the marches organized by activists- reveal the true nature of the geography of memory in Juárez” (Driver 2015, p. 45). Art raises consciousness, analyses and denounces the different factors behind female killing.

V.3.3.1. Aestheticization of Violence and *Pornomiseria*

The artistic performances of the Juárez femicides represent both life and death. Art creates a living voice for the murdered women. It attempts to keep their memory alive whilst seeking justice. However, some representations have turned into consumable objects that aim to entertain instead of to denounce. Drawing from the concept of *pornomiseria* (porno-misery), developed by Colombian filmmakers Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo, Driver analyses the voyeuristic exploitation of femicide. Ospina and Mayolo label porno-misery as those types of documentaries that appeared in the early 1970s where misery is transformed into a product to be sold instead of being analysed. Indeed, this kind of quasi-documentaries deform reality, as they aim to profit from making poverty and suffering an entertainment product. Driver applies this concept of porno-misery to the literary field and acknowledges that although explicit descriptions of misery and femicide “are necessary to provoke awareness, it is also true that the content can be exploited” (2015, p. 77). Driver explores whether graphic depiction of femicide victims “fulfil the need to document the truth and examines at what point such representations cross the line into porno-misery” (ibid., p76).

By comparing the non-fictional work on the Juárez femicides *Huesos en el desierto* (2002) by Sergio González Rodríguez and the novel *2666* (2004) by Roberto Bolaño, Driver analyses two different treatments of the femicides through art. The historically documented *Huesos en el desierto* functions as a testimony of the victims whilst the forensic descriptions of female dead bodies in Bolaño’s work aim to explore “the metaphysics of horror and evil without articulating any stated goals related to fomenting social change in Juárez” (2015, p. 89). Indeed, Bolaño’s novel does not explicitly promote

justice. Moreover, Driver finds it both sensational and non-sensational by arguing that “[o]n the one hand, Bolaño is consciously trying to be as sensational as possible to mimic the real violence in Juárez, but on the other, the work is so obsessed with sexual violence that I find it discomforting” (ibid., p. 91). The reiteration of extreme violent scenes can make it unbearable and, consequently, Driver understands that it lacks any attempt to promote social or political change with regard to femicide. Hence, *2666* can somewhat be perceived, at times, as porno-misery in the sense that its graphic descriptions may “contribute to the exploitation and objectification of the female body and reify the idea of the spectral, ghostly condition in which women in Juárez are depicted, hovering women where between life and death” (ibid., p. 73). Indeed, the line that separates graphic descriptions of violence as a strategy of awareness and a product of consumption can be quite fragile in some instances, as it is reflected in Bolaño’s work.

However, I argue that it is important to differentiate between an unconscious act of exploitation, which *2666* can be perceived as at times, and a conscious one. Ospina and Mayolo’s definition of porno-misery refers to the conscious act of transforming misery into entertainment with the intention of gaining benefit. This notion of porno-misery can be translated to the snuff film industry. Astley defines snuff as “a premeditated human death that would not exist without the intention of pointing a camera and capturing the event for a variety of sexual, political, and financial purposes” (in Jackson et al. eds. 2016, p. 148). One of the theories about who is killing the Juárez women points to snuff movie makers. *Desert Blood* portrays and criticises this controversial use and representation of violence. In the novel, Lone Ranger, a producer of snuff movies, kidnaps a girl, Mireya, to make a movie. Her mutilated body is subsequently found in the desert by a member of the Contra el Silencio Group. Gaspar de Alba includes graphic descriptions, depicted in one of the Lone Ranger’s snuff movies, as an attempt to show the mercantilist purpose behind extreme violence against women: “[...] words rolled on-screen: *Now Doris is dead and buried, and lies in her tomb, while maggots crawl out of her decomposed womb, the smile on her face is a sure cry for more, my hot fucking, cocksucking Mexican whore*” (p. 281). Explicit violent illustrations in *Desert Blood* do not contribute to the objectification of the female body but serve to criticise and denounce the deformation of the reality of the femicides through snuff films which subscribe to the notion of porno-misery.

Gaspar de Alba uses art as a counter discourse against this deformed truth. Drawing from Asante’s concept of activism, I argue that Gaspar de Alba is an activist that “uses her

artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression”. She “merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen [...]. The activist knows that to make an *observation* is to have an *obligation*” (2008, p. 282). The Chicana writer is aware that art, particularly popular culture fiction, can be crucial to raise consciousness both nationally and internationally. As I analyse in the next section, she also reflects, in her novel, that activism has played an important role to counteract femicide at the border.

V.3.3.2. Local, Binational and International Activism

Since the 1990s, activists have revealed the existent corruption, impunity and authorities’ incompetency. Activists from both sides of the border, as Kathleen Staudt and Irasema Coronado explain, “have been gaining ground in raising awareness of and bringing attention to the femicides” (in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011, p. 157). The investigative work on the femicides by the journalist Diana Washington Valdez was crucial to provide visibility and to engage the Chicana/o community in the anti-femicide activism.

From the beginning of the twenty first century, this activism has shifted from a domestic to a binational level. The activist group Amigos de las Mujeres de Juárez “was the pioneering cross-border network to emerge in 2001. [...]. This coalition “built visibility for and momentum around binational cooperation among local police authorities and an international tip line with assistance from the FBI” (Staudt and Coronado in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011, p. 167). Wright explains that these binational activist groups have dissolved during the late 2010s and the media coverage has diminished at a local level “however, [this dissolution] does not signify a lack of activism around femicide. Instead, it indicates a shift in the geographic orientation of the movement” to an international level. Mexican activists have formed coalitions with anti-femicide organisations in other countries and consequently has raised awareness of the Juárez femicides globally (in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán eds. 2011, p. 212).

Desert Blood is a creative reworking of Gaspar de Alba's academic activism that illustrates the anti-femicide protest of the author and main protagonists as well as that of the activists groups.

In the acknowledgments of her novel, Gaspar de Alba thanks the group Voces sin Eco “the first collective of families and relatives of the victims” (p. 343). Apart from

organising the first search parties, this group created “the now iconic image of the black cross in a pink rectangle as a symbol for justice for *las hijas de Juárez*” (pp. 343-344).

Gaspar de Alba translates the black cross as a symbol of activism into her novel:

Outside the city morgue, a protest was in progress. A group of about fifty women in black, holding posters that read *¡Ni Una Más! No More Assassinations* and *Stop the Violence against the Women of Juárez, End Impunity* [...] People in the crowd carried bright pink signs with black crosses painted in the middle and pictures of young girls inside each cross (p. 44).

Throughout *Desert Blood*, Gaspar de Alba documents real activist events and organisations in an attempt to give national and international recognition to these groups. An example of this is when Villa’s investigation leads her to research on the border femicides and finds that “[i]n November 1997, on International Day of No Violence Against Women, the mothers of the then 97 slain women in Juárez held a funeral march and a rally outside of city hall, where they demanded that the authorities bring the killers to justice and end impunity” (p. 119).

Wright acknowledges that mothers’ activism and their use of testimonial witnessing have generated international empathy and consequently international pressure on the local government. She sees testimonies as a key “strategy for internationalizing the movement and creating political public that responds to the message of mothers who are fighting for their daughters” (in Pratt and Rosner eds. 2012, p. 283). She argues that familiarity is “a pre-condition to creating a political movement that links activists with an activist public” (ibid., p. 284). Reyes and Rodríguez define *testimonio* as a narrative form that “allows the narrator to show an experience that is not only liberating in the process of telling but also political in its production of awareness” (Reyes and Rodríguez in Bernal, Burciaga and Carmona eds. 2017, p. 171). Consequently, *Desert Blood* can be considered a testimonial narrative in the sense that it is partially biographical, intertwines fiction and reality, and attempts to generate public awareness. Hence, drawing from Wright’s understanding of testimonies as crucial for the internationalisation of the Juárez femicides, *Desert Blood*’s testimonial imprint has been pivotal to its international success.

V.4. Synthesis:

Desert Blood is not only a counter discourse on brutal violence against women at the border. It is also a narrative that successfully attempts to nationalise and

internationalise the Juárez femicides, whilst uncovering the contributing factors to these killings. Gaspar de Alba's antidetective novel denounces violations against females and the threat that globalised capitalism poses, particularly to gender equality and women's rights. The undervaluation of women's labour not only translates into lower wages but also worse working conditions than men, sexual harassment, intimidation and violence. Capitalism and patriarchy have contributed to the oppression, objectification and undervaluation of women. As a result, there has been a lack of concern from governmental and law enforcement institutions with respect to femicides. Through the lenses of Chicana amateur detective Ivon Villa, *Desert Blood* analyses the Juárez femicides in the context of the circumstances in the border, gender power relations and socioeconomic aspects.

At the border, the intersection between police forces, government institutions, organised crime and global economic forces have created new forms of power that rely on violence to achieve productive results and to reinforce a culture of male authority. The *maquila* industry epitomises a global neoliberalism which reifies women and aggravates their oppression. The existent *maquiladora* model creates low-cost jobs under conditions of exploitation and violence. However, despite its negative and lethal consequences on women's well-being and lives, this industry has been perceived as the salvation of Juárez's economy and promoter of Mexicans' wealth. Consequently, as Staudt explains, the departure of manufacturing plants during the mid 2000-2010 period had a major economic impact on the city and "[a] collective idea persisted among the city's economic and political elites that reified the *maquiladora* model as a necessary evil" (2015, p. 31). Staudt's statement suggests an evil versus good duality of globalisation inasmuch as the *maquiladoras* brought economic prosperity to the city whilst it has turned it into a bloody graveyard.

Despite the *maquilas* relocation in other countries, femicides at the border continue. Hence, activism keeps fighting to put an end to this social scourge and to seek justice. In fact, activists' discourses have been translated to new channels of communication, such as social media, which have served to internationally promote their struggle. The culture of activism addresses what is happening, and why femicides keep occurring. Cultural responses to the Juárez femicides, such as *Desert Blood*, have also internationalised the issue. Art has contributed to this activism by attempting to interpret violence and exposing the reasons behind it. Filmmaker Lourdes Portillo states that "[r]eality is so bereft of

humanity, so barbaric, that we cannot grasp it without the delicacy of art. Through art we can feel the loss, and we can understand it without falling prey to sensationalism” (quoted in Driver 2015, p. 3). Far from Žižek’s conception of revolutionary violence, activism and artivism have confronted violence with non-violent instruments. The use of violence to achieve equality or certain justice is a myth that, according to Cawelti, “relates to the conception of America as a frontier society in which violent confrontations are part of the ordinary course of life” (2004, p. 167). Indeed, by using violence to counteract femicides, we run the risk of naturalising these attacks to the extent that they will cease to be revolutionary. Instead, the suffering of femicide victims requires the existence of art as in art “suffering can still find its own voice, consolation” (Adorno in Taylor ed. 1980, p. 189).

Gaspar de Alba’s novel offers an exploration of femicide culture at the border. Its detailed descriptions of graphic violence seek to awake consciousness on the issue. The unsettling violent descriptions function as a link between language and silence. The writing of violence turns into a critique of violence and this criticism is based on the understanding of the origin of violence.

As explained in chapter III, one of the conventions of the detective novel, especially in hard-boiled fiction, is to restore the order after the chaos of the crime. *Desert Blood* partially adheres to this convention in the sense that, despite the fact that the Chicana detective does not put an end to the femicides, she attempts to restore some sense through a discourse that makes visible injustices and offers an insight into the dangers of globalisation. Gaspar de Alba’s fictionalised account does not reveal the real individual culprits of the Juárez femicides, it does not adhere to the conventional format of the detective novel. Hence, she has referred to it as an anti-detective novel (Gaspar de Alba 2014). It does however follow the search for justice, which parallels the detective’s main aim in this genre. It reveals the mastermind machinery behind the femicides so that it can be challenged and transformed. In tandem with the novel’s focus on Irene’s kidnapping and the mystery behind Juárez femicides, “time and again the detective also unravels a mystery about him- or herself. The novel is as much his or her story as it is the story of their crime” (Rodríguez 2005, p. 8). Villa explores the mystery of her transnational and liminal identity, “making detective fiction a natural genre for Chicana/o writers who [...] are so obsessed with exploring, if not resolving, the bilingual, bicultural mysteries of [their] bifurcated lives” (Gaspar de Alba 2014, p. 176).

The institutions having failed to prevent further femicides, makes narratives such as *Desert Blood* the victim's voice and a tool for seeking justice.

pre-examination copy (08/07/2019)

CONCLUSION

The process by which I have explored how sexuality circumscribes the lives of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's fictional detectives and how they reveal the intrinsic relation between identity and violence has revolved around three main elements: recognising, dismantling and reconfiguring. Firstly, I have recognised and explored the similarities and differences of these sleuths to those detectives who featured in the earlier stages of the genre. This, in turn, has served me to measure the significant contribution of Nava and Gaspar de Alba's mysteries to pushing the boundaries of detective fiction. The analysis of the outsider/insider from Ríos' and Villa's standpoint has also aided in identifying how their experiences are influenced by normative ideologies and how stereotyping strategies have attempted to confine them, as well as to reify the victims of femicide. Secondly, I have examined how their counter-discourse has dismantled demeaning constructions of non-normative sexualities and female gender roles. Their narrative has also conveyed the dynamic nature of the genre, as well as the concept of identity. Finally, I have demonstrated how the inclusion of these detectives within a mainstream genre has not only presupposed the re-shaping of the genre but has also created a space for social and cultural activism in response to oppressive power structures.

After the 9/11 terrorist attack, the United States government declared a War on Terror which initially positioned Middle East Arab Muslims as a threat to national security and was subsequently further extended to immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. This, in turn, resulted in Congress passing the Secure Fence Act of 2006 which authorised the construction of an approximately 700-mile barrier on the 2000-mile border between the United States and Mexico, and an increase on border surveillance (Brent G. McCune and Dennis L. Soden in Matthew J. Morgan eds. 2009). Iris Marion Young argues that U.S. national security is driven by a gendered logic of masculinist protection. That is, a protection that resembles those patriarchal households where men take on the role of the protector and women that of the protected. In exchange for protection, "the woman concedes critical distance from decision-making autonomy" (2003, p. 226). Young maintains that society mirrors this pattern of subordination in that the United States offers its population protection in return for overlooking their actions with regard to state security, no matter how extreme these measures may be. In reality, this protection is not as it seems, as Moraga explains, "all that has changed with the attacks of September 11 is the illusion that U.S. borders protect those who reside within them,

an illusion seldom shared by this country's residents of color" (2011, p. 19). This tactic of protection has facilitated the militarization at the border and the acceptance of violent practices against Mexican immigrants, who have been pictured as the evil that threatens state security. Written in the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, Anzaldúa argues in her article "Let us be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—la sombra y el sueño" (2002) that the way to move beyond pain is transforming this pain into social justice. "The healing of our wounds results in transformation and transformation results in the healing of our wounds" (in Claire Joysmith and Clara Lomas eds. 2005, p. 100): She also affirms that the awareness of other people's pain leads to an ethical synergy. She proposes an ethics of interconnectivity through the wounds that connect each other as a way of healing. Thus, the reinterpretation of dominant beliefs that limit the experiences of the marginalised other and the sharing of a similar type of strategy will lead to a peaceful coexistence. She believes that "each of us can make a difference" (ibid., p. 101). Indeed, as I have demonstrated, Nava and Gaspar de Alba utilise their fictional works as a tool for social commentary and critique of neoliberal and heteropatriarchal structures. Their narratives contribute to the healing of wounds and consequently to transformation at a genre and social level.

This study has also demonstrated how the suitability of the detective fiction genre helped Gaspar de Alba to reveal the existent systemic violence behind the Juárez femicides and to give voice to the murdered women. As I was in the process of writing this conclusion, I read in *Norte Digital* newspaper about the most recent Juárez femicide victim. Her dead body was "dumped" at colonia Finca Bonita. The woman has not yet been identified and she is estimated to be no more than 24 years old. She was beaten up, choked to death and was the 68th victim of 2019 according to the independent website www.ellastienennombre.org. The newspaper article also notes that this number is far from that publicized by the Fiscalía Especializada de la Mujer (FEM). This institution indicates that the number of women killed in 2019 in Ciudad Juárez is 17 and that just 9 of these deaths are being investigated as femicides (Barranco 2019). According to the NGO Red Mesa de Mujeres, from 1993 to June 2019, in excess of 1700 femicides have been registered at this border town.

In parallel to these increasing numbers, various forms of artistic responses against the Juárez femicides continue to emerge. The Mexican actress Kate del Castillo is soon to star in the play *The Way We Spoke* written by the playwright Isaac Gómez and directed by Jo Bonney. This production, which opens in July 2019, explores the circumstances surrounding these killings. Based on multiple detailed interviews, it describes the horrifying accounts of the murder of

hundreds of women in Ciudad Juárez. As the play meanders between reality and fiction, the unanswered questions behind these killings are revealed.

Artistic representations of this nature take a space in response to violence against women. The documentary *Ovarian Psycos* (2016) directed by Kate Trumbull-LaValle and Johanna Sokolowski is another example of the fight for reclaiming the voices of those women subjected to violence. The Ovarian Psycos are a group of women who cycle at night in East Los Angeles to claim a space that has been dominated by men whilst they promote a feminism that takes into account poverty, race, gender identity and the different oppressions that “misfit” women suffer. As the founder of the crew, Xela de la X, powerfully raps, “another brown sister found dead, another body bruised blood red, another tear shed [...] she was only twenty four, but she was found face down, on the beach dead, from a beat down [...] she was only twenty four. We’re either bitches or we’re whores” (De la X 2017). The integral message of their feminist ideology is the power and solidarity of women joining together to implement change.

At a political level, the newly created Spotlight Initiative is focusing on reducing violence against women in Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The €500 million investment is the largest worldwide commitment of anti-femicide and gender-based violence to date (European Commission 2019). This initiative was launched in Mexico on the 25th May, 2019 by the European Union and the United Nations, and supported by the Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. It will be implemented in the State of Mexico, Chihuahua and Guerrero and will continue for four years. Focusing on the design of safe public spaces for women and girls, this project plans to ensure non-discriminatory access to justice and to transform the restrictive perception of women’s roles in society.

There is little doubt that the wide impact of the social and artistic responses to femicide and gender-based violence have significantly contributed to the creation of political initiatives such as Spotlight. As demonstrated in this study, the suitability of the detective fiction genre, as a tool for activism that brings social issues to light, has created an awareness that cannot be overlooked by political institutions.

As I discussed in chapter V, the lack of sufficient investigation into these crimes has contributed to their perpetuation. The artistic responses that highlight this inefficiency have created a kind of historical memory or record of these crimes as well as an homage to the victims. Historical memory plays a significant role within Chicana/o literature as “people without a historical

memory would be subordinated to ideas generated by the dominant order” (David Maciel, Isidro D. Ortiz, María Herrera-Sobek in Maciel et al. eds. 2000, p. xv). In producing fictional and non-fictional accounts of the femicides, writers and academics such as Gaspar de Alba have contributed to the reconfiguration of a historical memory. That is, *Desert Blood* questions traditional representations of female gender roles and normative sexualities as well as conveying strong female roles characterised by their agency and assertiveness, as embodied by her amateur fictional detective.

As demonstrated in this research, *Desert Blood* and the Henry Ríos mystery series have played a significant part in the critical recognition and analysis of the complexity behind mutually constitutive identities. They have brought attention to the need for an intersectional approach to explore the multifaceted aspects within queer Chicanas/os. The previous and current decade have witnessed the emergence of a vast body of criticism on Chicana/o sexual identities such as *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (2005) by Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, Jr., eds.; *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (2006) by Alicia Arrizón; *El Ambiente Nuestro: Chicano/Latino Homoerotic Writing* (2006) by David William Foster; *With Her Machete in her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians* (2006) by Catrióna Rueda Esquibel; *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men* (2009) by Lionel Cantú Jr.; *Homecoming Queers: Desire and Difference in Chicana Latina Cultural Production* (2009) by Marivel T. Danielson; *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire* (2010) by Sandra K. Soto; *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's "Irreverent Apparition"* by Gaspar de Alba and Alma López; and *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader* (2011) by Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez, eds.

Apart from these works, it is important to highlight the Jotería Studies dossier in *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*¹¹ published in 2014. This special issue, edited by Michael Hames-García, includes twelve articles that exemplify the emergence of the formation of Jotería Studies that is being developed by “a new generation of multigendered queer Chican@s and Latin@s, trained and nurtured by women of color feminisms and feminists” (2014, p. 138). These articles examine the origins of Jotería Studies and its influence on cultural studies and other disciplines such as theology and aesthetics. Hames-García argues that it “arrived as

¹¹ Alicia Gaspar de Alba is a member of the editorial board of this bi-annual publication. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* has been the leading journal in the field of Chicano studies since 1970.

something more than the “structure of feeling” that it might have been in the 1990s and 2000s. It is [...] an emergent structure, identifiable but still not fully formed. In this Aztlán dossier on *jotería* studies, I offer these contributions as gestures toward elaborating this emergent formation, whatever it might finally become” (ibid., p.138). This formation in progress is also reflected on the meaning of the term *Jotería*. The writers in this dossier utilise it to refer to those Chicanas/os whose lives encompass differing practices to traditional sexuality and gender norms. Whilst some authors equate *jotería* to terms like gay, lesbian, trans, bisexual and queer, others indicate that the cultural and historical context where queer Chicanas/os inhabit sets them apart from the more generalised terminology under the LGBT+ umbrella. Irrespective of these two positions, this is a debate that Hames-García maintains should be discussed within *Jotería* Studies. This area of study has somewhat emerged as a site of resistance to discourses and criticism that have often overlooked the intersectionality existent in queer Chicanas/os. The multiplicity embodied in Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s detectives and the space their mysteries create for the representation of queer Chicanas/os have paved the way for *Jotería* Studies.

Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s novels unravel the root of power discourses and from there create a space instrumental for the politics of resistance. Additionally, their novels also recreate a place of identity reaffirmation. The process of creating visibility for queer Chicanas/os in literary and other artistic productions informs and reasserts their *jotería*. This process has circumscribed a recognition and restoration of queer Chicanas/os right to publicly and privately live their lives according to their desires (Karin Ika in Lomelí et al. 2019).

The literary adaption of the Ríos mystery series to podcast format has also created a new space for the representation of queer Chicanas/os subjectivities. This new channel of representation is an alternative to the limited presence of Chicana/o literary works in bookstores and libraries. Aldama states that if we are to consider “Chicana/o authors and their products within the larger marketplace of Latina/o letters (Dominican, Cuban, Puerto Rican of origin), the literature represents only a small part of a small percentage (2%) of literature published. Yet Latina/os make up over 18% of the U.S. population” (2019, p. 201).

Crime and detective fictional and non-fictional accounts have so far proven to be very suitable formulas to be adapted to podcast. For example, in *The Serial Podcast and Storytelling in the Digital Age* (2017) edited by McCracken, the authors analyse the impact of the internationally acclaimed investigative journalism podcast *Serial*, hosted and produced by Sarah Koenig, as well as the interaction and engagement of the listeners. McCracken argues that in *Serial*, “the

many online discussions of the new cultural phenomenon and the strategies that the podcast employs to make listeners feel they are part of the investigation work to reconfigure individual subjectivity to that of a networked community” (2017, p. 5). This podcast exemplifies the power of social network contribution to communally investigate the crimes *Serial* covers throughout its three seasons.

Podcasts’ popularity is steadily increasing and have become a relevant medium for storytelling. Therefore, they have the potential to destabilize normative discourses and achieve social transformation. Nava has adapted the novel of the Ríos series *Lay Your Sleeping Head* into an eighteen-episode podcast. It aired on January 2019 and was directed by Russell Kaltschmidt. The actor Armando Rey, who voices Ríos, has been named by *Adelante* magazine amongst the most influential people in the LGBT+ Latino community of Los Angeles. Nava has not only availed of new technologies to make his work more accessible but has also utilised a modern crowdfunding platform to partially fund his podcast.

The Ríos series, which began in the 1980s, continues to be popular today as Nava launches his new novel *Carved in Bone* in autumn, 2019. Set in 1984, the novel chronologically follows *Lay Your Sleeping Head*.

Like Nava, Gaspar de Alba has chosen a new medium to represent one of her literary works. Her opera *Juana!* directed by Peter Kazaras, will premiere at UCLA in the autumn of 2019. The libretto has been co-written by Gaspar de Alba and Carla Lucero based on Gaspar de Alba's historical novel *Sor Juana's Second Dream*.

The literary adaptations of these two Chicana/o authors demonstrate that stories do not depend on a specific channel. They adopt a new medium for the transmission of their texts that still conveys their counterstatements and raises questions on monolithic thoughts. They also offer new perceptions to the audience about the world they live in.

The intersectional identity discourse inscribed in Nava and Gaspar de Alba’s detectives transcends dominant social constructions, contributes to new directions in Chicana/o detective fiction and paves the way for new critical ways to reaffirm queer Chicana/o subjectivities. In summary, it pushes and goes beyond those boundaries that were initially set to divide the acceptable from the non-acceptable, the authentic from the inconceivable and the subject from the abject.

It has been four years since Donald Trump, the current president of the United States, promised during his presidential announcement speech at Trump Tower: “I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will have Mexico pay for that wall” (Time Magazine 2015).

He casts undocumented Mexican immigrants as a threat to the U.S. economy and security. He assumes that “when Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. [...] They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” [*ibid*]. This simplistic, hyperbolic and populist speech is specific to the anti-immigrant sentiment. Trump’s rhetoric has demonised immigrants and posited them as scapegoats.

In *Requiem for the American Dream: The Ten Principles of the Concentration of Wealth and Power* (2017), Noam Chomsky discusses the main circumstances that have defined the Trump era. He argues that Trump has exploited the quiet discontent of North American society and contributed to their fearmongering. This rage produced by the lack of economic growth and dissatisfaction with the institutions that were meant to represent them was blatantly diverted toward immigrants by the Trump administration. The political use of this rage inextricably damages the ties that hold transnational solidarity. Trump’s attacks on immigrants and people of colour create scapegoats whilst also gaining the approval of his racist policies from white right-wing voters.

Trump’s words during his presidential announcement were familiar to Chicanas/os, border inhabitants and those referred to as “the others”. His words resemble those of the Anglo narratives produced before and after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which ended the Mexican American War in favour of the United States. These accounts have commonly identified Mexicans as criminals, both violent and uncivilised (Tabuenca in Lomelí et. al. eds. 2019). This public anti-Mexicanism has turned into a form of ideology as this hostility endorses actions against Mexican immigrants. These actions result in setting political goals such as the promise of building a border wall that would be paid for by the Mexican government (Gómez-Quiñones in Alvaro Huerta 2019). The demonization of immigrants has also been assigned to the geographical border which has resulted in a significant increase of military presence.

Keeping in mind that Trump has overexploited the border-evil trope, this demonization is not new, as Staudt explains, United States “politicians exploit fears with spatial metaphors, focusing on, even demonizing, borders, especially the two thousand-mile border separating Mexico and the United States”. She also acknowledges: “No doubt, border zones can become magnets for violence. The presence of multiple national sovereignties and multiple rules of law create conditions in which outlaws flourish in the North American free-trade zone” (in Kathleen A. Staudt, Tony Payan, Z. Anthony Kruszewsk eds. 2009, p. 13).

Desert Blood and the Henry Ríos mystery series highlight the very issues that Trump successfully exploits to sow dissent. This demonstrates that these novels are still relevant.

Moraga's letter to Donald Trump commissioned by CBC's *The Sunday Edition* and published on the 13th of November 2016, offers a scathing critique of Trump's inhumane and prejudicial policies. She denounces his misogyny, racial bias and inability to acknowledge climate change. She also states that he utilises nationalism and financial profit to define his domestic policies. Thus, she proposes to build a counter movement, "one in which each one of us has the courage to look deeply at what really motivates our political decisions". She wonders "how willing are we to look outside the prison of our own privileges and through the deepest sites of our collective fears and sorrow, to arrive at an honest political practice for change?" (Moraga 2016).

Moraga calls for representatives from varying cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds to truly represent the needs of the people. This counter movement will then create a safe space for Chicanas/os, Latinas/os and other minority groups where they can discuss their experiences and act against Trump's policies. Nava and Gaspar de Alba's mysteries contributed to laying the foundations for this space in that their fictional protagonists embody the experiences of marginalised minority groups whilst challenging authoritarian ideologies. The counter discourse of their narratives destabilises socially constructed notions on identity and provide alternative views on them. It reflects the multiple nature of the identity, culture and struggles of queer Chicanas/os.

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