Twenty-First Century Latin American Narrative and Postmodern Feminism
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Edited by

Gina Ponce de León
To the women of the world, and especially to Agavni, Nana, Gilda, Rocío, Natalia, and Lali.
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Women writers have been a presence in the Latin American literary tradition since the Colonial period and the genius of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. In the nineteenth century, women authors of foundational fictions—novelists such as the Cuban Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Soledad Acosta de Samper of Colombia, and the Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner—continued this tradition. In the early twentieth century, Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral, the Chilean Maria Luisa Bombal, and the Venezuelan Teresa de la Parra, among several others, continued the tradition of prominent women's writing in Latin America. Until the 1950s, most of these women writers were relatively ignored in the face of the supposedly canonical writers of the time, i.e. Rómulo Gallegos, Ricardo Güiraldes, and José Eustacio Rivera. In the 1960s, with the Cuban Revolution, the Boom of the Latin American Novel, and the rise of Latin Americanism as an academic discipline, what was once considered the traditional canon of Latin American literature has been vastly expanded. Feminist scholars, such as Jean Franco, Sara Castro-Klarén, Lucía Guerra-Cunningham and David William Foster, have brought to the fore Latin American women writers, as well as issues of gender in general.

In the 1980s, women writers in Latin America, headed by the theoretically-driven postmodern feminist texts of the likes of Diamela Eltit, Sylvia Molloy and Helena Parente Cunha, were among the most prominent writers. The commercially-driven popular success of Isabel Allende, Ángeles Mastretta and Laura Esquivel contributed to the aura of women's writing in this period. Thus, after the 1960s Boom and the 1970s Postboom came a second, now feminine, Boom of Latin American writing. It is in this context, after centuries of being ignored, and then assuming their respective voices in recent decades, that this important new volume appears.

In it, Gina Ponce de León serves as editor and contributor for a volume containing insightful essays by Amarilis Hidalgo de Jesús, Elvira Sánchez Blake, and Michele C. Dávila Gonçalves. These scholars maintain that twentieth century feminism was embedded in patriarchal ideology. In contrast, they argue that twenty-first century narratives in Latin America offer a new representation of women with innovative literary approaches. These innovative new texts are *las Negras* (2011) and *Saeta, the Poems*.

This book offers illuminating new readings of some of the most interesting and provocative women novelists of the twenty-first century.

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INTRODUCTION

Latin American postfeminist narrative fiction of the twenty-first century explores transgression, madness and race, as well as the ways these ideas delineate boundaries, thus interrogating the notion of feminism. Latin American postfeminist narrative stresses interaction with the reader who possesses a “globalized” mind, which in turn is directly connected to a cultural, historical and political interpretation of the world. As Homi K. Bhabha affirms in the book *The Location of Culture*:

Our existence today is marked by tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix ‘post’: postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism … (1).

Bhabha’s statements allow us to talk about postmodern feminism in Latin America in the context of the postcolonial era. As Leela Gandhi asserts in her book *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*:

Women have suffered a “double colonization”; the “third world woman” is a forgotten casualty of the imperial ideology, and native and foreign patriarchies (83).

Essayists in this book agree that Latin American postfeminist representations are exploring new gender directions within the frame of a new postfeminist discourse. This is evident in the work of twenty-first century Latin American female writers. Women in Latin America have not achieved the goals of the feminist movement, or have done so to a lesser degree, compared with women in western culture. Moreover, women’s discourses for equal rights recognition by the dominant male culture have largely been ignored.

This book posits that the feminist movement of the twentieth century has failed in its basic objectives (equal opportunities regardless of race and gender), and is moving in new and unexpected directions. Some feminist representations of the first years of the twenty-first century prove it. The purpose of this volume is therefore to showcase the interrogations and new manifestations of female representation in Latin American literature.
The new boundaries that women have transgressed are not coincidental; these directions belong to a newer era and especially, in Latin America, to Postcolonialism. It is relevant to emphasize that these representations are within the frameworks of this specific era because these contexts have created opportunities for minorities and marginalized groups to establish and express their sociopolitical struggles. Postcolonial dynamics are also part of a globalized world in which the possibility of learning and comparing regional ideologies nurtures the pursuit of individual objectives.

Something that we clearly realize in the globalized world is that women have different histories, backgrounds, and objectives in their struggles, and different approaches to “patriarchy”. Nevertheless, regardless of what women’s objectives are, there is a common history that unifies them: patriarchy has always been present, in different manifestations, and with very different consequences.

In order to understand the postfeminist narrative in contemporary Latin America, it is necessary to go back in history and outline the feminist movement of the twentieth century. As Elaine Showalter asserts in her edited book *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, Theory*:

> Since the late 1960s when feminist criticism developed as part of the international women’s movement, the assumptions of literary study have been profoundly altered (3).

Latin American feminism has followed the American and European feminist models, as well as their theoretical approaches. The Latin American feminism of the twentieth century is mainly based in the American and European ideologies which do not apply to Latin American culture.

The American and European feminist theories are relative newcomers to the feminist movements. As is stated by Susan Sheridan in her chapter entitled “Feminist Knowledge, Women’s Liberation, and Women’s Studies”, in Sneja Gunew’s *Feminist Knowledge*: “Women’s Studies state that a major strategy for change has come out of the contemporary women’s movement in the industrialized west” (36). It is obvious, when considering women in Latin America, that the feminist movements of the west are not fulfilling the needs of the women of, what is called, the third world. Sheridan continues:

> … the movement has changed and diversified enormously since its beginnings in the late sixties, but that its lines of continuity are real and
demonstrable, and its tasks are still far from accomplished—it is no mere passing fashion (37).

Perhaps the feminist movement and its theoretical approaches have been constructed by ideologies that belong to another world politically, socially and historically different from that of Latin American women; consequently, there are issues to take into consideration when we study the twenty-first century Latin American narrative and postmodern feminism. It is relevant to recognize that Latin American feminism of the twentieth century was embedded in a patriarchal ideology. What we observe in the new representation of women in the narrative of this new century is a series of innovative approaches towards their representation and roles in the postmodern and postcolonial era. The previous statements comprise the thesis of this book. Our objective is to propose a framework toward the understanding of the Latin American Feminism in the twenty-first century: its ideology, struggles and definition.

As an editor and contributor to this book, I present a chapter related specifically to the explanation of our own ideological understanding of these theoretical approaches. Each contributor uses a specific theory which can be read separately from the chapters in which the theoretical approaches are used to analyze the literary selections.

Amarilis Hidalgo de Jesús’ chapter focuses on the poetry and narrative work of Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro. The author has been considered one of the most important female writers in Puerto Rican contemporary literature. During her brief but poignant creative career, Arroyo Pizarro has pursued different and diverse thematic directions. In her first literary work, *Origami de letras*, she explored different topics related to historical passages and different world scenarios. During this period, she also wrote the historical novel, *Los documentados*, in which she explored the Caribbean illegal migration to Puerto Rico and other islands. In this novel she studied marginal discourses of migration within different historical and cultural angles. A second stage was devoted to the introduction of queer topics tied to historical and social themes. In this period she wrote *Ojos de luna* and different stories and poems dealing with historical and gender themes. In her third stage, the author has written openly about queer themes, mostly in her poetry and memoirs. Recently, Arroyo Pizarro has published a series of books dealing directly with the topics of Caribbean (African) female slaves. Hidalgo de Jesús in her chapter utilizes different historical and cultural discourses, including but not limited to, the concepts of intra-historia, “sucking salt”, female slavery, and women’s discourse to analyze *las Negras* (Black Females) and *Saeta, the Poems*.
Elvira Sánchez-Blake’s chapter focuses on how madness and literature are intrinsically conjoined topics defined by that blurred line between genius and insanity. The figure of the “madman” or the insane has become a staple symbol, analogy and parable to signify a world in crisis, and at times, the mirror and catalyst of the critical consciousness of humankind. Sánchez-Blake explores the concepts of madness and literature in two contemporary Latin American novels from a woman’s point of view; *Delirio (Delirium)* by Colombian, Laura Restrepo, and *Nadie me verá llorar (No One Will See Me Cry)* by Mexican Cristina Rivera Garza. These writers are part of the postmodern movement that perceives reality through a different prism. Gaze and vision are some of the recurrent motifs in these novels, as if there was a particular connection between sight and madness, or as if madness would be the result of grasping reality from a different perspective. Sánchez-Blake studies the correlation between gaze, madness and literature and its relevance in the definition of boundaries between history and micro-history, the inside and the outside, reality and hyper-reality and how they are located at the borderline of reason and unreason.

Michele C. Dávila Gonçalves’s chapter focuses on the role of motherhood in the new postmodern female criminal novel. She analyzes the subversion of the genre in Argentinian writer Claudia Piñeiro, and explores the mother-sleuth main character in two of her novels, *Tuya (All Yours)* and *Elena sabe (Elena Knows)*. For the theories surrounding the criminal novel she follows Leo Horsley’s work *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, exploring the history of the detective fiction written by women throughout the ages. For the feminist aspects of motherhood she bases her analyses on the psychoanalytic theories explored by Julia Kristeva. Interestingly, Kristeva concatenates the maternal role with the “abject” (what is horrible, perverse or repulsive). Moreover, Piñeiro’s mothers, while being in appearance traditional mothers, are in truth the agents of family crisis and catalysts to the destruction of their families and madness.

Gina Ponce de León’s chapter centers on how the representation of women has taken an unexpected path in the contemporary Colombian novel. Rising from the failure of the feminist movement, women have surpassed the “victim” role to create their new world of resistance. This analysis argues that the discourse of feminist struggle has taken individual paths marked by personal histories, environmental issues, and the daily culture of oppression. This representation is a layout of the ordinary; the characters are placed into limits considered borderlines. These revealing borderlines, which include suicide, auto-flagellation and captivity, are issues that display the extremes of an unknown frontier for the women in our times. The specifically analyzed novels are: *El eco de las mentiras*
(The Echo of Lies) by Lucía Cristina Ardila, and Hay ciertas cosas que una no puede hacer descalza (There Are Things That a Women Can’t Do Barefoot) by Margarita García Robayo.
CHAPTER ONE
THEORETICAL APPROACHES: UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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As editor of the present book, I deem it necessary to first expose the literary theoretical approaches that guide the following chapters so as to be more clear and precise on the framework of the specific analyses therein. In this context, theory is an ideological posture that we adjust to our specific objectives.

Owing to the topic we are dealing with, it may be controversial to use theoretical approaches that are born in a non-Latin American context toward the understanding and elaboration of feminism of the twenty-first century in Latin America. Nevertheless, the common ground of theory is a beginning to a more substantial dialogue which will permit us to establish a feminist representation that can be understood in the general context of feminist studies.

I: Breaking Gender and Sexual Conceptions

In her chapter “Images of Afro-Caribbean Women Slaves in Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro’s literary work,” Amarilis Hidalgo de Jesús studies the history of Spanish Caribbean female slaves, and how it is depicted in the works of Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro. Hidalgo de Jesús also questions how female slavery issues have been neglected for many years by historians and writers in the Caribbean. According to Hidalgo de Jesús, few studies or literatures have addressed themes that were deeply embedded in the life struggles of female slaves in the Spanish Caribbean. To establish the theoretical framework of her study, Hidalgo de Jesús uses the critical and theoretical works of Patricia D. Fox, Meredith M. Gasby, Genise Vertus,
Marie Ramos Rosado, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Suzanne Bost, Lesley Feracho, Laura J. Beard, and Myriam Yvonne Jehenson.

Hidalgo de Jesús begins her analysis with a discussion of the concept of “blackness” in Arroyo Pizarro’s writings, and describes these writings as the main source for the study of identity in contemporary Caribbean literature. She contextualizes her discourse within the theoretical frame of Patricia D. Fox’s notion of blackness. Her book *Being and Blackness in Latin America*, provides an interesting argument on how the understanding and predictions of “conventional ends” in narrative, shape the specific context for literature dealing with blackness (4). In order to define it, she proposes a re-shaping of the functions of the experience of blackness, including identity, culture, and expression (9). Hence, these ideas of this world and behaviors have molded the images of slaves in the works of Arroyo Pizarro. Likewise, her portrayals of female slaves concur with those of Meredith M. Gasby, for whom the Caribbean holds “shared multilayered histories of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism of people of color in the West” (7).

The majority of the Caribbean people have come to terms with the concept of blackness by accepting their black African roots and identity as part of their cultural migratory survival process. Gasby’s exposition on cultural and racial distinctiveness leans on the framework for discussion of Caribbean women’s migration found in the work of Arroyo Pizarro. In her narrative and poetry, the migratory journey of the female slave began in remote African villages when they were kidnapped for the purpose of being sold as slaves by other tribes. This reference comes into play while the new cultural and feeding habits of the slave are described in Arroyo Pizarro’s work. In that sense, the author expands the use of the term “sucking salt” proposed by Gasby, and its implication in the life of female slaves and of their predecessors. Gasby offers several cultural explanations on the cultural development of the term and its connection with survival techniques developed by female slaves during the “Middle Passage”, which is an important poetic and narrative element in Arroyo Pizarro’s work.

The idea of a cultural migratory identity of displacement is also discussed by Genise Vertus in her essay “An Even Stronger Woman: The Enslaved Black Caribbean Woman”. She provides an insightful argument in regards to the idea that “enslaved women took part in every important fight against slavery. Slave women courageously fought against the restrictive bond of slavery. However, they did so in their own distinctive ways” (Vertus). In the case of the Spanish Caribbean, there are not concise data or studies emphasizing the gender, sex life and role of female slaves
in slavery societies. More to the point, Arroyo Pizarro not only emphasizes the roles of female slaves in the characterization of their characters and poetic voices, but also recognizes the lack of studies on the theme.

Other historical facts related to the role of the female slave in the Puerto Rican slavery society are studied by Marie Ramos Rosado in her book *La mujer negra en la literatura puertorriqueña (Black Women in Puerto Rican Literature)*. Ramos Rosado identifies several problems related to the study of Puerto Rican black women. Indeed, she mentions that:

Se repite otro patrón muy común en nuestra literatura, la presentación estereotipada de negras como criadas y esclavas. Además las mujeres negras son reducidas al nivel de objeto sexual al cumplir el papel de criada sexual (Ramos Rosado 10).

[Another common pattern is repeated in our literature, the presence of stereotyped black females, like servants and slaves. And black women are additionally reduced to the level of sexual objects when they become sexual servants (Ramos Rosado 1).]

Based on her research, Ramos Rosado contends that only a few times in Puerto Rican literature are black women presented as main characters. Not surprisingly, Arroyo Pizarro places female slaves as main characters in her books. Drawing upon the descriptions of the female slave characters, she emphasizes the themes of the exploited and oppressed servant, slave, lover, mistress, prostitute and contextualizes it in a different literary scenario.

Arroyo Pizarro’s creative production resonates with those of Ramos Rosado and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. Concurring with Ramos Rosado’s postures, Terborg-Penn explores the fact that “women [slaves] in many ways were exploited and denigrated through rape and impregnation by slave owners” (11). Arroyo Pizarro agrees on this subject with Ramos Rosado and Terborg-Penn in exploring, in her books, the theme of exploitation of female slaves. She also argues that identity has had an important role in the development of the female mestizo and mulatto Caribbean culture.

Hidalgo de Jesús brings to her thematic strand one of the most important issues of our study: the postmodern Latin American representation of women in Latin American narrative. Consequently, the postcolonial themes are giving us the chance to study and understand

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1 Translation by Amarillis Hidalgo de Jesús.
Arroyo Pizarro’s goal in writing on female slaves’ discourses to break with the gender and sexual conception of female Caribbean/Puerto Rican slaves. This is precisely our topic within the feminist narrative of the postmodern times and the postcolonial era.

According to Hidalgo de Jesús, the constant presence of the colonizer discourse in Latin American history has been deeply rooted in the colonized mentality of the people. Also, the colonization process of the Caribbean islands created a misconception of race in the region. Suzanne Bost sees this as:

… racial and racist hierarchies [that] dominate Caribbean history, the uncertainty of racial differentiation based on skin color alone has created a social structure in which other characteristics such as class, language, cultural practices, and beliefs have come to signify race as much as color (90).

In the broader context of history, we must add displacement of cultural and linguistic discourses of the slave because of different languages and ethnic backgrounds. Posited in these terms, discourses of female slaves have been more controversial and socially hidden than those of their male counterparts. Female slaves were constantly sexually assaulted, physically and mentally abused, and even murdered by their masters. This forced them to create cultural and religious codes in order to be able to communicate with each other, and also to rebel against the patriarchal system which controlled their bodies and, sometimes, their mind’s strengths. In spite of daily confrontations with possibilities of cultural and linguistic disruptions of their own cultural legacy and life, the environment surrounding the female slaves definitely transformed their enslaved world. All that has been mentioned until now has been applied by Arroyo Pizarro to the development of the characterizations of her protagonists.

The theoretical presentation of Hidalgo de Jesús introduces several postulates of asserting political, racial, and rebellious discourses. These discourses bring us to the theme of survival techniques developed by Caribbean female slaves in dealing with their masters’ oppression. According to Hidalgo de Jesús’ analysis, it is very important to pay close attention to the challenging cultural discourses proposed by Arroyo Pizarro within the voices of her characters or poetic voices, which she aims to analyze in her literature. In that light, Lesley Feracho’s arguments in Race, Hybrid Discourses, and the Reformulation of Feminine Identity redefine the roles of historical discourses in search of their identity. Now and again, Feracho touches the themes of historical forces, nationality, politics, and gender applied to texts dealing with confrontations of
socialization among cultures and the autobiographical process of searching to reconstruct the positioning of the self in a historical context. Attesting to the importance of class, race and gender, Myriam Yvonne Jehenson, in *Latin American Women Writers*, clearly defines different types of female discourses in Latin America, drawing upon her theories: “Women were essential to the development of the new culture in the centuries that witnessed the conquest of Latin America” (Jehenson 1). Not unexpectedly, the treatment of female slaves was harsher than the treatment of female indigenous people. They were also sexually exploited as an “everyday occurrence” (2). Based on those types of historical discourses, Laura J. Beard in *Acts of Narrative Resistance* talks about the histories of families “as the history of their nations,” (71) just as Jehenson did. She also connects those histories with autobiographical discourses, and also ties them to the development of human identity. Whatever the historical and literary point is for Arroyo Pizarro to write on women slaves’ discourses in *Saeta (Arrow)* and *las Negras (The Black Women)*, there is no doubt that she is breaking with the gender and sexual conception of Caribbean/Puerto Rican female slaves. The representation of the female slave identity in her work also explains why her narrative and poetry queer themes interrelate with historical facts that enhance, and at the same time point out, the life of hardship of Caribbean slaves and their hidden sexual desires for the other and/or same sex.

Hidalgo de Jesús’ purpose is clearly to challenge different cultural perspectives developed around the passive image of female Caribbean/Puerto Rican slaves. Her theoretical approach focuses on gender, history, and culture. In her analysis she integrates several theoretical components related to subversive, cultural and gender fragmentation discourses.

**II: The New Meaning of Madness**

Elvira Sánchez-Blake’s chapter studies two postmodern Latin American novels. The first is *Nadie me verá llorar (No One Will See Me Cry)*, by Cristina Rivera Garza, a member of the new generation of Mexican writers, and the second, *Delirio (Delirium)*, by Laura Restrepo. The two novels are considered postmodern narratives dealing with women’s roles in society as well as socio-historical-political issues. Therefore, women’s madness and literature will be addressed in the context of the postmodern movement that characterized the late twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century.
According to Sánchez-Blake, the writers use madness to raise critical awareness on social and political issues affecting regions in Latin America at the turn of the twenty-first century. She compares, contrasts and analyzes insanity as a literary device as it corresponds to postmodern and feminist critical theories. Specifically, she explores how figures of the mad and mentally disturbed have been tools to subvert feminine marginalization and to reflect changes in women’s positioning, both at the individual and collective level.

Cristina Rivera Garza, a member of the new generation of Mexican writers, proposes an alternative view of madness in *Nadie me verá llorar*. Sánchez-Blake analyzes how the author uses the “asylum” to reveal another side of Mexican history at the turn of the twentieth century. Parody, pastiche and fragmentation presented through alternate narrative techniques allow the reader to see into the complex dimensions of the so-called “mad,” “criminal” and “excluded” in contemporary Latin America.

In *Delirio*, Laura Restrepo portrays a woman truly afflicted by mental illness whose power of second sight allows allegorical representations of Colombia’s multiple social, political and turbulent realities. *Delirium* depicts the mental collapse of the main character, Agustina, triggered by the crisis of values of a country under siege by political violence, corruption, chaos and falsehoods at individual and collective levels. Restrepo delivers a message that blurs the fine line of reason and unreason. The pathway to survive the horror and the chaos of the daily existence in this country is through what can be called the stage of hyperreality.

Sánchez-Blake explores the relationship of women and madness, starting with Michel Foucault’s seminal work, *History of Madness*, which provides three essential arguments for this analysis. First, madness is seen as a human experience that builds on the consciousness of humankind. Second, madness is related to the emphasis on gaze, which according to Foucault, allows the insane to see what is concealed in the eyes of the “sane”. This resource opens the vast spectrum between vision and blindness, a recurrent literary theme of the madness motif. A third consideration is the blurry line between reason and unreason, an interrogation constantly present throughout the analysis of the texts selected for this chapter.

The connection between women and madness is established through key feminist theories. Elaine Showalter’s *The Female Malady* establishes a fundamental alliance between women and madness:
… because women are situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture and mind (3-4).

Showalter explores different theories of madness to conclude that changes in cultural fashion, psychiatric theory, and public policy have not transformed the imbalance of gender and power that has kept madness to a female malady. She contends that psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on penis envy as the main determinant of female psychosexual development, influenced the view of women’s fragile mind and predisposition to mental disturbances. R.D. Laing’s anti-psychiatry movement in the sixties, which protested against shock treatment, and promised to analyze women’s situation in the family and the society, not only failed in its theoretical effort, but may be the most sexist of all in its practice. Showalter’s debate has been central to understanding and advancing the exploration of women’s representation of insanity as a subversive feminist symbol and strategy.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, consider the literary text as the symbolic representation of the female author’s anger against the rigidity of patriarchal tradition. For them, madness was the price women artists had to pay for the exercise of their creativity in a male-dominated culture (81). They depart from the symbolic representation of the pen as a male tool, and therefore as inappropriate and alien to women. Women who attempt the pen cross boundaries dictated by nature. In this sense, all activities associated with writing, reading and thinking are not only alien but also inimical to “female” characteristics (8). Their analysis of Victorian literary texts, based on the complex social prescriptions causing women to become ill, will be central to this chapter.

Sánchez-Blake also explores the correlation that exists between the witch and the hysteric according to Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément in *The Newly Born Woman*. The contribution of these authors to the debate on feminism uncovered what was hidden under repressed structures of language and society situating women in a marginal position of silence and exclusion. Cixous’s call for a woman “writing her body” has generated a revolution in feminism and female agency that has permeated and influenced women's literature in all hemispheres.

Finally, Sánchez-Blake focuses on theoretical approaches related to the surge of postmodernism in Latin America: she mentions how Nelly Richard analyzes the crossovers between postmodernism and feminism. These crossovers are relevant for establishing the Latin American feminism of the twenty-first century. The narratives selected for this
chapter have been widely analyzed with regard to the idea of madness and literature from multiple perspectives by many Latin American specialists. Although Sánchez-Blake considers all these approaches, she is aware of the danger of falling into essentialisms such as the clinical-psychoanalytical debates, or about categorizations and definitions of the mentally ill. Thus, her discussion departs from the cultural-anthropological connections of madness, society and representation in literature.

III: Feminist Crime Fiction and Motherhood

In her chapter, Michele C. Dávila Gonçalves, using a dialogic approach, summarizes the beginnings of the detective novel and consequently the variations of the genre including the hard-boiled detective novel. Her study focuses on an Argentinean writer of crime fiction, Claudia Piñeiro and her unconventional female sleuths. As a wide theoretical background, she uses Leo Horsley’s study, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, because of its vast research of main and secondary sources, clarity, objectivity and the inclusion of obscure and well-known crime fiction such as the black and feminine detective narratives. Dávila Gonçalves’s main goal is to analyze the detective genre in Piñeiro’s work, focusing especially on an uncommon characteristic in her novels when compared to the typical female sleuth: the investigator as a mother. Although the element of motherhood in crime fiction is not unique to Piñeiro (Horsley explains that it is also characteristic of black feminine detective fiction), it is a first in Latin American female detective literature. To encompass the theoretical setting of her study, Dávila Gonçalves includes the critical psychoanalytic analysis made by Julia Kristeva in several of her essays such as “Women’s Time”, “Stabat Mater”, “A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident”, and her text, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. She believes Kristeva’s ideas convey an uncannily true background to Piñeiro’s novels because they present motherhood as viscerally tied to the “abject”—the horrible—one of the theorist’s main propositions.

Dávila Gonçalves introduces her topic by giving a brief historical background to the classic detective novel and underscoring the work of the first female sleuth, Agatha Christie’s spinster investigator Miss Jane Marple. At the beginning of the so-called Golden Age of the detective novel, the investigator analyzed crimes using purely deductive reasoning; he or she followed clues, interviewed people and, at the end, the resolution of the crime or the enigma was always exposed. This changed later with the hard-boiled fiction in which the characters lived in cities, and the
detective, “a lone wolf”, was up against a corrupt system that tried to destroy him, therefore the need of guns and other “manly” help. Instead of being an intellectual type, like Edgar Allan Poe’s Auguste Dupin or Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, the hard-boiled detective was both forceful and vulnerable physically and emotionally, even sometimes falling in love with a *femme fatale*.

Dâvila Gonçalves points out there have been several female sleuths since Christie’s time, and she recognizes many of them in her study, acknowledging not only the diverse representation of women and nationalities but also the increase of this type of literature and the acceptance it has popularly received nowadays. She summarizes Horsley’s study of the transitions of detective female fiction from the 1960s onward, from a female detective that had to resist stereotypes, to the “chick dick” (a version of the hard-boiled male investigator) who had to be like a man to be respected, especially in the police force. According to Horsley, the female contemporary perspective in this type of narrative has “regendered” detective fiction and its sub-genres such as the police procedural, the thriller and the *noir*. It also rewrites the genre when it highlights the victim’s point of view and not only that of the sleuth’s. The new roles women have gained since the end of the twentieth century have helped mold a new female crime fiction.

The interesting aspect for Dâvila Gonçalves is that many of the feminine sleuths are single women, implicitly establishing, consciously or not, that a mother could not be a true detective owing to her family role. This stereotype is beginning to change among traditionally marginalized or underrepresented groups. Black and Hispanic women are gaining a voice in contemporary detective fiction and are modifying and transforming the genre to include renovated perspectives, contexts and concepts. Dâvila Gonçalves explains how contemporary feminist crime fiction not only challenges the literary genre but also female stereotypes. She follows Horsley in his appreciation that the genre is transgressive because it shows how social and moral contexts change in time and how those changes are reflected in literature and that, therefore, the genre is continually being subverted. She asserts that, in recent times, while female writers revisit the detective fiction genre, they acknowledge present-day real situations, therefore writing a new female body. Contemporary narratives present many ambiguities due to unsolved crimes, show the citizens’ loss of empowerment, and highlight violence through the grotesque and the abject.

Dâvila Gonçalves comments that, during the eighties, Spain was in the vanguard of female crime fiction, publishing several serial novels with
female sleuth protagonists. For example, two writers, Catalan Maria-Antònia Oliver and Alicia Giménez Bartlett, created detectives Liòna Giui and police officer Petra Delicado respectively. She also mentions others like Chicana writer Lucha Corpi and her detective Gloria Damasco, and Cuban-American, Carolina García Aguilera, and her private eye Lupe Solano. Interestingly, according to Dávila Gonçalves, in Latin American detective fiction there are more amateur sleuths, as in the Golden Age of the detective novel, than professional detectives. She theorizes that, while maintaining the enigma of the typical detective story, these novels do not follow the perceived “formula” of the genre so as to open more narrative possibilities and consequently be considered more “literary”, and therefore, more serious. This is an area of study that Gonçalves has been developing and still has multiple possibilities for future research.

In her study she takes into account Horsley’s main four characteristics of the contemporary feminist crime fiction, which are the community, empathy with the victim, open-ended plots, and a strong female voice as the narrator or as the central character. She then proceeds to analyze two novels by contemporary Argentinean writer Claudia Piñeiro. Among Piñeiro’s literary production there are a series of critically acclaimed and original detective novels that transform the genre in subtle ways. Piñeiro starts with a subversion of the investigative role that is not common either in the male or the female genre: the role of a mother as sleuth. In two of her novels, Tuya (All Yours) and Elena sabe (Elena Knows), the mother is the axis of unraveling the truth of the narrative enigma. Gonçalves proposes that in these novels Piñeiro not only challenges the maleness of crime fiction, as other female authors do as well, but more interestingly the meanings of motherhood. The sleuths/mothers destabilize their gender-imposed roles. She states that these are mothers full of paradoxes and contradictions because they have agency and are transgressors; they are both heroes and victims. For the representations of motherhood, Gonçalves uses the Lacanian psychoanalytic approach delineated principally by Julia Kristeva in the texts mentioned above. For analyses of the novels, she reviews Kristeva’s studies on the intrinsic desire of motherhood, the dark criminal side of the liberated woman, the abject and crises in families, the process of separation from the mother (the Lacanian symbolic order), and the feeling of solitude and exile from women’s own bodies, bringing melancholy and depression.

Although the two novels are considered crime fiction because in both there are murders and two main characters that search for the truth of those crimes, the narrative language is different. While the central murder and the family crisis in Tuya are depicted ironically, Elena sabe is an
introspective piece with philosophical undertones. Nevertheless, both texts maintain one of the characteristics intrinsic in the hard-boiled detective fiction: social critique. In Tuya it becomes clear as the narration continues that the mother is part of the reason for the crisis in her own family, owing to her obsession with maintaining the appearance of a perfect household, even though her husband is unfaithful. Her increasingly eccentric behavior serves to expose the hypocrisy and debasement of the white, upper-middle class of Argentina. She transforms herself from an astute mother to a woman bent on saving herself at all costs. In Elena sabe, the author criticizes the exorbitant cost of medical expenses and society’s blind eye toward the elderly while unveiling the deep sadness of a mother searching for the assassin of her daughter. In the end, sickly Elena finds a truth that has been self-evident. In this novel, old age and sickness are metaphors for cruelty and abandonment, realities both Elena and the reader must face.

The portrayal of postmodern and postfeminist female characters in crime fiction where ambiguity colors motivations, what is forgotten, and the truth, is well analyzed by Dâvila Gonçalves. This summary of the main theoretical ideas underlined in her study serves as an introduction to her chapter.

IV: Feminist Discourse and Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism embraces the necessary critical approaches that agree with the ideological interpretation of postmodern Latin American feminism today. As Michael Chapman states in his article “Postcolonialism: A Literary Turn”:

… postcolonialism has come to describe heterogeneous, though linked, groupings of critical enterprises: a critique of Western totalizing narratives; a revision of the Marxian class project; utilization of both post-structural enquiry (the displaced linguistic subject) and postmodern pursuit (skepticism of the truth claims of Cartesian individualism); a marker of voices of pronouncement by non-resident, ‘Third-World’ intellectual cadres in ‘First World’ universities (7).

Nothing is more appropriate to defining postcolonial theory than the term “heterogeneous”, which is irrevocably linked to its description. In this critical framework this term defines the way feminist representation is taking shape in twenty-first century Latin American narrative. This theory can be used toward the portrayal of women’s struggles to find ways to survive the subordination under a patriarchal establishment. Chapman’s statement about the postmodern pursuit is one of the main issues of the
contemporary Colombian feminist narrative, specifically, the two novels analyzed in the chapter: *El eco de las mentiras* (*The Echo of Lies*) by Lucía Cristina Ardila, and *Hay ciertas cosas que una no puede hacer descalza* (*There are Things that a Women Can’t Do Barefoot*) by Margarita García Robayo.

Chapman’s “Third World” groups can be used to describe Latin American contemporary feminist narrative fiction, which is not only embedded in “Third World” categorization, but also by the definition of gender. Continuing with Chapman, another unavoidable idea to take into consideration when trying to establish an ideological approach to postcolonialism is the following:

> In its discursive categorizations—its Foucauldian acts of enunciation by which the postcolonial formulates the condition of its own possibility (see Foucault 1970)—postcolonial theory predominates as sense-maker, or event maker, over and above the experiential terrain to which its theory directs its diagnostic or emblematic or, too often, its obscurantist pronunciations (8).

This theoretical approach does not have an explicit definition of its exegesis as stated in the previous paragraph; nevertheless, it is precisely for that reason that this theory can be useful in describing how the subordinated groups are elaborating their own individual ways of representation.

It is relevant to establish the context in which the feminist Latin American narrative of the twenty-first century appears. There is a need to clarify that its way of representation is due to its specific historical context. The postcolonial times are characterized by open expressions and the ideological struggles of minority groups oppressed by the dominant power. It is easy to guess that the ideologies that reacted against the oppression developed strength in their ideological representation during the postcolonial era.

What makes possible today the recognition of marginalized and minority groups is cultural globalization. On the one hand, the media serves to extend the power of the dominant cultures, but on the other it also serves to differentiate and compare the factions that make up our society in the world. Minorities have sought their specificity and are in need of expressing their disagreement with the cultural and sociopolitical environment. Minority groups have finally found the time to raise their issues, and are in need of exposing their specific battles because the globalized media constantly displays what is happening in the world in which women live, and within which they must define themselves.
In Colombia, discrimination against minority groups has been disguised by the segregation manipulated by economic power, which leads to classism by exclusion. Social classes are then determined by economic power; what prevails in Colombian society in overcoming the social discrimination is the level of education and the economic capacity of its members. Logically the economic power and the level of education are governed by the social class to which people belong. The process of promotion in the social class becomes a “vicious cycle”. The ability to ascend in the social level has made minority groups raise objectives that are not specifically established by race or culture, but individual goals that are determined by the need to ascend in the social pyramid. We can affirm that the Colombian feminist narratives of the twenty-first century have developed from an individual and fragmentary struggle which is due to the historical context of postcolonialism and postmodernism.

Novels in this chapter represent feminist characters that express an ideology against what has been called “europeizante” (Europeanization), a term used by José Antonio Figueroa in his dissertation entitled “El realismo mágico, vallenato y violencia política en el Caribe colombiano” (“Magic Realism, ‘Vallenato’ and Political Violence in the Colombian Caribbean”). The characters are shaped in the search of affirmation of an identity that has been denied by the dominant power that surrounds them. It is in a way an act of liberation of the marginal and marginalized culture of women embedded in the Europeanizing tradition that dominates from the colonial period to the present.

Postcolonial times in Latin America, specifically in Colombia, are characterized by the acceptance of an identity formed by diverse races and cultures. In Latin America, cultures have gone through stages in which the search for identity was the main objective. An identity based on the mixture of races and cultures marks a fundamental difference from other colonized countries. We can say that this search for identity was expressed in the Latin American narrative during the twentieth century. What we find today is an identity charged with all its advantages and disadvantages and, at the same time, with an awareness of the European cultural heritage. This awareness of the cultural Europeanization allows women to articulate in the feminist narrative some issues of representation against the dominant power that is based on the cultural heritage that took shape in colonial times.

The contemporary narrative allows one to appreciate new lines that respond to the postmodern era in which deconstruction and skepticism respond to the ideology of postcolonial times. For this reason it can be stated that the Colombian feminist narrative presents a thematic concern