

# Shades of the Planet

---

AMERICAN LITERATURE AS WORLD LITERATURE

Edited by

Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS  
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling, 1816–1906* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 131–49.

50. George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature: Or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, ed. David Lowenthal (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 70, 46, 201.

51. See for example Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 104–5.

52. Marsh, *Man and Nature*, 282–83, 439, 65, 36.

53. To Charles Eliot Norton, May 24, 1871, quoted in Lowenthal's "Introduction" to Marsh, *Man and Nature*, xi.

54. Marsh, *Man and Nature*, 441–42.

## CHAPTER 10

## At the Borders of American Crime Fiction

Rachel Adams

A CASE INVOLVING WOMEN, MONEY, AND MURDER. A darkened room where two men confront one another. A disillusioned investigator. The friend who betrayed him by "going Mexican." The intimacies of male bonding sundered. Forty years after the publication of Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1951), Michael Connelly revives these plot elements for his best-selling crime novel, *The Black Ice* (1993).<sup>1</sup> Both novels are set in Los Angeles, where their detective-protagonists struggle to preserve the reputations of men who appear to have committed suicide under suspicious circumstances. Both crimes have ties to Mexico that require the detective to cross the border during the course of his investigation. In the end, the alleged victims are found alive, having faked their own deaths to get away with murder. Each man's slide into degeneracy is indicated by his increasing identification with Mexico, and the transformation of his physical features from white to "Mexican." His passage across the border signals the surrender of his values, relationships, and core aspects of his identity.

This is where the similarities between Connelly and Chandler come to an end. Published in the same year as the signing of NAFTA, *The Black Ice* reflects the extent to which relations between the United States and Mexico have changed in the decades since the publication of *The Long Goodbye*. Although Connelly's protagonist Harry Bosch is as tough-minded and individualistic as Chandler's Philip Marlowe, he operates in a world where the professional private eye is obsolete. A lone detective is no match for the transnational crime rings that plague contemporary Los Angeles. The files, computer databases, and institutional resources needed to track their movements are available only to those working within a law enforcement agency. Bosch is a member of the Los Angeles Police Department, where his breaches of protocol cause constant friction with his superiors. Whereas Marlowe's case concerns interpersonal, domestic matters—a bad marriage leads to conflicts over love, money, and, ultimately, murder—Bosch's concerns rivalry among powerful international drug cartels. And whereas Marlowe perceives the border as a sparsely populated, liminal wasteland, Bosch's borderlands are teeming with vehicular traffic, commerce, and industrial activity. In order to continue his investigation on the other side, he must contend with a foreign system of law

enforcement that requires him to collaborate with his Mexican counterparts. The forty years from the publication of *The Long Goodbye* to *The Black Ice* mark not only material changes in U.S.-Mexico relations, but also the evolution of detective fiction itself, which has increasingly recognized links between crimes against individuals and the transnational criminal networks that operate on the underside of the global economy. The evolution of this popular genre should encourage us to read beyond the borders of the nation to trace out the circuits of intercultural contact and cross-pollination that are becoming increasingly important to understandings of American literary history.

As the detective novel turns to the globalization of crime, it acknowledges borders as an ever more important narrative locale. When Chandler's Marlowe remarked that "Tijuana is not Mexico. No border town is anything but a border town," he indicated the marginality of the region.<sup>2</sup> As a resident of Los Angeles, he perceives border towns as isolated, provincial, and unique unto themselves. This view would become increasingly untenable once contemporary globalization began to affect the U.S.-Mexico border in the 1960s and 1970s. The decades following World War II saw a period of rapid development spurred by the buildup of U.S. military bases, a booming tourist industry, and the arrival of the *maquiladoras* in the 1960s. The implementation of NAFTA in 1994 turned the region into a primary artery in the global economy, of vital concern to national and international relations.<sup>3</sup> During the same period, the U.S. government was coming to recognize cross-border crime as a national security concern.<sup>4</sup> The erosion of economic borders that gave rise to legally sanctioned forms of globalization also encouraged the internationalization of a brand of criminals political scientist Peter Andreas has labeled "clandestine transnational actors, . . . nonstate actors who operate across national borders in violation of state laws and who attempt to evade law enforcement efforts."<sup>5</sup> This new type of criminal poses a problem for law enforcement, whose jurisdictional authority typically ends at national borders.<sup>6</sup> As Bartosz H. Stanislawski and Margaret G. Hermann have argued, international policing efforts have lagged far behind the evolution of powerful clandestine networks, which seek out "black spots" in the vicinity of national borders where "weak state structures and high levels of corruption [provide] a lawless and relatively sovereignty-free environment."<sup>7</sup> So wealthy and powerful are these networks that their influence is often dispersed far beyond the borderlands where their operations are based.

These new circumstances have made the U.S.-Mexico border a popular setting for contemporary crime fiction, which takes its cue, in part, from the changing face of North American crime. However, the detective novel has never been a simple reflection of its historical context. At its most basic level, the genre registers disruptions in the social order, seeking imagined resolution to problems of morality, injustice, and the law that may seem insurmountable

outside the domain of fiction. Because their themes and conventions have proved to be extremely portable, detective novels can now be found in virtually any part of the world.<sup>8</sup> North America, where hard-boiled crime writers first transformed the genre in the 1920s, is now home to a rich array of revisionist detective fictions. One of the most remarkable features of these newer works is a geographic diversity that stretches from Quebec to Chiapas. But a survey of contemporary detective fiction also reveals the extent to which crime continues to be associated with particular locations and communities. While murder is almost unthinkable in the sleepy Canadian town of Algonquin Bay depicted by Giles Blunt's *Forty Words for Sorrow*, "going Mexican" continues to be as potent a signifier of corruption in literature today as it was in 1951.<sup>9</sup> Thus, although there is a growing body of crime writing focused on the U.S.-Canadian border, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are a far more common setting for American detective fiction because of the region's long-standing association with lawlessness and violence, and its current struggles with the most negative consequences of globalization.<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary crime writing set along the U.S.-Mexico border exemplifies the globalization of the detective novel since it is at once regionally specific—in that it substitutes Ciudad Juárez, El Paso, Tijuana, or Calexico for the mean streets of Los Angeles and New York—and conscious of the international, and potentially planetary, implications of the crimes it represents.<sup>11</sup> As such, it provides an opportunity to link local problems to global concerns. In what follows, I consider the work of three authors—Rolando Hinojosa, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, and Alicia Gaspar de Alba—whose revisionist crime writing presses at the boundaries of the genre's traditional forms and purposes. Whereas the detective's most fundamental task has always been to bring new perspective to the scene of the crime, these authors grant the investigator a special form of knowledge that Walter Mignolo has called "border gnosis." Derived "from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system," border gnosis provides the detective with alternative understandings of the relations among crime, lawfulness, and community.<sup>12</sup> For Hinojosa, this means introducing new characters and settings to the police procedural, a subgenre of detective fiction ideally suited to his concern with community and cross-border collaboration. His imagined solution to the problem of global crime is the solidification of regional, transnational ties. The more radical and nihilistic Taibo revives the figure of the independent hard-boiled investigator in a context where law enforcement and all other forms of institutional authority are as immoral as the worst criminals he encounters. Addressing an international readership, Taibo's detective fiction produces counterhistories intended to create possibilities for identification across the boundaries of language and nation as a corrective to government corruption and the breakdown of community. Gaspar de Alba turns to the detective novel to bring a single, real-

life crime—the deaths of hundreds of women in the El Paso/Ciudad Juárez area—to the attention of English-language readers, who have largely remained ignorant of the problems plaguing the region. Focusing on a female investigator who uncovers the particularly brutal consequences of globalization for poor women, Gaspar de Alba draws attention to the gendering of transnational crime, as well as the crime writing tradition. Her work seeks to expose violence and injustice, but it also recognizes the detective novel's potential to galvanize political action. Rarely do detectives in any of these works find satisfaction in identifying individual culprits, whose crimes are linked to networks too vast to be apprehended or brought to justice. Yet despite this apparent failure of the genre, each author suggests that globalization has opened up new possibilities for the production and circulation of literature, making it a more potent tool for addressing social problems, seeking justice, and forging solidarities across the lines of nation and community.

#### CULTURE AND "THE MYTH OF THE CONTINENTS"

While this essay is focused on detective fiction from a particular region, it is also inspired by the broader question of what it would mean to reframe the study of American literature in transnational, rather than national, terms. My own approach to this question is to consider the continent as a unit of cultural analysis. Continents provide an ideal, and largely untapped, opportunity to examine the interrelationship of geography, culture, and politics that has been central to much recent work in American literary studies. Because they are neither sovereign political territories nor determined by any particular topographical logic, continents may be the most unstable and fallacious of all geographic configurations. In their book *The Myth of the Continents*, Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen argue that this spatial fiction has had particularly deleterious effects on geographical understanding. Yet what makes myths troubling to geographers is precisely why they are valuable to cultural critics, because they are rich repositories of collective beliefs and values. Acknowledging the fictitiousness of continents helps to expose the constructedness of the more familiar spatial metaphors—regions, nations, hemispheres, worlds—that are used to understand and categorize literature. Yet continents are a fiction with very real consequences, as is evidenced by recent debates over membership in the European Union. They are the building blocks of our most basic understanding of the globe. From elementary school to the highest levels of foreign policy and international governance, continents determine economic and political alignments, as well as the flow of people and goods around the world. Given their vital role in geopolitical relations, it is worth asking about the *cultural* impact of "the myth of the continents,"<sup>13</sup> which seems destined to persist despite the protests of professional geographers.

Intracontinental borders, which are the focus of this essay, have played a crucial part in the formation of North American cultural history. Traditionally, these borders have provided a rationale for the division of North American literature into three discrete categories, which suggest, artificially, that Canadian, U.S., and Mexican cultures can be best understood as self-enclosed units, each defined by questions of national identity and history.<sup>14</sup> Some specialists in Canadian and Mexican studies have sought to maintain those categories against what they perceive as an imperialistic attempt by American studies to engulf contiguous fields. However, others see the mutual benefits of situating American literatures within histories of transnational, diasporic, and cross-border contact. Many scholars, including those collected in this volume, have proposed that new understandings of geography offer promising ways to reconfigure Americanist literary study. My attention to the continent, a spatial unit that is widely used by geographers, sociologists, economists, and historians, but rarely by literary or cultural critics, is intended as a contribution to these efforts. One potential benefit of this approach is that it can examine localities, such as the U.S.-Mexico border regions, within the context of broader national, and international, relations, as this essay will attempt to do by analyzing literary responses to NAFTA and the impact of globalization.

My understanding of North America treats it as a subset of the more well-developed field of hemispheric studies. Recent scholarship that takes the hemisphere as a unit of analysis has produced new maps of multilingual, trans-American cultural filiation. Yet "the Americas" can often seem an inchoate and unwieldy category. North America is a region of the American hemisphere that emphasizes cultural relations between the U.S. and its closest neighbors. To study the continent is to foreground the question of neighborliness, to acknowledge the impact of geography and shared borders on the cultures of the United States, Mexico, and Canada, which necessarily have a different relationship to one another than to other nations. With the onset of Cold War and the declining emphasis on hemispheric alignments, these neighborly relations became all the more important. The implementation of NAFTA and heightened security concerns since September 11, 2001, solidified the notion of North America as a geopolitical unit, which some feared might become a "fortress continent"<sup>15</sup> cordoned off from a world community. A continental perspective seeks to better understand how the fiction of "North America" might reverberate at the level of cultural production. For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on how a particular genre has registered the impact of NAFTA—a potent symptom of the perils and possibilities of "North America" within the global economy—on a specific region. Although I discuss the problems of neighborliness, border management, and cultural and linguistic diversity within particular communities, I hope it will also serve as a model for the comparative study of popular genres at other North American borders, or on other continents.

## THE BORDERLANDERS AND THE POLICE

Until the late twentieth century, the law stopped at the United States' southern border. At least that is the conclusion one might draw from reading hard-boiled fiction, a genre invented on North American soil. In the work of classic practitioners of the genre, Mexico is essentially outside the law, a space where the police are incompetent and corrupt, and where criminals, perverts, and losers go to indulge their appetites for vice. Mexican lawlessness is at once dangerous and seductive to streetwise detectives who walk a fine line at the edge of morality and lawfulness. Criminals who flee south to escape identification often end up losing themselves altogether, engulfed by the tantalizing prospect of "going Mexican." As we have seen, the association of Mexico with moral degeneracy can be found in a novel as recent as Connelly's *The Black Ice*. It can be traced to such early works of hard-boiled fiction as Dashiell Hammett's 1927 story "The Golden Horseshoe," in which a petty criminal escapes into Mexico, where he assumes the identity of a dead man in order to extort money from his wife back in the United States.<sup>16</sup> The more extreme case occurs in Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, where the fickle and deceptive Terry Lennox undergoes plastic surgery, his darkened skin and changed features literally transforming him into a Mexican. He enhances the surgical alterations to his body with cosmetic changes such as an effeminate perfume and dainty eyebrows, as well as the adoption of overly expressive body language.<sup>17</sup> The extent of Lennox's fall is figured as a geographic descent from North to South when he explains to Marlowe, "I was born in Montreal. I'll be a Mexican national pretty soon now."<sup>18</sup> His statement implies that becoming a "Mexican national" will conclude his slide into utter degradation, permanently severing the bond of friendship he shared with Marlowe. James M. Cain's *Serenade* (1937) emphasizes the primitive aspects of Mexico, where Americans go to indulge their most naked, bestial instincts. His protagonist, the American John Howard Sharp, describes the penchant for violence he discovers in the Mexican populace: "About half the population of the country go around with pearl-handled automatics on their hips, and the bad part about these guns is that they shoot, and after they shoot nothing is ever done about it."<sup>19</sup> Cain's Mexico is a place of primitive savagery, where an innate brutality combines with a total absence of law enforcement.

Orson Welles would try to challenge these stereotypes in his 1957 film noir *Touch of Evil*, which pits the tough, honest Mexican detective Miguel Vargas against the corrupt American Hank Quinlan. *Touch of Evil* reverses the conventions of hard-boiled fiction by making a Mexican its hero and advocating collaboration between law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border. But Welles's vision of neighborly community is undermined by his decision to cast Charlton Heston as Vargas, suggesting that an actual Mexican would

be unsuited to play the part. The spectacle of a white actor in brownface turns the character's Mexican nationality into a matter of race, while Heston's garbled Spanish further distinguishes him from the actual Spanish speakers in the film. And despite the fact that Vargas is part of a police force, he is the only Mexican law enforcement figure to appear during the entire movie, which otherwise relegates Mexicans to predictable roles as cartoonish villains, drug addicts, and vandals. Many of these clichés endure in Steven Soderbergh's more recent depiction of cross-border crime in *Traffic* (2000). The film is intended to indict the U.S. War on Drugs for its failure to combat the drug habits of U.S. consumers and the powerful Mexican drug cartels that supply them. Yet despite its manifest effort to lay the blame on both sides of the border, *Traffic* relies uncritically on an array of familiar stereotypes. Whereas the United States is pictured in cool blues, the Mexican scenes are shot through a lurid yellow filter that suggests an atmosphere of corruption and decay. This visual device is echoed at the level of plot, which is weighted heavily toward the well-rounded stories of families in the United States while focusing its Mexican sequences almost exclusively on the corruption that extends from ordinary cops to wealthy drug cartels, the military, and the highest levels of government.

Beginning in the 1980s, Chicano/a authors began to challenge such narrative clichés about the border by writing detective fiction that featured more well-developed Mexican and Mexican American characters in the context of complex, historically informed representations of border culture. The Chicano detective novel is one instance of the general diversification of crime writing in the United States. In place of the working-class white protagonists created by Hammett, Chandler, and Cain are investigators who come from many different cultures. In keeping with the detective's changing complexion, the mean streets of Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York city have relocated to a variety of geographic locales.<sup>20</sup> The new face of the genre is reflected in Karen Tei Yamashita's 1997 *Tropic of Orange*, where Gabriel, a Mexican American character who is a fan of Southern California's hard-boiled tradition, fantasizes about writing his own novel featuring "an L.A. Chicano private dick."<sup>21</sup> It is not surprising that Gabriel imagines the detective in his own image since identitarian concerns have become an important aspect of U.S. crime writing, which now includes detectives of every conceivable gender, racial, and ethnic background.

Rolando Hinojosa is one of the earliest and most acclaimed Chicano authors to work in the detective genre. His crime novels are part of an ongoing fictional project that creates a thick portrait of Mexican American community through the use of multiple perspectives and literary genres. Hinojosa's Klail City cycle, which has been compared in complexity and scope to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha or Gabriel García Márquez's Macondo, consists of a series of interrelated novels about the fictional communities of Barrones,

Tamaulipas, and Belken County, Texas, the southernmost point of land entry into Mexico. A scholar and teacher, as well as a novelist, Hinojosa has dedicated his career to the study and representation of regional Chicano culture. The portrait of a hybrid border culture provided by the Klail City novels is rooted in his own experiences as a native of Mercedes, Texas, who was born and raised by an Anglo mother and Latino father. But Hinojosa's concern with a specific region does not make him provincial. As he described it, "I am Mexicano and I'm a Texas Mexican. But if I was born in this country . . . I can draw from all over the world for my work. What I'm contributing . . . is really American literature."<sup>22</sup> Hinojosa insists on situating Chicano culture within America, but his is an America that extends across the borders of the United States to Mexico and beyond.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, his comment suggests that being a writer of American literature means espousing a planetary sensibility that is open to influences from a multitude of regions and cultures. Informed by such cosmopolitan convictions, Hinojosa's novels are firmly rooted in a local community that spans the U.S.-Mexico border, where "going Mexican" is a fact of everyday life, rather than a sign of irreparable decline.

Hinojosa uses the detective novel, among other literary forms, to articulate a mode of American counternationalism that privileges local, binational social formations over state-sanctioned versions of national identity. His chosen mode is the police procedural, which is ideally suited to his concern with community and regional belonging because it emphasizes collaboration and teamwork within the confines of institutions rather than the alienated individualism of the private eye.<sup>24</sup> The move away from the hard-boiled hero reflects an evolution in the scope and nature of illegal activity portrayed by the detective novel. Crimes like terrorism and drug and arms trafficking must be combated with highly specialized technologies and teams of professionals that make the private eye seem like an anachronism. Even when focused on an individual detective, police procedural explores the way partnership and institutional hierarchies can both constrain and enable the task of problem solving. When an investigation crosses national borders, it introduces an added complication, the willingness and capacity of various state agencies to cooperate with one another. The transnational investigation is encumbered by additional layers of bureaucracy, which are precisely what makes borders so attractive to criminal networks seeking to exploit the cracks between different national institutions.<sup>25</sup> Authors of ethnic American detective fiction imagine that the protagonist who has grown up negotiating between different cultural and linguistic traditions is uniquely suited to the challenges of such cross-border investigation.

Hinojosa's two detective novels, *Partners in Crime* (1985) and *Ask a Policeman* (1998), are set in the fictional Belken County, a community that straddles the international border. The local population retains a deep sense of regional history, exemplified by the Mexican judge who quips that the protagonist's

surname "Buenrostro" is a sign of the detective's kinship with "one of our illustrious Santa Anna's lost children."<sup>26</sup> His allusion to the infamous Mexican general responsible for losing Texas to U.S. forces in 1848 suggests that history endures in daily interactions among border dwellers. Hinojosa's descriptive style reinforces this historical sensibility by linking current cross-border relations to the past. One telling passage uses background detail to depict the complex ties between the two sides of the border: "The old neighborhood across from the fort, dating back to the 1850s, was now a crowded block of cheap stores and fast-food places catering mostly to the Mexican nationals who crossed the bridge daily. Many came to shop and spend American dollars, and more came to earn their dollars as maids, store clerks, gardeners, painters, carpenters, janitors, and still others to serve as pick-up day laborers paid for work done on the spot" (AP, 32). The mid-nineteenth-century fort is an architectural landmark that identifies the adjacent neighborhood by recalling a prior moment when the border was a zone of military contestation. What was once the site of armed conflict has become a commercial district where businesses owned by U.S. citizens are supported by Mexicans working at low-wage jobs on the U.S. side of the border. Their presence attests to the unequal but interdependent relationship between the two economies, which continue to bear traces of past hostilities and uneasy compromises.

Hinojosa creates a protagonist who is a border dweller ideally equipped to combat transnational crime. Rafael Buenrostro is a Chicano and senior member of his local homicide unit whose close partnership with the Anglo Cully Donovan is a model of interethnic collaboration. Their success in combating the clandestine networks that thrive along the U.S.-Mexican border zone comes from their deep familiarity with local culture, their sense of when it is appropriate to bend the rules, and their willingness to cooperate with Mexican law enforcement agencies. Interpersonal relationships that extend across the lines of racial and national identity are crucial to the smooth functioning of the Belken County Homicide Squad, where Buenrostro and Donovan are old friends as well as coworkers. When a case requires U.S. and Mexican colleagues to work together, they gather at the Lone Star restaurant for a night that "was business, and it was visiting as well; a fine, old valley custom, on both banks of the River. Newcomers chafed, but they either succumbed to the habit or they didn't succeed."<sup>27</sup> As this gathering suggests, borderlanders have their own jokes, rituals, and codes, which have more to do with membership in a regional community than with race or native language, since most are bilingual. They are suspicious of outsiders, or "*fuereños*" (PC, 117), who must submit to local custom in order to secure the necessary cooperation of regional authorities.<sup>28</sup>

*Partners in Crime* and *Ask a Policeman* explore the tensions between local and national solutions to the problem of cross-border crime. As some sociologists have recognized, border communities' distance from seats of federal power

often means that they are hostile to centralized government.<sup>29</sup> Local transnational organizations often seek strategies for subverting national legislation that they see as out of touch with the daily realities of life in a binational region. Thus when Jehu Malacara of the Klail City First National Bank learns that tellers have been bribed to stay quiet about illegal transactions, he realizes that it is “an obvious Treasury violation” but he also struggles over the appropriate action to take because he knows them personally and is “a borderer, first and last. And, as most borderers throughout the world, he had little confidence in central authority” (PC, 116). One of the ongoing conflicts in Hinojosa’s novels concerns border management, an issue that pits Buenrostro and Donovan, who seek nonmilitary solutions to crime in the region, against the bellicose district attorney Chip Valencia, who welcomes federal proposals for increased military presence in the area. While Valencia lobbies to line the border with tanks, the detectives demonstrate their commitment to nonviolence by going unarmed into the final showdown with Mexican crime boss José Antonio Gómez. Their decision is affirmed when Gómez is brought down through the combined efforts of Mexican and Anglo detectives, his only injury a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Such scenarios suggest that the best way to eradicate transnational crime is close collaboration between local law enforcement officers on both sides of the border.

Although he depicts a region plagued by a violent underground economy, Hinojosa refuses the stereotype of Mexican immorality so common in hard-boiled detective fiction. Crime thrives on the border not because of Mexicans but because of dysfunctional policies that have made clandestine activities so profitable: in the course of thirty years, for example, the activities of a local crime ring have evolved from pimping to transporting heroine, fueled by the demands of U.S. consumers who remain undeterred by efforts to police the international border. The criminals are ultimately thwarted through teamwork by U.S. and Mexican agencies, each attuned to local communities and respectful of one another. Hinojosa is virtually unique among Hispanic authors in his depiction of local law enforcement officers as modest, hardworking, and resourceful.<sup>30</sup> In an interview he claims that he sought to avoid the figure of “the crooked cop,” which he saw as a cliché of leftist writing.<sup>31</sup> His Anglo, Chicano, and Mexican detectives are true heroes in a community endangered by both the drug trade and security measures coming from national capitals of Washington, D.C. or Mexico City.

Hinojosa explains that he turned to the detective novel as a means of bringing visibility to the rising violence that the transnational drug trade had introduced into his community. *Partners in Crime* and *Ask a Policeman* are the most plot-driven, linear contributions to his Klail City series, which is known for its fragmentary, impressionistic narrative style. The turn to realism allows Hinojosa to address social issues more directly, but also to imagine solutions that affirm his longing for binational community. If the transnational criminal

represents a corrosive form of globalization, his protagonists introduce an alternative that combines respect for local institutions with an awareness of the region’s ties to the world. Even if their skillful detective work cannot fully eradicate the problem of transnational crime, it does prove the necessity of collaboration, the importance of historical perspective, and the borderlander’s enduring ties to place.

#### THE INDEPENDENT EYE OF THE MEXICAN *NEOPOLICIACO*

At the same time that Hinojosa was beginning his Klail City cycle, the Mexican *neopolicia* was coming into its own. Whereas the Anglo-American detective novel flourished in the first half of the twentieth century, critics generally agree that noteworthy examples of the genre did not begin to appear in Mexico until much later. As Braham explains, “[U]ntil the 1970s the field of Latin American detective fiction was both limited and derivative. Through simulation or parody, authors engaged the marginal status and formulaic nature of detective narrative to dramatize Latin America’s peripheral position with respect to modern Western culture.”<sup>32</sup> Things changed with the arrival of Paco Ignacio Taibo II, the most well known and prolific Mexican detective novelist of his generation. Taibo writes in a subgenre known as the *neopolicia*, which is inspired by Anglo-American hard-boiled crime writing. Whereas Hinojosa’s novels employ the police procedural to affirm the values of teamwork and institutional authority, the *neopolicia* favors the lone detective who must work independently, since the worst criminals are often officers of the law. As a character in Taibo’s *Some Clouds* remarks, “[T]he police are behind something like 79 percent of the serious crime in Mexico City.”<sup>33</sup>

When Taibo began writing crime fiction in the 1970s, he inserted himself into a market created after World War II, when cheaply produced Spanish-language detective novels enjoyed a broad readership among the Mexican public. Detective fiction in translation, which had been popular with Latin American readers since the nineteenth century, reached its apogee in the 1930s and 1940s, inspiring a host of Mexican imitators to take advantage of a ready market in the 1950s.<sup>34</sup> More recent Mexican detective novelists such as Taibo, Jorge Ibarguengoitia, Carmen Boullosa, and, more recently, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz reject these Hispanic predecessors as formulaic and derivative (“a generation of parodists and imitators,” in the words of Taibo).<sup>35</sup> Instead their models are American writers like Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and Chester Himes. Contemporary Latin American authors admire the hard-boiled novelists for their proletarian values and their ability to address a popular readership while maintaining a commitment to literary style. Widely read and deeply familiar with the genre, authors of the *neopolicia* allude frequently and knowingly to their Anglo-American precursors.

The Mexican *neopolicia* is the product of a generation that came of political age in the late 1960s. The October 1968 massacre of student protestors in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas galvanized a generation of intellectuals, some of whom turned to the detective novel as a means of social critique, making its leftist sentiments explicit in a way that would have been unimaginable to their Anglo-American precursors.<sup>36</sup> The decision to embrace a degraded form of popular literature was itself seen as a political act, a reaction against the difficult, experimental fiction of the boom generation. The impact of the events of 1968 is evident in the *neopolicia*'s disdain for the state and official institutions, its depiction of a chaotic, wild Mexico City, and skepticism about the possibilities of justice. Even though the detective is often unable to solve the crimes he investigates, the narrative of investigation becomes a means of speculating on the intellectual's role within a national and global society. When these novels are set at Mexico's northern border, they articulate an alternative vision of *mexicanidad* that counters both official versions of Mexican nationalism and the pressures of Americanization coming from the north.

The *neopolicia* depicts Mexico as a place of near anarchic corruption, where a dysfunctional state apparatus has given free reign to criminals, while ignoring the needs of ordinary citizens. These novels reflect the widespread public skepticism about official authorities that has arisen in Latin American nations unsettled by decades of short-lived and unreliable government regimes. The detective's most hated antagonists are not individuals but institutions, including the U.S. and Mexican governments, which both perpetrate and condone acts of lawless violence. Often the United States is seen as responsible for amplifying Mexico's problems by pressuring it toward rapid modernization; imposing contradictory immigration and trade policies; and infecting Mexicans with its crass, consumerist mentality. In a context where crime almost invariably involves the state, it is crucial that the investigator be a private eye who obeys no authority other than his own moral code. This figure, who has come to seem outdated to many U.S. detective writers, is taken up by authors of the Mexican *neopolicia* as the fitting embodiment of the David-and-Goliath struggle that pits the people against crime syndicates, police, and the state. His temperament and style are cut from the hard-boiled mold, although Taibo's protagonist, Hector Belascoarán Shayne, underscores his leftist politics by rejecting the label "private" investigator in favor of "independent."

Taibo's work is published by major international presses, translated into many languages, and has a large readership among non-Mexican audiences, although it employs highly specific Mexican contexts and uses a local vernacular that Ilan Stavans describes as "replete with malapropisms, offensive insults, and street syntax," which defies translation.<sup>37</sup> The epicenter of Taibo's fictional universe is Mexico City, which he establishes with the kind of thick description that Raymond Chandler lavished on Los Angeles. Like the British Chan-

andler, who claimed California as his adopted home, Taibo is a Spanish immigrant who settled permanently in Mexico City. Just as Chandler's Marlowe is a product of particular California locales and lifestyles, Taibo's detective Belascoarán Shayne is born of an urban, Mexican context, which, for better or worse, is the place where he most belongs. Comparing his setting to Chandler's, Taibo remarked in an interview: "the differences are in the structure of the lone hero, the outsider: a vocation for solitude, a fidelity to friends (in Marlowe's case) and to certain obsessions (in Belascoarán Shayne's case). Raymond Chandler's character moves within rational histories whereas mine is surrounded by a chaotic atmosphere, Kafkaesque and corrupt: Mexico City."<sup>38</sup> As Belascoarán Shayne walks the streets of this massive, chaotic, and decentralized modern metropolis,

The city opened up to him like a monster, like the fetid entrails of a whale, or the insides of a discarded tin can. In its few hours of sleep, the sleep of a tired man, of a worker worn out by his labor, the city became a character, a subject, signals, and would blow breezes full on strange intentions. The jungle of television antennas was bombarded by wavelengths, messages, commercials. The asphalt, the shop windows, the walls, the cars, the *taco* vendor stalls, the stray dogs all made room for him at the beat of his steps.<sup>39</sup>

In this passage, a dirty, proletarian Mexico acquires the status of a well-developed character. The use of colloquialisms and references to particular Mexican places and histories anchors Taibo's fiction in a very specific urban setting. But because that setting is the vast, cosmopolitan Mexico of the late twentieth century, it is also tied to a global economy and culture.

Like modern Mexico, the name of Taibo's protagonist attests to his cosmopolitan genealogy. The name "Belascoarán" points to the Basque ancestry of Hector's father, who fought with Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War. Hector continues the Basque legacy in his fierce independence and willingness to resort to violence in the pursuit of justice. Association with the Basques, who some believe may have sailed to North America hundreds of years before Columbus, also establishes Hector's belonging in the New World. "Shayne" signals the detective's ties to a modern America in which the United States plays a central role. It pays tribute to the Miami-based detective Michael Shayne, who is the fictional creation of author Brett Halliday. Halliday, in turn, claimed Latin American inspiration by explaining that his detective protagonist was based on a deckhand he met while working on an oil tanker off the coast of Tampico, Mexico.<sup>40</sup> The name Shayne is thus a sign of cultural symbiosis, a reminder of the unacknowledged Mexican origins of much U.S. culture, as well as the reciprocal influence exerted by that culture on contemporary Mexico.

Although their obsessions with Pepsi, female basketball stars, and American literature tie them to the United States, Taibo's protagonists are *chilangos*



(inhabitants of Mexico City) who feel profoundly alienated from the northern border, a place that Belascoarán Shayne describes as “*la frontera*, that strange name used to designate a mix of territories branded by the dubious privilege of sucking face with the United States.”<sup>41</sup> With such statements, he rejects the kind of cross-border community idealized by an author like Rolando Hinojosa. The transnational crime syndicates that plague contemporary Mexico cannot be combated through the collaboration of national law enforcement agencies, given the extreme corruption of officials on either side. In place of the binational community imagined by Hinojosa, Taibo uses the detective novel to articulate a version of *mexicanidad* that is associated neither with Mexican Americans nor with official modes of nationalism advanced by the Mexican state.

Pancho Villa—heroized for his bold and futile assault on the United States—is an important figure in Taibo’s attempt to recover alternative versions of the Mexican past. When a case takes Belascoarán Shayne to Chihuahua in *Frontera Dreams*, he identifies with the civic devotion to Villa, “guardian of the fucked-over who await his triumphant return” (FD, 55). At the museum dedicated to his memory, the detective engages in an act of historical investigation, “a hunt for the unexpected, an attempt to catch a little of the ambiance, a search for General Villa’s air of mockery” (FD, 56). A more literal form of historical recovery is the subject of Taibo’s “Morán y Pancho,” subtitled “(Notas para una novella de canallas y villistas escrita por Dash Hammett y reescrita al paso de los años por Paco Ignacio Taibo II)” (Notes for a novella about scoundrels and Villistas written by Dash Hammett and rewritten some years later by Paco Ignacio Taibo II). The story’s protagonist is the hard-boiled novelist Dashiell Hammett, who is investigating, rather than writing about, a murder and finds himself drawn into a search for the missing head of Pancho Villa, “el único general, al que los historiadores de Nueva York insistían en llamar bandolero, que había invadido los Estados Unidos” (the only general, who the historians of New York insist on calling a bandit, who had invaded the United States).<sup>42</sup> Over the course of his investigation, Hammett repeatedly crosses the U.S.-Mexico border until he finally tracks down the head. Although his quest is successful, the story ends with an ambiguity typical of Taibo since the ultimate fate of the head is left unclear: Hammett may have thrown it into the sea, concealed it in his neighbor’s yard, or, most ironically, buried it under a statue of Lincoln “para que los niños norteamericanos rindan homenaje sin saberlo a Pancho Villa” (so that North American children pay unknowing homage to Pancho Villa) (223). Taibo delights in the possibility that the remains of Pancho Villa might sully the memorial to a revered figure in U.S. national consciousness, as well as the idea that Mexico was a formative place in the life and career of one of the United States’ foremost authors of detective fiction. This tale of historical recovery also becomes a critique of contemporary Mexico when Hammett’s Mexican friend Raul laments that his

compatriots no longer deserve the missing head, “aunque me hubiera gustado guardarla para los otros años que vendrán” (although I would have liked to save it for the coming years) (222). The counterhistory of Pancho Villa provides Taibo with an opportunity to recall a moment of bold resistance against the United States, but also to criticize Mexico’s failure to live out the promises of the revolution. “If novels were good for something,” one of his characters reflects, “it was to tell us what the others were like that we could not be like. It was not, as they thought in the first half of the twentieth century, a means of instruction, which entailed lectures, morals, advice, images to imitate and deny. . . . Even less was it raw material for linguistic experiments. . . . Literature was a resource for the future, the stuff of premonitions: a book of schedules, a real proposed chapter for intervening in real life.”<sup>43</sup> Taking seriously the notion of literature as “a resource for the future,” Taibo believes in the power of the written word to shore up alternative historical knowledge that might point the way toward a more egalitarian social order. He finds the detective novel, with its broad popular appeal and concern with problems of crime and morality, an ideal form for such an undertaking.

Recently, Taibo has further probed the relationship between literature and political agency in a detective novel written collaboratively with Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation), which was published serially in the Mexican newspaper *La jornada* between December 2004 and February 2005. The partnership between an acclaimed author and the charismatic guerilla leader promises to take the genre in new directions. Widely available via the Internet and contracted to international publishers who will translate the completed narrative into multiple languages, *Muertos incómodos* (The Awkward Dead) is intended to reach a large audience of readers around the world.<sup>44</sup> The finished novel consists of twelve chapters alternately written by its two authors, the sections by Taibo featuring Hector Belascoarán Shayne and the sections by Marcos featuring a Zapatista detective named Elias Contreras (who also happens to be dead). The two investigators meet in Mexico City, where they are tracking a man who is responsible for a wide range of crimes, including participation in the “guerra sucia” against the insurgents in Chiapas; collusion with the Bush government; and plundering the environment for financial gain.

The plot of *Muertos incómodos*, which is thin and often veers into the absurd, frequently digresses into metaphysical speculation (in the chapters penned by Taibo) and political critique (in the Marcos chapters). It is highly topical, remarking on current events such as the videotapes of Osama Bin Laden, the controversial arrival of Wal-Mart in Teotihuacán, and the indictment of Mexico’s popular mayor and presidential contender, Manuel López Obrador. It represents a Mexico fully saturated by globalization, which appears in its more positive form in the international band of comrades gathered in Chiapas to participate in the revolution, and, more negatively, in official con-

spiracies to decimate the region's natural resources for export and the sinister activities of an ultra-right-wing Mexican group called El Yunque, which has ties to Europe and other parts of Latin America. In many ways, the investigation seems doomed from the outset, given the view articulated in an early chapter written by Marcos that "EL asesino no va a regresar a la escena del crimen, simple y sencillamente porque él es la escena del crimen. EL asesino es el sistema. El sistema sí. Cuando hay un crimen hay que buscar al culpable arriba, no abajo. El MAL es el sistema y los MALOS son quienes están al servicio del sistema" (The assassin will not return to the scene of the crime, simply and sincerely because he is the scene of the crime. The assassin is the system. The system itself. When there is a crime, it is necessary to look above not below. The evil is the system and the evildoers are those who serve the system).<sup>45</sup> At the same time that it cannot hope to defeat "the system," *Muertos incómodos*, much like Taibo's previous work, uses the detective genre as a moral compass and as a means of advocating resistance against wrongdoing, even if justice cannot be served. As one character reminds Contreras, the detective's task is to "[busca] para encontrar al mal y al malo y lo [mira] que reciben su castigo por sus maldades" (seek to find evil and evildoers and see that they receive punishment for their wrongdoing).<sup>46</sup>

Taibo's appropriation of hard-boiled crime writing takes the American detective novel to uncharted territory. Like Hinojosa, his subject is the globalization of crime. However, as he views it, the culprits are not only transnational criminals but law enforcement and politicians. In order to maintain his integrity, the detective must shun all institutional ties. Instead of focusing on a single locality, Taibo situates his critique of the global economy in many locations, from the northern border states to Mexico City to the jungles of Chiapas. And in place of the multicultural cross-border community affirmed by Hinojosa, Taibo imagines solidarity among populations that may be spatially dispersed but share common experiences of oppression. They may travel great distances to defend a cause they believe in or, thanks to the Internet, may communicate instantly with one another. Taibo's investigators cannot hope to bring down the massive networks of corruption they uncover, but they can reveal counterhistories that point out both the ideological investments behind official revisions of history and provide models for action in the future.

#### WOMEN ON THE LINE: A CASE FOR THE PLANET

Hinojosa and Taibo provide the detective novel with new characters and geographic locations, while preserving its focus on male bonding and masculine concerns.<sup>47</sup> And despite the fact that both authors allude to actual crimes that have occurred along the U.S.-Mexico border, neither has written of the region's greatest unsolved crime: the missing women of Ciudad Juárez. Since

1993, hundreds of women have been abducted, raped and subjected to other forms of sexual violation, and murdered. Many bodies turn up in the surrounding desert; others are never found. Most of the victims are poor migrants who have moved north to the border to work in the *maquiladora* plants. Women occupy a particularly charged position in the local economy of Ciudad Juárez as they are the primary source of factory labor and are also associated with the city's booming sex industry.<sup>48</sup> In the last eleven years, over three hundred women have been murdered, and 800 more have been reported missing, yet authorities have failed to find a culprit or identify a motivation for the crimes. Often they blame the victims themselves for flaunting their sexuality and being careless about their personal safety. Victims' advocates trace the onset of the crimes to the implementation of NAFTA, arguing that they are an indirect consequence of globalization in the region. The absence of any plausible solution has given rise to numerous popular theories, which attribute the crime to serial killers, satanic cults, organ smugglers, and a trade in "white slavery" or snuff films.<sup>49</sup> Given the magnitude of the case and the abundance of sensational culprits, it is striking that borderlands detective fiction, which so often takes its cue from contemporary events, has paid it so little attention. This silence was broken with the 2005 publication of Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*, which features a female investigator who probes the gendered dimensions of violence along the U.S.-Mexico border. An author who has worked in many genres, Gaspar de Alba turns to the detective novel as a means of drawing the world's attention to what might seem to be a local crisis. She also uses *Desert Blood* to reflect on the capacity of crime fiction to intervene in the social problems it represents.

With *Desert Blood*, Gaspar de Alba inserts herself into the recently established categories of feminist and Chicano/a detective fiction. Her protagonist, Ivon Villa, is a lesbian who has returned to her birthplace in El Paso in the hope of adopting a child. Like Taibo, Gaspar de Alba invests her character with a proud transnational genealogy. The "daughter of a man who considered himself a great-grandson of the hardheaded Pancho Villa and an Apache woman, . . . she did not bend or break easily" (17). With such bloodlines, Ivon becomes a figure for a binational Chicano community with a long history of rebellion and enduring ties to place. When her teenage sister Irene is abducted, Villa is appalled at the inaction of U.S. and Mexican authorities. She embarks on her own investigation in a desperate effort to save her sister's life. Ultimately, Villa succeeds in rescuing Irene from a perverse crime ring that makes snuff films for sale on the Internet. As she searches for her sister, Villa is confronted by the unsolved cases of the dead and missing women of Ciudad Juárez. By creating parallels between the cases of Irene and the *maquiladora* workers, the novel underscores that all of these crimes are the product of dramatic changes within a community brought into sudden contact with the global economy.

Like both Hinojosa and Taibo, Gaspar de Alba's appropriation of the detective novel invites speculation about her generic choices. Her protagonist is not only an impromptu investigator but an instructor of Chicano/a Studies who is struggling to finish her dissertation. The urgent problem of Irene's disappearance threatens to jeopardize Villa's future as a scholar, since she is facing a looming deadline that must be met or she risks losing her job. The unfinished dissertation is a device that allows the author—herself a scholar of Chicano/a Studies—to weigh the merits of different generic forms. On the one hand, Villa's skills as a researcher are valuable. Her background in cultural studies makes her an effective investigator who “always look[s] for the historical and cultural context of whatever she was researching.”<sup>50</sup> Gaspar de Alba's own reliance on scholarly sources is evident in the acknowledgments printed at the end of the novel. On the other, the dead women of Ciudad Juárez make Villa's scholarship seem irrelevant. At the novel's end, Villa realizes that “she ha[s] exactly eight days to finish the last chapter, write a conclusion, print up the whole manuscript, and submit it to her committee” (340). As useful as her academic training may be, she treats her dissertation as an afterthought. By incorporating the problem of an unfinished work of scholarship into *Desert Blood*, Gaspar de Alba can reflect on her decision to write a detective novel, rather than a scholarly book or article. Despite its gravitas, she eschews academic writing in favor of a popular form that long been treated as a degraded mode of literary expression, but has the capacity to reach broad audiences and to encourage their emotional investment in the problems it represents.

Alba draws attention to the many ways that *Desert Blood* breaks with generic convention by calling it an “anti-detective novel.” It is true that the story ends neatly with Irene's rescue and the happy reunion of the Villa family. But Ivon is unable to bring the culprits to justice or determine who is behind the murders of the *maquiladora* workers. Ultimately, she rejects the genre's traditional goals when she decides that identifying individual perpetrators is less important than revealing the social and economic dynamics that allow these crimes to continue:

Pornographers, gang members, serial killers, corrupt police men, foreign nationals with a taste for hurting women, immigration officers protecting the homeland—what did it matter *who* killed them? This wasn't a case of “whodunit,” but rather of who was allowing these crimes to happen? Whose interests were being served? Who was covering it up? Who was profiting from the deaths of all these women? (333)

These lingering questions about profit and motivation help to explain why Irene, a middle-class U.S. citizen, comes to a very different fate than the impoverished Mexican women who regularly disappear from the *maquiladoras* and whose relatives lack resources to demand justice. When her own family comes together, Villa thinks of the many Mexican families that have been irreparably broken apart by the murders. The neat resolution of an individual

crime is thus unsettled by the novel's insistence that the larger problem it exposes remains unsolved. Using the language of factory production, Ivon realizes that she has uncovered “[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. . . . This thing implicated everyone. No wonder the crimes had not been solved, nor would they ever be solved until someone with much more power and money than she, with nothing to lose or to gain, brought this conspiracy out into the open” (335). In its portrait of widespread corruption among politicians, corporations, and lawmakers, *Desert Blood* echoes the *neopoliciano's* radical leftist sensibilities, as well as its sense of futility about the possibility of eradicating the broad social problems it exposes.

Yet *Desert Blood* is not conceived out of the sensation of powerlessness expressed by its protagonist. Gaspar de Alba frames the writing of her novel as precisely the kind of action that Villa herself feels unable to take. While Ivon believes that the crimes can be solved only by someone with “much more power and money than she,” Gaspar de Alba points to the ongoing work of families and grassroots organizations to intervene where established figures of power and authority have failed. Forming alliances across national borders, nongovernmental groups are a line of defense against transnational criminals who operate by exploiting the weaknesses of law enforcement in the region. These organizations, which emerged from public outrage at the indifference and inaction of local officials, have attracted the attention of activists and media outlets in many parts of the world. In her preface, Gaspar de Alba presents *Desert Blood* as a contribution to their efforts. Addressing herself to Anglophone readers, she explains: “It is not my intention in this story to sensationalize the crimes or capitalize on the losses of so many families, but to expose the horrors of this deadly crime wave as broadly as possible to the English-speaking public, and to offer some conjecture, based on research, based on what I know about the place on the map, some plausible explanation for the silence that has surrounded the murders” (vi). Framed in this way, the novel overlaps closely with other forms of media that seek to bring worldwide attention to the problems plaguing Ciudad Juárez. In its alignment with a specific cause, *Desert Blood* differs from the detective novels of Hinojosa and Taibo, which provide a more indirect reflection of current events in the borderlands.

*Desert Blood* also reflects on the particular role that novels can play in galvanizing public sentiment by exploring how narrative fiction can fill in gaps left by other forms of representation. The novel opens with a short chapter narrated from the viewpoint of an anonymous victim during the final, gruesome moments of her life. As the description of Villa's investigation unfolds, it is interspersed with chapters that follow Irene through the terrifying experience of abduction and sexual abuse. In these episodes, the reader must imagine

death from the perspective of the victim rather than the perpetrator or the detective, who surveys the scene of the crime only after it has been committed. By representing the fear and pain suffered by these women, the novel gives voice to the victims and their families. In fiction, the dead can speak out to remind the living of their suffering. Although these crimes are based on actual events, Gaspar de Alba also lends them a metaphoric dimension that underscores the victims' symbolic role in the border economy. Pennies are found inserted into many of the dead bodies that turn up in *Desert Blood*, a detail the author explains in her introduction as an effort "to signify the value of the victims in the corporate machine; the poor brown women who are the main target of these murders, are, in other words, as expendable as pennies in the border economy" (v). The dead women force-fed on a diet of U.S. currency become symbols of a Mexico poisoned by economic reliance on its northern neighbor or, as one character puts it, "just like the maquilas themselves have been shoved down Mexico's throat" (252). This rather obvious metaphor works precisely because of its blunt simplicity; like a political slogan, it compresses a complex situation into an enduring image that surfaces at key moments throughout the narrative.

With *Desert Blood*, Gaspar de Alba brings together elements of the Mexican and Chicano/a detective novel to render one of the worst unsolved crimes in recent North American history in narrative fiction. Although she does not solve the crimes, Villa uncovers a transnational web of corruption that implicates law enforcement, politicians, judges, and reporters in allowing the killings to continue. Behind it she finds the disastrous impact of NAFTA on the fragile social and environmental ecologies of the border region. With writers of the *neopoliciano*, Gaspar de Alba shares an identification with the powerlessness of the poor and marginal populations of Mexico, a commitment to exposing the underlying social and economic causes of their oppression, and a deep suspicion of politicians and officers of the law. At the same time, *Desert Blood* shares the identitarian concerns of U.S. lesbian and Chicano/a detective fiction. Like many other contemporary ethnic authors, Gaspar de Alba emphasizes her protagonist's identity as a feminist, lesbian, and Chicana, implicitly underscoring her difference from the classic Anglo-American detective. As she traverses the border during the course of her investigation, Ivon also maps tangled bonds of cultural filiation that extend back over many generations. Her story expresses a longing for cross-border connections that is closer to the U.S. Chicano tradition than the Mexican. Adopting elements of both U.S. ethnic and Mexican crime writing, Gaspar de Alba uses the detective novel to address a real crime that has so far defied novelization. It is a crime that brings violence against women to the forefront, highlighting both the troubled sexual politics of border communities and the gender dynamics of the crime writing tradition.

Contemporary crime writers like Hinojosa, Taibo, and Gaspar de Alba are opening a new chapter in the history of American detective fiction, one that cannot be adequately understood without crossing the borders of language, culture, and nation. On the one hand, their work presents a devastating picture of the impact of globalization on the U.S.-Mexico border. Rapid development, the displacement of populations, and the erosion of economic boundaries under NAFTA have introduced high rates of violent crime to the region. Heightened concerns about illegal immigration and national security have brought greater attention to these problems, while doing little to address their underlying causes. The diffuse organization of transnational criminal networks makes the prospect of justice elusive so that, more often than not, confrontations between detectives and criminals end without resolution. The globalization of crime changes the detective's relationship to his (and more recently, her) community. Whereas once the investigator set out to restore social order, this goal is elusive in communities whose populations are dispersed or migratory and where there is little consensus about shared beliefs and values. But globalization has also meant the dispersal of the detective novel itself, as it has been appropriated into a range of cultural and linguistic contexts across North America and around the world. When it enters these new contexts, detective fiction does not fall prey to the homogeneity and standardization so often associated with the globalization of culture. Instead its recognizable formulas have been adapted to address the concerns and traditions of regions that are defined through their membership in broader continental, and planetary, communities. The borderlands, which were once at the edge of the detective novel's imagined geography, have become a meeting ground for some of its most innovative practitioners, who are reimagining the genre's capacity to resonate beyond the printed page and to speak to audiences far beyond the local settings it represents.

Read together, these works can provide a case study in the regional adaptation of a popular form. But my analysis is also intended to serve as a model for approaching the borderlands between other nations and cultures within North America and abroad. This model relies on the continent as an analytic unit whose elastic borders extend outward to the American hemisphere and beyond. Within North America, border literatures attest to the particular burden of geographical proximity to the United States, which can be simultaneously a source of inspiration, a longed-for destination, and a tyrannical hegemon that threatens the economic and political sovereignty of its closest neighbors. For border communities, a history of violence and loss remains alive in conflicts over resources and social values. But as we have seen, the border is also the site of regenerative counterhistories, which underscore the contingencies of current geopolitical formations by imagining alternatives to national community. These become visible only through a geographic frame that encompasses Mexico as well as the United States, and that might be

productively expanded to include Canada as well. A wide-angle view of the continent exposes the paradoxes of North American cultural forms that illuminate the tenacity of borders of all kinds, while defying them in deft and surprising acts of crossing.

## NOTES

1. Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (New York: Vintage Crime, 1992); Michael Connelly, *The Black Ice* (New York: Warner Books, 1993).
2. Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*, 37.
3. *The Wall around the West: State Borders and Immigration Controls in North America and Europe*, ed. Peter Andreas and Timothy Snyder (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Lawrence A. Herzog, *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space, and Politics on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); David E. Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century: A History of Economic and Social Transformation* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1999); Oscar J. Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994); Claudia Sadowski-Smith, ed., *Globalization on the Line: Culture, Capital, and Citizenship at U.S. Borders* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
4. Peter Andreas, "Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-first Century," *International Security* 28, no. 2 (2003): 78–111, 83–91.
5. *Ibid.*, 78.
6. Bartosz H. Stanislawski and Margaret G. Hermann, "Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and WMD," discussion paper for the Conference on Non-State Actors, Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction, Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM), University of Maryland, October 15, 2004.
7. *Ibid.*, 2.
8. The table of contents of a collection like *The Post-Colonial Detective* illustrates the genre's international diversity.
9. Giles Blunt, *Forty Words for Sorrow* (New York: Berkeley Books, 2002).
10. In "Continental Ops: Crossing Borders in North American Crime Narrative," I compare crime writing from the U.S.-Canadian and U.S.-Mexican borderlands (*Foreign Relations: Remapping the Cultures of North America* [forthcoming, University of Chicago Press]).
11. On Chicano/a detective fiction, see Claire Fox, "Left Sensationalists at the Transnational Crime Scene: Recent Detective Fiction from the U.S.-Mexico Border Region," in *World Bank Literature*, ed. Amitava Kumar (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 184–200; and Ralph Rodriguez, "Cultural Memory and Chicanidad: Detecting History, Past and Present, in Lucha Corpi's Gloria Damasco Series," *Contemporary Literature* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 138–70.
12. Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11.
13. Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, *The Myth of the Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

14. Although there are a number of programs in North American studies, especially in Europe, these typically focus on the United States with the explicit goal of enabling students to compete in the global marketplace.
15. Naomi Klein, "The Rise of the Fortress Continent," *Nation*, February 3, 2003, 10.
16. Dashiell Hammett, "The Golden Horseshoe," in *The Continental Op* (New York: Random House, 1974).
17. Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*, 370.
18. *Ibid.*, 377.
19. James M. Cain, *Three by Cain* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 7.
20. Leroy L. Panek, "Post-war American Police Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martín Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 159.
21. Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (St. Paul, Minn.: Coffee House Press, 1997), 246.
22. "The Boss I Work for Dialogue: Leslie Marmon Silko and Rolando Hinojosa" (1987), in *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*, ed. Ellen L. Arnold (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 94.
23. For example, see Elizabeth Espadas, "Bridging the Gap: Rolando Hinojosa's Writings in Their Latin American Dimension." *MACLAS Latin American Essays* 1 (1987): 7–15.
24. Panek, "Post-war American Police Fiction." See also the introduction to *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel*, ed. Peter Messent (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997); and Robert P. Winston and Nancy Mellerski, *The Public Eye: Ideology and the Police Procedural* (London: Macmillan, 1992).
25. On the contemporary crime novel, see Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen, *Contemporary American Crime Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); *Sleuthing Ethnicity: The Detective in Multiethnic Crime Fiction*, ed. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Monica Mueller (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003); *Multicultural Detective Fiction: Murder from the "Other Side,"* ed. Adrienne Johnson Gosselin (New York: Garland Publishers, 1999); Kathleen Gregory Klein, ed., *Diversity and Detective Fiction* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999); Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); *Criminal Proceedings*, ed. Messent; Richard B. Schwartz, *Nice and Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002); *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*, ed. Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
26. Rolando Hinojosa, *Ask a Policeman* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1998) 140. All subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.
27. Rolando Hinojosa, *Partners in Crime* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1985) 173. All subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.
28. As Hinojosa remarks of his own borderlander identity, "I was born on the Texas-Tamaulipas border, not far from where the Rio Grande flows into the Gulf of Mexico and not far from the last two engagements of the Civil War. The territory was surveyed by the Spanish army and settled by Spanish subjects in the 1850s, and the people who settled there had a sure sense of identity. That self-confidence remains, and the

Valleyites, with all their good and bad points, have one reply when asked where they hail from: 'I'm from the Valley.' They name no town unless pressed to do so." Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, "Commentary," *World Literature Today* 3-4 (Summer 2001): 64-72.

29. Martínez, *Border People*, 23-24.

30. For example, Rudolfo Anaya and Lucha Corpi, two other well-known authors of Chicano/a detective fiction, favor the private investigator who subverts the police and other official authorities, working directly with individual clients.

31. Danilo H. Figueredo, "Ask A Mystery Writer: A Conversation with Rolando Hinojosa," *MultiCultural Review*, September 1999, 27.

32. Persephone Braham, *Crimes against the State, Crimes against Persons: Detective Fiction in Cuba and Mexico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), ix.

33. Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Some Clouds*, trans. William I. Neuman (Scottsdale, Ariz.: Poisoned Pen Press, 2002), 73.

34. Braham, *Crimes Against the State*, and Ilan Stavans, *Antiheroes: Mexico and Its Detective Novel*, trans. Jesse H. Lytle and Jennifer A. Mattson (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

35. Cited in Stavans, *Antiheroes*, 146.

36. Braham, *Crimes against the State*, xiii.

37. Stavans, *Antiheroes*, 111.

38. Cited in Stavans, *Antiheroes*, 145.

39. Cited in Jorge Hernández Martín, "Paco Ignacio Taibo II: Post-colonialism and the Detective Story in Mexico," in *The Post-colonial Detective*, ed. Ed Christian (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 168.

40. Stavans, *Antiheroes*, 109. For the story of Halliday's encounter, see <http://www.mikeshayne.com/htmike.html> (accessed June 6, 2005).

41. Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Frontera Dreams*, trans. Bill Verner (El Paso, Tex.: Cinco Puntos Press, 2002), 106. All subsequent references cited parenthetically in text.

42. Paco Ignacio Taibo II, "Morán y Pancho," in *El juego de la intriga*, ed. Martín Casariego (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1997), 200. All subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text. Translations of "Morán y Pancho" are my own.

43. Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Leonardo's Bicycle*, trans. Martin Michael Roberts (New York: Warner Books, 1995), 273.

44. Richard Boudreaux, "Mexico's Rebel with a Cause and a Knack for Prose," *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 2004, A3; James C. McKinley, "Solution to a Stalled Revolution: Write a Mystery Novel," *New York Times*, December 13, 2004, A4; Luis Hernandez Navarro, "Cosas del Pasado," *La jornada*, January 18, 2005; Jo Tuckman, "Subcomandante Marcos Pens New Twist to Zapatista Struggle," *Guardian*, December 20, 2004, 11.

45. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, *Muertos incomodos*, *La jornada*, December 19, 2004, 6. My translation.

46. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, *Muertos incomodos*, *La jornada*, January 30, 2005, 8. My translation.

47. In "Left Sensationalists at the Transnational Crime Scene," Claire Fox notes the gendering of borderlands detective fiction, as well as its neglect of the crimes against women taking place in Ciudad Juárez.

48. Melissa Wright, "From Protests to Politics: Sex Work, Women's Worth, and Ciudad Juárez Modernity," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 2 (2004): 369-86.

49. John Burnett, "Chasing the Ghouls," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 2004, 12; Alma Guillermoprieto, "A Hundred Women: Why Has a Decade-Long String of Murders Gone Unsolved," *New Yorker*, September 29, 2003, 83; Chris Kraul, "Frustration Grows Over Killings," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2005, A3.

50. Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (Houston: Arte Público, 2005), 118. All subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.