

Towards a Travesti Subjectivity and System of Aesthetics:  
Approaching Trans\*lations in Argentinean Literature, History, and Culture

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## Abstract

"Towards a *Travesti* Subjectivity and System of Aesthetics: Approaching Trans\*lations in Argentinean Literature, History, and Culture," examines *travesti* authorship and representation with a focus on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Argentinian fiction. While *travesti* traditionally refers negatively to minoritized subjects assigned male at birth but who identify beyond the binary, the stigmatic term has emerged as a radical political and activist identity within the Southern Cone. Although *travesti* identity has been largely misapprehended through Globally Northern projections of queerness and trans\*ness, I demonstrate how the literary and cultural productions of *travesti* representation and authorship offer new pathways for imagining and enacting queer decolonization through the narrative subversion of widespread social discrimination, the negation of civil rights, the stigmatization of sex work, and extreme economic precarity. I identify and explore three distinct genre strategies that recount to counteract the material conditions that render *travesti* lives illegible and unlivable: the dystopian, the neo-baroque, and speculative fiction. By interweaving these narrative strategies across fiction, the archive, and personal testimonies of current and past activists, I show how these experimentations in genre unveil new strategies for the viability of gender identities outside of the Western sex-gender binary. By focusing on semi-autobiographical narrative production by *travesti* authors living in the Southern Cone, I show how this view from the South of *travesti* and trans\* civil rights and history offers invaluable insight into practices of kinship and care within the growing international field of Trans\* Studies.

## Introduction

Quiero invitarlos a abrir su corazón y sus sentimientos para sentir la realidad,  
para sentir el amor. ¿Pueden sentirlo?

— Daniela Vega, 2018 Oscar's Ceremony

Succinctly diving into the origins of this study's scope is a difficult task, as many of its efforts are lifelong extensions of my own personal interests in activism and social justice initiatives within the Queer and Trans\* community globally. As a scholar in Latin American literature, this has manifested in diverse ways throughout the tenure of my academic formation in the global Hispanic world, which has drawn me to the study of gendered and sexual dissidence for nearly two decades through canonical works such as *El beso de la mujer araña* and *El lugar sin límites*, the autobiographical inscriptions of Sylvia Molloy, Pedro Lemebel, or Reinaldo Arenas, as well as cinematic engagement with films such as *Fresa y chocolate*, the works of Pedro Almodóvar, and more contemporarily, trans\* representation in *Una mujer fantástica*. Summarily, my investment in understanding these manifestations of LGBTQ+ identity and community in these vastly different regions of the Spanish-speaking world spoke to the essence of connection that I wanted to establish with their artistic expressions and their consequent historical applications. As such, early framings of my scholarship in the landscape of Queer and Trans\* Studies were deeply influenced by what Gloria Anzaldúa posed in *La conciencia de la mestiza*, as she theoretically and culturally disseminated the concept of thinking with queerness as the ultimate culture-crossing factor (“La conciencia”); not alone in these examinations, the deployment of Anzaldúa’s work proliferated across investigative disciplines with expansive methodological pathways.

Moving into the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, however, a grappling with the universal applications of queerness and its culture-crossing premise began to surge, as many voices—academic,

activist, and otherwise—challenged the ways in which the queer and trans\* epistemologies and activisms hailing from Globally Northern, predominantly white and cis-normative, Euro-North American tradition can be mobilized in analyzing sexual diversity and gender expansiveness in the Global South—whether in the Americas or otherwise. In the scope of this study’s examinations, and in a constant returning to how to carefully frame these engagements with sexual and gender diversity in Latin American contexts, this work manifests a critical thinking with and alongside these expressions in relationship to Trans\* Studies as it is understood in the Global North. Moving away from this epistemological focus, it instead centers the *travesti* community that inspires its representative examinations within 21<sup>st</sup> century Argentinean fiction.

Perhaps no period better encapsulates the onset of this repositioning in my own scholarship and personal knowledge acquisition than the moments I spent performing field research on *travesti* and transgender identity, history, and representation in Buenos Aires in 2018. Having received the Tinker Nave Grant from the Latin American Caribbean and Iberian Studies (LACIS) program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the investigative work I performed during the trip capacitated dialogue with two of the three authors of this dissertation’s analysis of *travesti* representation and authorship in Argentinean literature. Upon experiencing my first interview with author Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, the author of *La virgen cabeza* and the focus of the first chapter, the intentionality and framing of questions I posed to her continue to unveil the myriad ways in which my past interrogations inhibited my scholarship, keeping me from capturing the significance of her *travesti* protagonist Cleo’s representational value. This vital shift was only further enhanced by archival opportunities I experienced through a coordinated visit to ESMA (El Museo Sitio de la Memoria), which at the time had commenced an interview series through El Archivo Nacional de la Memoria on gender oppression and sexual

diversity in Argentina. Only accessible on-site at that juncture, my exposure to recorded interviews with trans\* activists such as María Belén Correa and *travesti*/trans\* advocates and feminist allies such as Diana Maffía expanded my investigative approaches through both anecdotal evidence and a chronological repositioning of *travesti* and trans\* advocacy group formation in the early 1990s. These conversations and archival opportunities deconstructed numerous paradigmatic barriers, which capacitated a gradual undoing of a Globally Northern positionality that discerned *travesti* community, culture, and representation through the lens of transgender epistemologies, artistic expressions, and activism.

Finally, perhaps the singular experience during my field work that transformed this study's framing was a moment of total happenstance, as local connections with Zindo & Gafuri editor Patricio Grinberg led to an informal interview with author Naty Menstrual. Having yet to confirm her short story collection, *Continuadísimo*, as the second text within this dissertation's examinations, her presence, honesty, and engagement with my curiosities and analytical framing was an absolute revelation. Indeed, while I had been already engaging with the works of *travesti* activists Marlene Wayar, Lohana Berkins, and María Belén Correa, our conversation laid to bare the response to what was lacking in my overarching inquiry—if there isn't necessarily a manifest theoretical framework that is already critically in place to examine *travesti* characters and authors in these representations, why not place them at the very center themselves? Menstrual's willingness to dialogue with me revealed a methodological framing through this very experiential process, as it became evident that the salient framework for comprehending the irreverent expression of *travesti* characters such as Cleo was reliant on the analysis of voices of individuals such as Menstrual herself, as well as her ability to embed her voice and *travesti* subjectivity into the literary.

In retrospect, this investigative opportunity not only was a significant catalyzer of my academic and personal growth, but it also representative of the most formative experiences to impact my present scholarship and this study's examinations. As I continue reflecting on these conversations and experiences throughout the years, I have come to view it as the commencement of a precise undoing —indeed, I discern and mark this instance as the onset of the shift my scholarship experienced in moving away from Globally Northern queerness and trans\*ness as inherently more radical, progressive, or ethically superior in the global landscape of global Queer and Trans\* Studies. In this work's commitment to a provincial deciphering of *travesti* identity and history, and in expanding on the classic intertwined deliberations of gender and genre—or *el género*—in the global Hispanic world, I aim to show how it truly stands apart, thereby highlighting the tensions and shortcomings that arise when set into dialogue within the discipline and expansion of global Trans\* Studies.

#### BREAKING THE LENS: REFUSING TRANS\*LATION AS A DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGY

While acknowledging the radical work of Queer and Trans\* Studies as it is understood in the Globally Northern context as incredibly vital to transnational and (trans)feminist scholarship and activism, this study establishes a fervent commitment to undoing the widespread requisite or preemptive assumption that the field must be understood uniquely through European and North American scholarly traditions that have long overlooked BIPOC communities and regional differences. As these methodological and philosophical inquiries are often rooted in settler colonial tradition, it is imperative to recognize that they have also limited our scope and understanding of gender-expansiveness globally, as they are ultimately reliant on both an emergent understanding of the Western sex-gender binary model as well as its consequent disruption. This study thus looks to both actively decenter how we discern the emergence of

transgender epistemologies by moving outside of Western models of how trans\*ness appears or what it can come to signify, while also offering decolonized theoretical and methodological strategies for actively accomplishing that decentering within the Americas.

It thus seems fitting, that as literary criticism served as the originator for my initial misinterpretations of subversive sexualities and gender dissidence in Latin American narrative, that I perpetually return to it with a reinvigorated engagement that aims to restore *travesti*'s radical epistemological roots. More specifically, through a close analysis of *travesti* representation and authorship in literary production, through this body of narrative works, I collectively address how the radical re-inscriptions of genre in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Argentinean fiction unveil both literary and aesthetic modes for decolonizing the conscripts of gender through, amongst other strategies, a politics of refusing *travesti*'s translation. Organized around the study of three fictional narratives, my work analyzes the distinct genre strategies used by three authors to counteract the material conditions that define *travesti* lives and subjectivity: the dystopian in *La virgen cabeza* by Gabriela Cabezón Cámara (2009), the Perlonghian twisting of the neo-baroque or *el neobarroso* in *Continuadísimo* by Naty Menstrual (2008), and speculative fiction in *Las malas* by Camila Sosa Villada (2019). Through these examinations, I evaluate the distinct methodologies of queer and trans\* decolonization that are offered within each literary context, which are constituted by the narrative subversions of widespread social discrimination, negations of civil rights, the stigmatization of sex work, and extreme economic precarity. Together, I explicate each author's contributions to a collective literary worldbuilding that not only foregrounds a vibrant portrayal of *travesti* individuals and their ingenuity in strife, but also posits a new vision for humanity through their groundbreaking approaches to survival, kinship, and care. Interweaving these stories with archival references and personal testimonies of current and

past activists and artists throughout this study, I aim to demonstrate how the unique genre strategies employed by these authors communally offer crucial new strategies for understanding diverse gender identities outside of the Western sex-gender binary in a globalized setting.

Such an impetus for this study's objectives surely rests on the shoulders of early pioneers, as decades of literary and artistic criticism of gendered and sexual dissidence in Latin American contexts has proliferated for nearly three decades. In the foundational 1998 essay anthology, *Hispanisms and Homosexualities*, for example, editors Sylvia Molloy and Robert McKee Irwin invited readers and scholars to "bring out the 'disappeared' queerness of each text, however strange or disquieting that queerness may seem—to the resistant readers of traditional *hispanisms*, but also, more importantly, to us, queer hispanists" (xvi). Alongside the contributing editors, scholarship such as Daniel Balderston's work on homophobia as a political tool within the Mexican Revolution (57-75), José Esteban Muñoz's analysis of queer Cuban-American Pedro Zamora's disidentifications with HIV/AIDS activism (175-196), and Mary S. Gossy's inquiry into portrayals of lesbian desire within María de Zayas (19-28), to name a few, all answered their call, as they visibilized academic discussions of sexual and gendered variance in an arena that had historically viewed their contributions as inconsequential. Not two years later, another foundational anthology *Reading and Writing the Ambiente: Queer Sexualities in Latino, Latin American, and Spanish Culture*, edited by Susana Chávez-Silverman and Librada Hernández, featured many of the same authors and gradually expanded the conversation.

As such, Molloy and McKee Irwin's introductory petition clearly generated a cascade of academic works that led to the proliferating use of queer theory's lens. Whether we are considering Emilio Bejel's *Gay Cuban Nation* (2001), *Historia de la homosexualidad de la Argentina* (2004) by Osvaldo Bazán, Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui's *Transvestism, Masculinity, and*

*Latin American Literature* (2002), or even more recent works such as *Queer Argentina* (2017) by Matthew Edwards, these seminal studies labored to bring these examinations to light, with some more effectively narrowing in on cultural and linguistic distinctions than others. These elisions are evident in scholarship where queerness, homosexuality, and transgender status are interchangeably applied in translation or otherwise, frequently rendering them synonymous and further contributing to this proposed “disappeared” (McKee and Molloy xvi) element in these evaluations of both gender and sexuality. In this sense, Amelia Viteri’s recent scholarship on the metaphorical walls these interchanges produce indeed seems to pose the inverse, as an alignment with queer identifications in the context of the Americas can in fact “...silenciar nociones de ‘latino,’” as they both construct some boundaries while simultaneously bringing others down (Viteri, “Desbordes” xxv). Regardless, the consequence of past scholarship is unmistakable upon grasping the vibrant portrayal of these dissident lives, the historical contexts that shaped them, and recovering the linguistic traces of their gender-expansive and sexually dissident communities. In revisiting the initial approaches employed by many of these scholars, an entreaty emerges in their reevaluation—which is not to comprehensively eradicate their work nor claim that their approaches are egregiously mistaken—but rather, to reinvigorate their investigations through a critical lens that interrogates the neocolonial impositions that spurred their framing.

Speaking to the scholarship that has arisen in response to these “(des)encuentros de lo *queer* y América Latina” (Sancho), one methodology proposed by scholar Diego Falconí for examining the cultural and linguistic production of *queerness* (or *queer/cuir/cuy(r)* expressions) is that it can indeed transpire through the study of regional narratives. In response to how the development of *una teoría cuir latinoamericana* requires a delicate, caring, and decolonized

approach in its geopolitical translations of northern queer theory and gender theory (Viteri et al.; Rivas; Ochoa; Sabsay; Gargallo), Falconí indeed mechanizes the literary to explore these tensions,<sup>1</sup> in which he gestures towards the rupture of neocolonial/postcolonial patterns and power dynamics through its use (“De lo queer/cuir/cuy(r)” 98). Through analysis of Ena Lucía Portela’s short story “En vísperas del accidente” (96), his scholarship has contributed to the exposure of queer/cuir’s transnational translation failures and shortcomings through both gender studies and decolonial theory, ultimately gesturing us towards the premise that applications of “...la teoría queer generan posibles pautas para juzgar su uso y desuso, así como sus posibilidades y limitaciones...” (96). This prospect of narrowing in on these critical errors of translation, or the “la ‘delicada’ traducción *queer*” (96), as he frames it, has proven to be a pressing contemporary concern and ongoing need.

Additionally, this critical inquiry is not exclusive to the Globally Southern context of the Americas, as Jasbir K. Puar’s groundbreaking work on the sprawling global applications of homonationalism and its neo-colonizing impositions, *Terrorist Assemblages*, reminds us that even within the context of “liberatory” neoliberal queerness that, “This benevolence towards sexual others is contingent upon ever narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity” (xii). Reified by the reframing of queerness at the intersections of race and class, Muñoz’s theoretical work *Disidentifications* grounds these transnational considerations in the reverberating global

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<sup>1</sup> These explorations have much in common with other literary explorations—and performance scholarship—of what these failures have come to signify. However, they are also modes of inquiry which look to highlight regional expressions of gender/sexuality conflicts that need not always engage with false connotations either, such as Guillermina De Ferrari’s “Illness and Utopia in Severo Sarduy’s *Pájaros de la playa*” and “Antonio José Ponté’s Necrophilia,” Laura G. Gutiérrez’s *Performing Mexicanidad*, Juana María Rodríguez’s “Translating Queer Caribbean Localities in *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*,” and Larry La Fountain-Stokes, “Boricuas cruzando fronteras: autobiografías y testimonios trans puertorriqueños.”

dissonance that transpires when approximating the mythical white queer ideal. Simultaneously, his framework prompts us to consider that *disidentifications* often serve as “...a strategic survival strategy of identification for/of/by those with multiple intersecting marginal identities” (“Disidentifications” 4). In approaching these models, he reminds us that in both past and present inquiries into the transnational considerations of neoliberal queerness and its failures, that at times, “...resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere. But for some, disidentification is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously” (5).

With these frameworks in mind, the fashion with which even U.S. Trans\* Studies has resisted being categorically lumped into queerness, indeed looking to go beyond the epistemological roots of Sedgwick’s closet, can be fruitful by way of comparison. In fundamentally inquiring, “What’s queer about trans\* studies?” scholar Caél Keegan explored the “epistemic hindrance” posed to trans\* studies scholars who were being embedded within queer studies and gender and women’s studies, along with its unforeseen restrictions (Keegan). But as Trans\* Studies has flourished in its own right, unbound to the applications of the queerness and its concomitant limitations, the proliferation of this body of thought has only continued to pose new ways and frameworks through which we move through and see the world, whether it’s Julia Serrano’s *Excluded*, Jay Prosser’s *Second Skins*, Jack Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place*, *Trans\**, or *Female Masculinity*, Paúl Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*, and many more. In the growing applications of trans\* studies in a globalized context, and thus mirroring some of these foregrounding “troubles and travels of the queer” (Domínguez Ruvalcaba), an initial proposal of “queerizando lo decolonial,” therefore signals us to respond to the notion that gender is indeed

the vehicle through which decolonization is achieved (Lugones). In pulling at the threads of the universal applications of Globally Northern trans\* studies and praxis, this study both queries and invests in the manifestations of gender expansiveness in Latin American narrative that indeed models such a methodology. Consequently, its aims are to expand upon Falconí's proposal of the literary as a decolonized method of transgressive gender praxis, with specific paying attention to *travesti*/trans\* representations and expressions.

The larger stakes of this project thus constitute an intervention in Global Trans\* Studies, and at the axes of Latin American cultural studies, that places the study of literary *travesti* subjects and authorship at the center of this critical framework. As such, this work reckons with a central tension in U.S.-Latin American relations in which U.S. Queer and Trans\* scholarship and activism may, however unwittingly, exercise neocolonial impositions for the sake of Globally Northern transgender legibility and resource access. Given that the specificity of trans\* identities in the Global South is articulated in language that frequently defies translation in Western terms, the assertions of this body of work are also grounded in the premise that academic translation without corresponding transformation of frameworks does not merely threaten further marginalization of the *travesti* community and their political and material realities—it constitutes a form of erasure. Thus, recognizing this bind, with this study I exercise an ethics that foregrounds the challenge to Western frameworks presented by the untranslatable specificity of *travesti* expression, distinctive genre-stylings, and settings of each of these three fictional texts. Upon commencing this dialogue on paradigmatic shifts and articulating an explicitly decolonized vision in their examination, I move forward by first enacting a bold directive—that we must abide by an unnegotiable use of *travesti* and a steadfast refusal to participate in its translation.

¡TRAVESTIS: PRESENTE!: *CUERPOS DESOBEDIENTES*, POLITICAL CONTEXT, AND SETTING THE TERMS

Integral to understanding the enumerative characteristics of *travesti* identity in Argentina,<sup>2</sup> whether it comes in the form of archival evidence, literary representation, or political manifestos, is this explicit refusal to be conveniently translated,<sup>3</sup> categorized, and subsequently erased in its own power and significance, rejecting further relegation of their identities into the margins, and pushing their history into oblivion. *Travesti*, after all, cannot be described, translated, or understood as anything other than *travesti*, and its additional regional specificities make it difficult to pin down in signification. Assigned male at birth but legally and socially understood as individuals who identify neither as men nor women, the analysis of *travesti* as a radical political and activist identity within the Southern Cone has foregrounded further examination of its significance outside of Globally Northern projections of queer and trans\* identity, including emergent examinations within the literary world. Therefore, this study's explicit refusal to adapt to the use of Globally Northern Queer and Trans\* ideologies and terminologies onto their histories is part and parcel to its exchanges, as its examinations will come to demonstrate how *travesti* as a socio-political entity refuses to being shifted to a temporal reality, while simultaneously rejecting a unilateral move towards *transgénero* readability as the ultimate global trans\* "liberation saga" (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 16).

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<sup>2</sup> While the use of *travesti* is not exclusive to Argentina, as it is also recognized throughout the global Hispanic world (including Spain) (Platero 100), its significations change from region to region, including the reclamation of its pejorative status. Argentina's deployment of *travesti* as a radical political and cultural entity is mirrored in many Southern Cone contexts, as its deciphering in Chile and Uruguay bears much comparison.

<sup>3</sup> Whether in prestigious dictionaries such as Harper Collins and Oxford Dictionary, the digitally accessible WordReference, and even within the Pan-Hispanic efforts of encapsulating the cultural lexicon of the ever-expanding Hispanic world within the *Diccionario de la lengua española*, *travesti*'s signification both cross-culturally and in English translation consistently falls in line with vocabulary that has historically been taught in trans\* activism as problematic—*transvestite*, *cross-dresser*, *ladyboy*, *shemale* ("Travesti" in *Diccionario*; *Harper Collins*; *Wordreference*). The problematization of this vocabulary merits its own contemplation in trans\* assimilation politics in U.S. history.

Hence, part of this endeavor to frame this setting of the terms requires a social, political, and historical contextualization that mobilizes not only its deliberate use, but also an explication of diverse strategies that facilitate how we might understand it both within the Southern Cone and within transnational dialogue. As a takeoff point for this contextualization, I offer a series of descriptors that come to mind when attempting to capture the essence and implications of their community's storied legacy: world-breakers, irreducible, irreverent, bold, untranslatable, resourceful, brazen courage, and *furria*.<sup>4</sup> The descriptions themselves are devastatingly pertinent, for they attempt to encapsulate an existence that rejects the binarisms of gender categories, and at the same time, they help us formulate a framework for understanding the fleeting nature of an identity that exists within an ever-expanding gender-spectrum. Furthermore, many of the descriptors above—particularly *furria travesti*—are employed by *travesti* activists themselves, underscoring the ferocity of their responses to the manifold political injustices they have faced as a community. In essence, it's clear that an engagement with the legislative and historical analyses that have endeavored to categorically separate which entities under the trans\* umbrella receive recognition and protection—and which bodies dare to defy such vigilant surveillance of their non-normative gender expressions—further facilitate our understanding of this community's indispensable history.

Indeed, the historical and cultural importance of distinguishing the employment of “*travesti*” as an identity category versus “trans\*” and its many iterations cannot be understated

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<sup>4</sup> Often deployed within the *travesti* community and its connected activism (and frequently attributed to the legacy of Lohana Berkin's fervent political work within Argentina), *furria* or *furria travesti* is a recurrent descriptor for the collective passion, rage, and anger that has propelled forth important milestones surrounding *travesti* visibility, community organization, legal successes, and much more. (Wayar, *Furria travesti*)

nor underexplored,<sup>5</sup> especially as the discussion of transgender rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century became more globally circulated. In the pivotal 2006 anthology *Transgender Rights*, edited by Paisley Currah, Richard M. Juang, and Shannon Price Minter, for example, the expert legal analysis made by contributors Mauro Cabral and Paula Viturro in “(Trans)Sexual Citizenship in Contemporary Argentina,” problematizes the increasing global use of the trans\* umbrella very early on in global applications of their regional research, ultimately recognizing its limitations upon stating:

Throughout the present essay, we utilize the *trans* concept as an umbrella term, that is, alluding to all those persons who identify themselves in a gender different from that which was assigned to them at birth, whatever their transitional or legal status. The term *travesti* will be utilized according to its regional specificity; that is, alluding to all those persons who, having been assigned the masculine gender at birth, identify themselves in different versions of femininity, and who may or may not surgically or hormonally modify their bodies. The term *travesti* possesses a particular political specificity, in that it unites a generalized condition of social vulnerability, an association with sexual work, the exclusion of basic rights, and the recognition of the same as a political identity (270).

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<sup>5</sup> As noted in the introductory chapter of *Transgender Rights* (2006), editors Currah, Juang and Price Minter define the Globally Northern abbreviated umbrella trans\* as a term that is “...now generally used to refer to individuals whose gender identity or expression does not conform to the social expectations for their assigned sex at birth. At the same time, related terms used to describe particular identities within that broader category have continued to evolve and multiply. As new generations of body modifiers and new social formations of gender resisters emerge, multiple usages coexist, sometimes easily, sometimes with much generational and philosophical tension: *transvestite*, *cross-dresser*, *trannie*, *trans*, *genderfuck*, *genderqueer*, *FTM*, *MTF*, *trans men*, *boyz*, *bois*” (xiv-xv). They simultaneously address that the “term *transgender* offers political possibilities as well as risks. Any claim to describe or define a people or a set of practices poses the danger of misrepresenting them. The danger is not trivial; distorted representations lead readily to misguided advocacy” (xiv-xv).

While Cabral and Viturro's work is centered on the purported 2005 legal triumph in which a transsexual man won the right to change his documented name and sex in Argentina, their legal analysis carefully developed how this singular court ruling inextricably tied the ability to modify one's legal documentation of name and sex to a compulsory cisheteronormative standard.

Put another way, their analysis broaches how the case sets the stage for the allocation of fundamental rights of Argentinean citizenship exclusive to trans\* individuals who were understood as "true transsexuals" (263), i.e., those who at the time fulfilled an exhaustive series of legal, medical, and social requirements that proved their authentic desire to permanently transition. Posed as a questionable system of ethics that juridically enforced an approach towards cisheteronormative standards as the exclusive desirable end goal, the breakdown of the case interrogated how the right to transition—and to be legally recognized as one self-identified—was solely extended to those who willingly subjected themselves to a prescriptive, pathologizing standard and curative ideology towards trans\*ness. These measures often entailed requirements such as forced sterilization by the state, the separation of happily married couples (as they would thus be identified as same-sex marriages), the barring of an individual from the institution of marriage as a caveat for legal recognition, and the elimination of the right to privately transition, as individuals were often required to publish details on their medical transition in local publications as proof of their desire to live according to the prescribed natural order (271).

The lived experiences of *travesti* individuals in the piece therefore exist in stark contrast to these juridical requirements that provided transsexuals a separate, privileged legal status (albeit discriminatory and eugenicist in nature), as they were and are often adamantly opposed to participating in these state-sanctioned medical and social demands for recognizable and respectable transition. Thus, framed within this context of Argentinean transgender rights

legislation, *travestis* are categorically set apart as they suffer in this alienating construction of sexual citizenship that negates their humanity, as they refuse their "...corporeal possibility of living according to the natural order... and thus deserve adverse life conditions and persecution" (265). As this ostracization frequently resulted in their direct oppression by the criminal justice system for the sake of protecting "morality and good manners" and the "third parties who may be deceived in their good faith" (265), this historical analysis proffers invaluable insight into the recovery of *travesti*'s specifications by highlighting how their rejection of these transitional trans\*sexed economies and neat global trans\* legibilities resulted in a clear privation of access to legal and material resources.

While not exclusively focused on the *travesti* community and their legal and social history, this piece of Argentinean scholarship is invaluable in a way that may at first go unperceived—which I argue specifically takes shape in the myriad referential texts of the publication's notes section. In navigating both the patent desire to protect these good citizens (i.e., cisheteronormative folks), and the supposed moral dangers implicit in *travesti*'s discernible embodiment, a plethora of documentation speaking to their persecution arises at the end of Cabral and Viturro's work, as well as connective post-facto publications.<sup>6</sup> But elemental to deciphering this importance is first recognizing that the widespread circulation of *Transgender Rights* in 2006, which featured many well-recognized authors and scholars such as Judith Butler,

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<sup>6</sup> Within Lohana Berkins' text and corresponding survey, *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*, for example, consistent evidence demonstrated regular police abuse experienced at a nearly unanimous level amongst the *travesti, transexual y transgénero* respondents. In tandem with this information there is statistical data corroborating that those surveyed experienced physical aggression, sexual assault, homelessness, lack of access to education, and homicide at disproportionately high levels in comparison to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts (78, 130-133, 177-180). In the 2017 publication *La Revolución de las Mariposas* much of these initial data points are directly comparable with current statistics, alongside nuanced analysis of how the GIB of 2012 improved quality of life for *travestis*, trans\* women, and trans\* men. However, analysis from this publication also demonstrates a devastating truth: with more visibility comes heightened violence (90-91, 93, 105-106, 128-135).

Dean Spade, its contributing editors, and more, likely meant that a global audience was being exposed to an unearthing of resources that directly referenced the lives, work, and activism of the *travesti* community perhaps for the very first time.

What is more, just above this list of referential texts that spoke to their community-driven responses and boots on the ground activism is an imprinted commemorative line: “Dedicated to Lohana Berkins and her invincible and joyful strength” (270). Perusing the works below the dedication, such as “Itinerario político del travestismo” and “Eternamente atrapadas por el sexo” both by Berkins herself, anthropologist Josefina Fernández’s publication *Cuerpos desobedientes: travestismo e identidad de género* (2004), Diana Maffia’s collaborative work “Ciudadanía sexual,” and the underexplored references to the formation of *travesti* activist and advocacy groups such as ATA, ALITT, and OTTRA,<sup>7</sup> my initial inquiry regarding when the use of transgender, trans\*, and transgénero ever really began in Argentina materialized responses in vastly unexpected ways. More specifically, this dedication to Berkins seemed to position its own rhetorical question to the careful and curious reader—did the use of *travesti* ever really end?

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<sup>7</sup> *Cuerpos desobedientes* notes the first formation of these *travesti* advocacy groups: ATA (Asociación de Travestis Argentinas), formed in 1991, ALITT (Asociación de Lucha por la Identidad Travesti y Transexual) in 1994, and OTTRA (Organización de las Travestis y Transexuales de la República Argentina) in 1994 (Fernández 116). ATA was the earliest documented advocacy group, which was organized under the guidance of activists María Belén Correa and Claudia Pía Baudracco. Some sources, including a testimonial from Belén herself, document its official organization as 1994, although they were organizing as early as 1991. The group then branched off into these two subsequent groups (ALITT and OTTRA) largely due to their philosophical and political differences regarding presentation of gender identity and the legalization of prostitution (116). In a corroborating interview with Correa, there is a deliberate pointing out of the emergent use of *transgénero*, *transexual*, etc. in the growing enumerated letters of the acronymic titles. Correa specifically explains how Asociación de Travestis Argentinas was first coined during a police encounter, but the group continually incorporated growing trans\* terminology to be inclusive (ATTA- Asociación de Travestis y Transexuales Argentinas and ATTTA- Asociación de Travestis, Transexuales y Transgéneros Argentinas). The final adaptation resulted in shifting the adjectival Argentinas to “de la Argentina” to make it gender inclusive for ATTTA: Hombres Trans (Correa “ESMA Interview”).

Decisively pointing to her incomparable contributions, this unveiling of resources catalyzed examinations of materials that referenced and highlighted a life and work dedicated to *travesti* activism. By studying her endeavors to document the political realities and struggles of the *travesti* community through statistical data and socio-political analyses, we can indisputably discern how Berkins spoke to the question of *travesti* (in)visibility through her participation in numerous publications that addressed these frustrations such as in *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas* (2007), Lohana Berkins' and Josefina Fernandez's joint publication effort *La gesta del nombre propio: Informe sobre la situación de la comunidad travesti en la Argentina* (2006), and more. Evident in these texts is that whether they were documenting the first discernible presence of *travesti* identity in public discourse and the formation of their earliest political and social groups,<sup>8</sup> the amassing of data that demonstrated their devastating realities,<sup>9</sup> or by contrast, how

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<sup>8</sup> Lohana Berkins' and Josefina Fernandez's joint publication effort *La gesta del nombre propio* spoke to this question of *travesti* (in)visibility by addressing how their first discernible presence in public discourse is directly correlated to their formation of larger social and political groups, stating that "El travestismo organizado en Argentina comienza a manifestarse públicamente en los años 90. El argumento central de su visibilidad es la lucha por la derogación de los Edictos Policiales en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, principal herramienta del Estado para reprimir disidentes peligrosas/os" (39-40). Corresponding information in Fernández's publication *Cuerpos desobedientes* speaks to the significance of these police edicts, understood as a long-lasting implementation of law enforcement that stemmed from remnants of Spanish colonial rule. Law enforcement officials under these terms were permitted to take legal action against the accused for any perceived violation of the law without substantial evidence, which had historically been viewed as extremely repressive and questionable in terms of their legitimate practice. As these edicts empowered police officers to essentially act as a judicial branch of the law on the street, the simple act of cross-dressing or implications of being *travesti* (which was consistently followed by allegations of prostitution) could land you in jail for a maximum of 30 days without ability to appeal. As one can imagine, this often led to extreme police abuse, unnecessary but lawful (though cruel and repressive) detainment, and clearly, far more violent outcomes (ridicule, abuse and rape by prison cellmates, lack of attentive health care, and often even death) (13-14). Clearly devastating in their deployment, Fernández draws our attention to specifically to 1997, a year in which autonomy is given to Buenos Aires as a municipality and consequently eliminated the police edicts, which was replaced at the time by a Código de Convivencia Urbana (Fernández 14).

<sup>9</sup> As clearly evidenced in two foundational texts: *La gesta del nombre propio* (Berkins and Fernández) and *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas* (Berkins), mounting statistical data during the time of its collection provided evidence of discrimination, homelessness, and poverty in direct relationship to one's *travesti* identity and common associations with sex work. Fernández and Berkins incorporate the emergence of

they experienced joy in their everyday lives,<sup>10</sup> these publications demonstrated her unabashed effort to not let their communities be eclipsed by globalizing terminology.

Indeed, exposure to these materials only further outlines *travesti*'s unassimilable political identity by nature of revindicating a space that exists outside of binary ideals, or as Berkins puts it directly, “El travestismo irrumpe en esta lógica binaria de, las sociedades occidentales que es hegemónica y que oprime a quienes se resisten a ser subsumidas y subsumidos en las categorías ‘varón’ y ‘mujer’” (“Travestis: una identidad política” par. 7). And while the ability to communicate the complexities of *travesti* identity in the legal and sociopolitical world present challenges, particularly for those who do not labor to understand the details of its usage and histories from region to region, this growing body of knowledge makes one element incontrovertibly clear—that this facet of its exploration is but the tipping point in comprehending *travesti*'s inherent refusal to being relegated to the parameters of state recognition and Northern legibility. As globalizing trends of transgender legibility continue to inadvertently threaten these provincial histories, contemporary decolonized examinations respond with a resounding *no* to transnational dialogue that projects limiting perspectives under the banner of Western gender freedoms and liberation.

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varying terms that are included in both the collection of data for transexual and transgénero community and in the ever-expanding organizations of ATA, ATTA, and finally ATTTA during the late 1990s.

<sup>10</sup> In the introduction to *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*, Berkins opens by answering the question—why these three words, and why in that order? As she explains, they invoke a vital cycle and lived memories of *travestis*, *transexuales*, and *transgéneros* in lived community, irrespective of the Latin American region (8). More specifically, she explains the role of cumbia in the process of dancing, celebrating, and forming community, which will be further explicated in chapter one (8).

REFRAMING TRANS\*NATIONAL DIALOGUE: PROVINCIAL HISTORIES AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICS OF (IN)VISIBILITY

As bodies of theoretical and cultural knowledge regarding diverse sexual identities and gender expansiveness in the Global South becomes more exhaustive, our ability to definitively refrain from exclusively using the Euro-North American lens of trans\*ness and queerness is only further facilitated in transnational cultural analyses. As these considerations have undeniably demonstrated thus far, the ubiquitous application of terms such as queer and transgender throughout our increasingly globalized world often fall short in translation and application, even when linguistic moldings attempt to bend the terms to their philological will (e.g., pronunciations and spellings of *cuy(r)*, *cuir*, etc.). Along with the scholars discussed earlier in this introduction, this has also been developed in texts such as Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba's *Translating the Queer* (2016)— which offers a critical viewpoint of accepting these terms as we know and understand them, while also discerning the complex nature of untangling their imperialist and neocolonial legacies from geopolitical systems of sexed and gendered dissident knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Additional texts, such as Diego Falconí's *Inflexión Marica* as well as his editorial collaborations with Santiago Castellanos and María Amelia Viteri on *Resentir lo queer en América Latina: diálogos desde/con el Sur*, Lawrence La-Fountain Stokes's *Translocas: The Politics of Puerto Rican Drag and Trans Performance*, and Francisco J. Galarte's *Brown Trans*

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<sup>11</sup> As Domínguez Ruvalcaba emphasizes in the introductory chapter “Troubles and travels of the queer” in *Translating the Queer*, “Queer cannot be translated into a rational logic of the culture and gender system but is estranged from it. Queer culture and discourse have already emerged as the other’s tongue in their culture of origin. They had to be translated into the hegemonic discourse of metropolitan academia. Now, queer has come to be translated into another cultural system, which already had its own contradictions and political dynamics. I argue this translation of queer occurs as a countercultural intervention into the culture in which it arrives as a translated concept. But this intervention does not come without controversy: as a theory coming from the so-called global north, queerness has been under suspicion of being another expression of colonialism, as it is considered a distinctive mark of modernity. Nevertheless, it is arguable that queerness is, in fact, an instrument of decolonialization, in which translation plays a key role as a linguistic process where meaning is put into crisis” (12)

*Figurations: Rethinking Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Chicanx/Latinx Studies*, have increasingly circulated conversations of decolonial queer and (trans)feminist praxis, with a renewed vision of regional neologisms and vocabulary that speaks to their embodied knowledges in tandem with their approximations to purportedly universal queer and trans\* identities within and beyond the Luso-Hispanic world. Whether explicating local *mariconería*,<sup>12</sup> that *pato* indeed can mean more than “duck”<sup>13</sup> and “torta” doesn’t always mean cake,<sup>14</sup> or deliberating the politics of (in)visibilizing brown trans\*masculine bodies in Chicanx and Latinx movements, these academic works and many others have sparked discernable interest in diverse expressions of LGBTQ+ identity that manifest across the Globally Southern contexts of the Americas. Put

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<sup>12</sup> In a thought-provoking collection of essays, *Inflexión Marica: Escrituras del descabro gay en América Latina*, editor and scholar Diego Falconí Trávez’s “Desaprender a ser gay. De-colón-izaciones maricas para América Latina,” offers up many inquiries regarding the conflict that exists in the intersectional identities of being gay and *latinoamericano*, introducing challenges to the notion of gayness being a universal identity that has always existed outside of Western culture. Falconí Trávez pushes back on the notion that gayness as it is understood in the Global North be used to sift through *las políticas gays en América Latina*, intending to unlearn this understanding from that global positionality and fervently employ their own terminologies (201-233).

<sup>13</sup> In Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes’ *Translocas*, the scholar’s introduction provides lists of global complications of gender and sexual identity terminology, but in narrowing on Puerto Rican specifics on complicating it through the neologism of *translocas* states “...we must consider the particularities of Boricua or Puerto Rican sexuality, with its ample repertoire of terms in English and Spanish entailing greater or lesser pejorative connotations, which include standard and nonstandard vernacular terms such as *pato* (literally a duck, but used figuratively to refer to a homosexual or effeminate man), *pata* (lesbian or masculine woman), *maricón*, *afeminado*, *ponca*, *loca*, *travesti*, *vestida*, *bugarrón*, *marimacho*, *marimacha*, *tortillera*, *bucha*, *papi chulo*, *banjee*, *butch queen*, *femme queen*, and *thug*... The term ‘transloca’ engages with and complicates this list” (18). La-Fountain Stokes also provides further explanation of words such as *transformista* in a local Lansing, Michigan radio interview. Specifically referencing the practice and art of drag performance, some may also use *travesti* within drag while others use *transformista*, but these categories are not mutually exclusive. In fact, in some Spanish-speaking regions, as discussed in the interview, the two are sometimes interchangeable (La Fountain-Stokes, “De profesor a transformista”).

<sup>14</sup> *Torta*, or *tortillera*, originally understood as a pejorative for describing queer and butch women in Argentina and México, has been progressively reclaimed by the community, akin to the English reclamation of the derogative *dyke* and other Spanish regionalisms such as *bollera*, *camionera*, *marimacho*, and more (Cano; Marchante\_Genderhacker 295-302).

another way, these analyses explore how embodied existence marked by sexual and gender dissidence in the Americas vibrantly exists both within, outside of, and apart from their purported anglicized counterparts, but their import is exclusively discerned through a deliberate investment in a cultural proficiency of their regional histories and terminologies.<sup>15</sup>

In ongoing contemporary bureaucratic visibility and surveillance of trans\* and *travesti* legibility that I explored previously, author and activist Marlene Wayar, for example, outright continues to contest these forced binary notions of trans\* identity and how *travesti* doesn't neatly comply with the Western cis-heteronormative puzzle. Affirming this growing response to reject legible gender compliance, in Martín de Mauro Rucovsky's piece "The Travesti Critique of the Gender Identity Law in Argentina," the scholar engages with Wayar's opposition and discusses at length how even the passage of the globally lauded Gender Identity Law of 2012—which allowed for one's complete autonomy over gender identification changes on legal documentation—must be considered through *travesti* dissent to comprehend the legislation's cisheteronormative limitations, as its tenets demonstrate that "*travestis* do not fit the paradigm of citizenship because the only subjects who fit this category are men and women" (231). Viewing the law's passage as highly binary and exclusionary of the *travesti* community that operates outside of male and female categorizations, Wayar's critique, as the piece analyzes, is that it carelessly erases *travesti* and trans\* identities through a system of binary normalcy on DNI and

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<sup>15</sup> As evidenced by Falconí's engagement with Brad Epps, the proposal often comes in the form of a focalization on the viewpoint from whence these expressions emerge, in this case, this global Hispanic-American perspective. Epps points to the clear reappropriative, defiant manner through which queerness in the U.S. is often shaped, i.e., a revision of pejorative language. In conversation with these practices, and the proposal that Epps makes that this reclamation usually transpires in activist circles, e.g., "*la calle*," a methodology emerges to retake the pejorative in regional Spanish (Epps). Put another way by Marcia Ochoa, the use of "*loca*," for example, mandates the action of "*loca-lizar*" the identity in question (Ochoa), a practice further enhanced by the Puerto Rican particularities of *loca* expressions and transgressions in his scholarship on performance (Stokes).

statehood vigilance of transition (224). Although it was and still is viewed by many as one of the most progressive transgender civil rights legislations to have been signed into international existence, it becomes quite clear that the parameters of this more recent legal decision yet again push *travesti* individuals further into the margins through a legal refusal of acknowledging their community as a civilian entity altogether, which for decades resulted in “lawful” arrests under *los edictos policiales*, as well as restricted access to work, housing, appropriate medical care, education, and much more.

Nevertheless, when considering the broader implications of why trans\*, *transgénero*, or queer/*cuir/cuy(r)* vocabulary has been deployed and disseminated throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to begin with, we cannot elide the conversations that transpire in the scholarship of activists such as Malú Machuca Rose. For example, while exploring Giuseppe Campuzano’s life, art, and methodologies as a *travesti* artist, Machuca Rose highlights the significance of trans\* movements in Perú that initially rejected the use of *travesti*, as it was predominantly seen at the time as a pejorative that “...was used to delegitimize trans women as women” (242). Speaking to the transnational influence of trans\* politics, while also balancing a reconciliation with their supposed necessity in Perú, their scholarship on Campuzano addresses and deciphers the common occurrence of how Globally Northern Queer and Trans\* activism and analysis stalwartly secures its foothold in the Global South under the guise of neoliberal protective measures. Underscoring an ideological narrative of dominant capitalistic world order, Machuca Rose further amplifies an analysis of the sprawling usage of Euro-North American LGBTQ+ vocabulary in the Globally Southern American context by uniting its usage with a need to be seen, i.e., legible, by those who are disproportionately afforded power and control in the Western hemisphere, stating:

The investment in trans as an umbrella term for the multiple indigenous forms of gender and sexual dissidence stems, very clearly in my opinion, from the need to be seen, validated, and most important, funded by people in power from the Global North—those who have the power to make our government listen and obey under the threat of isolation from the globalized neoliberal capitalist order. In contrast to the supposed universality of trans, travesti is provincialized and particular, even where some form of this word exists in many languages (242).

Discerning this impetus for survival, visibility, and material resource access as a forceful motivator provides very clear implications for the acquiescence of imported queer and trans\* terminology broadly within Latin America, and more specifically within this study's examinations of the Southern Cone.

Adding to this emphasis in a distinct fashion is a recently recorded 2017 interview with trans\* activist María Belén Correa, in which she provides personal argumentation towards the utilization of the term trans\* in present day. Working politically alongside Claudia Pía Baudracco throughout the 1990s, Correa is internationally recognized as a lifelong trans\* activist, as well as the co-founder of ATTTA in 1994 (Asociación Travestis Transgéneros y Transexuales de la Argentina). After receiving repeated threats on her and her family's lives in 2001, however, she was forced to live in exile in the United States, and in 2004, became the first Argentinean to be granted political asylum since the country's democratic transition post-dictatorial regime (1976-1983). Archived in the ESMA museum (Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos) alongside a growing installation of national memory archives in relationship to gender oppression and the trans\* and *travesti* community, her insights provide more modern context and argumentation for the employment of trans\* and its dissemination within Argentina, stating:

Cuando yo estaba totalmente capacitada con ese lenguaje... para poder comunicar a las chicas que dejaran a usar travesti, transexual, transgénero... porque eso era una forma de desnudarme... porque al decirte esas clasificaciones, es como decirte... estoy operada, no estoy operada; tengo trapo, no uso trapo; tengo tetas, no tengo tetas; uso peluca o no... entonces no... cuando llegue un nivel de conocimiento o acercamiento hacia vos, podré desnudarme a decirte, “Sí, soy travesti, soy transexual o soy transgénero,” pero mientras tanto soy una simple persona trans, nada más (Correa “ESMA Interview”).

The personal rationale of Correa cannot be disregarded, even within the context of questioning globalized uses of trans\*, as the privacy offered under its umbrella applications, in her opinion, also permits a level of disclosure intimacy that doesn’t compromise the safety and dignity of the individual involved. What is more, these decisions of gender identification are always highly personal and individualized; intrinsically, Correa’s employment of trans\* is clearly something she views as empowering, but above all, it’s an identification choice she pursues for herself without undue influence.

Nevertheless, one cannot abstain from mentioning that Correa’s utilization of trans\* is correlated to her time in New York during displacement, as she goes on to mention in the interview (Correa “ESMA Interview”). During this period, her contact with local U.S. frameworks influenced her social justice activism, as she developed an intersectional lens while also learning to navigate the weight of securing federal and state funding for community support. As she came across material resources such as books, pamphlets on trans\* terminology, and HIV/AIDS activism and outreach, she not only sent them to her trans\* and *travesti* sisters back in Argentina, she also extended efforts to communicate her newly acquired knowledge. Evident in the excerpt above, she correspondingly labored to convince them that trans\* in its applications

was both a way of creating community as well as a form of securing safety and privacy (Correa “ESMA Interview”).

But in understanding the inherent violence posed in this universal imposition of queer and trans\* legibility, especially as we recognize the cyclical nature of its neoliberal proffering of protection and resource access, this study endeavors to ask—what *additional* strategies exist to recuperate and reinvigorate an engagement with *travesti* as a political, historical, and cultural entity? And furthermore, where else could we possibly begin to explicate its essence without—unironically—essentializing the term? As my scholarship will only continue to underscore, the ongoing incorporation of this statistical and archival data, gleaned from the investigative work of *travesti* activists and collectives themselves, only further demonstrates the need for discerning numerous strategies that mobilize cultural paradigmatic shifts that restore, humanize, and decolonize these legacies of gendered and sexual dissidence. Moving beyond the implementation of startling numerical data that conveys their material conditions and widespread suffering, this work thus moves to incorporate novel examinations of cultural realia in the explication of their histories.

#### INSPIRATIONAL METHODOLOGIES: PARADIGMATIC SHIFTS, STORYTELLING, AND VISUAL ARCHIVE

As the impetus for a historical revisiting of *travesti* and trans\* identity in Argentina and the Southern Cone garners more weight, the exhumation of their political, social, and sexual lives surfaces in myriad forms—e.g., the cinematographic, the epistolary, the photographic, etc. Moreover, as the examination of the vast political and artistic oeuvre of *travesti* representation in Argentinean culture continues to show, there is a salient characteristic in their expressive bodies of poetry, visual art, performance, and philosophy that activates the overarching framework of this study—their commitment to enacting an unrelenting politics of *personal* authenticity that is

captured through malleable renderings of the archive (my emphasis). But while this work's chapters realize a collective contemplation of the literary expressions and genre-bending strategies of *travesti* authorship and representation found in fictional narrative, its inspiration in part takes cues from other archival installations that revisit the embodied epistemologies of *travesti* and trans\* identity that rescue them from historical and cultural oblivion—one such obvious connector being María Belén Correa's initiative to curate a visual collection of their pasts, fittingly entitled *El Archivo de la Memoria Trans*.

Initially a dual project between Correa and Claudia Pía Baudracco, Baudracco's untimely death in 2012 became a catalyst for Correa to start amassing photos from trans\* and *travesti* community in Argentina. Through a digital collection where friends were encouraged to upload photos, periodicals, police reports, magazines, and more (Correa, et. al 156), their lives throughout the 1980s—90s reconverged on the online platform, while simultaneously "... a small team of transwomen and professional photographers formed to begin digitizing photographs, scanning them in high resolution to preserve trans memory" (156). Although Correa's exile eventually led to her emigration to Germany (where she currently resides), she continued to work alongside numerous trans\* and *travesti* compilers of the archive from abroad, such Cecilia Estalles, Carla Pericles, Ivana Bordei, Magalí Muñíz and Caroline Figuerado.

Wildly successful and still ongoing, *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2019 special issue of "Trans en las Américas," published a small selection of the archive's offerings, which also included interviews with its participants and organizers such as Carla Pericles, who remarked that, "...I think of them as treasures because they contain our memory. They're the only thing that we have to reclaim our past, since so few of us survive" (157). Marked by a time in which these individuals experienced the egregious violation of their basic human rights, excessive

physical, emotional, and mental violence, and the normalization of their deaths, the photographic collection only continues to expand as these individuals like Pericles reach into the past. Stirred to document their persistent love, community, and the care that they held for each other, the archive's creation and distribution is also a testament to visibilizing their will to survive and their enduring political *furia*. Amongst the oral interview contributions published in the special issue, contributor Carolina Figueredo's comments capture why these archival collections matter, saying:

Personally, it changed me so much, working in the archive, in my spirit... For me it was an important step. If it hadn't been for the archive, our stories would never have been seen. Our photos never would have been exhibited. It's like the archive gave us the opportunity to scream out our pain at the top of our lungs, what we felt and what we lived.... When I began to scan the photos, when I attended the exhibitions, I realized I understood the value that these photos have because each photo represents a story. I hadn't understood that value before, and being in the archive helped me to understand (Correa et al 162).

Powerful in its concretization, the value in collecting and circulating the photographic materials in *El Archivo de la Memoria Trans* manifests in the powerful verbal acknowledgement of self-recognition mirrored in enacting their curation and preservation. As an early visual documentation of the everyday realities of the *travesti* and trans\* community of this era, this visual collection mobilizes additional restorative undertakings that excavate diverse iterations of the archival. In the same vein, it is evident that this record of their memories is framed and embedded in the strict codes of realism, and rightfully so, as their documentation sheds light on

the hardships they faced and the resilient communities they formed in response to such pervasive injustice.

But in connection with how these experiences manifest in the literary portrayal of *travesti* subjects, with each case study of this work (Cabezón Cámara, Menstrual, Sosa Villada) I venture to unveil what transpires in these accounts of their lives and personhood when the literary spirit of *travesti* authors and characters dares to defy these realist parameters. In place of these restrictive portrayals that cannot contain how their imaginations move through the narrative world, each author's instrumentalization of a particular literary genre not only moves to depict a more livable life for their characters, but indeed also conveys a realm in which they *truly and communally thrive*. In activating a visibilization of their collective histories and memories, this study's examinations of *travesti* literary ingenuities asserts that we must incorporate these representations of their expressiveness, resourcefulness, and overall aesthetic into our determinations of what is truly archival.

#### THE LITERARY AS ARCHIVE: CAPTURING *TRAVESTI* SUBJECTIVITY AND AESTHETIC ESSENCE

Considering these efforts to frame the complex facets of *travesti* identity, the realm of the literary not only speaks truths to their political specificities and realities, but through the power of storytelling, it also augments the affective experience and ability to connect with the irreverent nature of *travesti* expression that will be further explicated in chapter one. Despite the relentless erasure experienced by *travesti*-identifying authors and their consequent literary representation, these texts have still persistently made their way into Northern academia, while these institutions grappled with translations of purportedly queer and trans\* identities in the Global South that fell short in signification. I have studied these depictions with fervor within my specialty, with my exposure largely dependent on word-of-mouth recommendations and personal research, realizing

that these texts offer an extraordinary doorway to understanding *travesti* lives and experiences that is only further expounded upon by the archival, while also offering some of the first significant visibilities of the *travesti* community outside of direct political activism. Holistically, I aim to show that discerning an aesthetic mapping of their subjectivity and their embodied systems of knowledge as they are presented in these narrative texts is imperative for not further contributing to the *travesti* community's erasure.

To understand the complex social and cultural interactions that shape these comprehensions of human subjectivity, it's evident that an essential component of this analysis involves a close investigation of their systems of artistic representations. What is more, the paramount importance of a subject's personhood in literature takes another form entirely when considering *travesti* perspectives in artistic expression (i.e., Pedro Lemebel, Susy Shock, Claudia Rodríguez, Giuseppe Campuzano). While throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century more and more voices within the *travesti* community have surged within the domain of performance arts, I submit that the literary is an invaluable resource to address early *travesti* visibility in the form of a shaping and seminal aesthetics for the generations to come. Furthermore, the recognition of this literary visibility becomes crucial as one considers that two of this study's authors—Menstrual and Sosa Villada—are *travesti*-identified authors themselves, a rarity in the publishing world. In any case, literary depictions of *travesti* realities are far more abundant than one might presume given the absence of this discourse in the corpus of canonical literature. Indeed, whether we are going beyond José Donoso's *La Manuela* in the Chilean *El lugar sin límites*, Pedro Lemebel's *la Loca del Frente* in *Tengo miedo torero* or Molina in Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* (yes, I am in fact arguing that Molina is *travesti*, not a *subversivo homosexual*),<sup>16</sup> the geopolitical and

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<sup>16</sup> While more recent analysis by Burke (2007) and Allan (2014) have positioned Molina as a transgender character in Puig's canonical text, I posit that her character has been detained alongside Valentín within

atemporal reality of *travesti* representation in fact scales back decades in Chile and Argentina (although not limited to these Southern Cone settings) and persists in present-day representations.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, it is imperative to consider that the recognition and intentional visibility of *travesti* authorship on a larger scale is relatively new, particularly when considering that early evidence gathered by Berkins substantiates the claim that access to education for *travesti* individuals drastically drops in direct correlation to statistics of social shunning from family structures, financial instability, and the absence of a social safety net and stable home environment for those expelled (“*Cumbia, copeteo*” 77, 164-166). These data points related to education access are only further corroborated in the 2017 publication *La Revolución de las Mariposas*, although there are notable improvements due to legislative accomplishments surrounding gender identity (29, 85-88). Consequently, although previously denied the tools, material resources, and access to speak and write for the public, only contemporarily are the works of authors such as Menstrual and Sosa Villada being recognized. Within the late 20<sup>th</sup> to early 21<sup>st</sup> century, these authors are finally being met with a shifting of social attitudes and an audience of contemporary readers that crave how they bring their stories to the publishing world.

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the Argentinean dictatorial regime (1976-1983) not due to a subversive homosexual identity or for the corruption of minors, but rather specifically due to her *travesti* identity. While trans\* is useful for the endless global iterations of gender expression, the specific geopolitical implications of *travesti* in this Southern Cone context enhance our comprehension of Molina as a character, which has been further obfuscated by Globally Northern interpretations of her identity such as William Hurt’s lauded performance of Molina in the film adaptation, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985) and its corresponding U.S. musical adaptation. I endeavor to reposition her as *travesti* in a reclamation of this term’s historical and geopolitical significance in this Southern Cone context.

<sup>17</sup> Considering the regional specificities of *travesti* and its varying representations, numerous additional literary texts provide ample opportunity to further this field of study such as: Mayra Santos-Febres’ *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000), Luis Zapata’s *La hermana secreta de Angélica María* (1989), Mario Bellatin’s *Salón de belleza* (1994), Félix Bruzzone’s *Los topos* (2008), and Severo Sarduy’s *Cobra* (1972) and *Maitreya* (1978).

Sharing their private strife with the public and speaking to their own subjective experience, these indispensable stories of growth, struggle, kinship, and sex now find their way into our day-to-day lives through these publications, while simultaneously asking us to both grasp the motivations for the stylistic departures that inform their writing strategies and to move away from previous academic obfuscations brought on by globalized projections of queerness and trans\*ness.

The literary aspect that thus sets these written works apart is of great consequence, as it provides us not only with a nuanced familiarity of *travesti* culture, but also a collective embodiment of their ingenuity, humor, and bravery that is embedded in the affective sphere. It is through these narratives then, as I explicate in detail within the first chapter, that we can understand the specificities of *travesti* subjectivity and generate a roadmap for a seminal framework of *travesti aesthetics*. But perhaps first and foremost, these narrative spaces provide us with an archival space of memory where *travesti* histories and stories are being recorded in detail, mobilizing a restructuring of their vanishing pasts and a history of their community through its capture in the written word. Thus, through these representations, there also lies a potential to rebuild a sphere of existence that was continually stolen from them, ignored, or forgotten altogether; but it is also critical to convey the fact that the promise of these thinkers, authors, and texts exists in the regeneration of these stories through their own voices within these narratives, and a consequent weaving of that fabric of memories into our comprehensive understanding of written history.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

CHAPTER ONE

In the first chapter, I analyze how the utilization of the dystopian genre by author Gabriela Cabezón Cámara in the novel *La virgen cabeza* (2009) opens new decolonized pathways for understanding the intricacies of *travesti* identity, community, and history through an exploration of trash and its consequent resignification. This is demonstrated through the central *travesti* protagonist Cleopatra Lobos and her construction of a community made entirely out of garbage (*una villa miseria*), which provides refuge for a community of citizens deemed unworthy of protection (*travestis*, orphans, prostitutes, people of color). Using refuse and socially undesirable methods of sustenance to their gain, the impoverished *villa* maintains radical sustainability within the city limits of Buenos Aires; under Cleo's guidance and the miraculous advice she receives from *la Virgen María*, its inhabitants cease to subsist on the outside world. Throughout this analysis, I argue that to understand both the significance of Cleo's constructed community and *travesti* identity, we must build a seminal framework of *travesti* aesthetics and subjectivity that explores how trash and dystopian landscapes are remapped by Cleo's novel *travesti* vision.

To bring together pivotal dystopian strategies and the role of trash within the text, I conceptualize a framework entitled *travesti traseo*, which fuses Cecilia Palmeiro's literary concept of *traseo* with contemporary *travesti* author Naty Menstrual's self-proclaimed genre *literatura travesti trash*. Understood as a perversion of language that is performed through a corporealization and trashification of the written word, I unite Palmeiro's *traseo* with the lived experiences of Menstrual's semi-autobiographical writings (which I explore further in my second chapter). This framework offers insight as to how we must discern Cleo's *travesti* identity, as her identity itself reveals trashification as both a mode of agency and a method of kinship. I call for this explicitly because Cleo's lived experience is often obfuscated in the narration by the

cisgender character who tells her story due to using Globally Northern terms to describe Cleo, subsequently leading to academic misreadings of Cleo's identity as queer or exclusively trans\*. Within this dystopian existence, envisioned through the resignification of literal and figurative trash, I demonstrate how the intertwining of Cleo's subjective experience of *travesti* identity and the communities of care she forms offer vital shifts for a decolonized queer humanity, shedding conventional notions of family, love, and survival altogether.

## CHAPTER TWO

Expanding an examination of genre strategies in my second chapter, I evaluate how *travesti* author Naty Menstrual utilizes the genre of *el neobarroso* (an Argentinean twisting of the neo-baroque) in her compiled short story text, *Continuadísimo* (2008). Through an explication of how Menstrual employs *el neobarroso*'s stylings—extreme adjectival opposites, sexualization of the written word, a sensual “perversion” of literature that passes “through the body” (Palmeiro 26)—I contend that she uses the genre in resistance to neoliberal understandings of sex, consumption, and desire, as well as a methodology for embracing alternative visions of *travesti* joy. Thus, I demonstrate how the role of *el neobarroso* in her work can be understood through the rejection of cleanliness and biopolitical machinations of control; an understanding of the body as an explicit vehicle of sheer pleasure, satiation, and consumption; and finally, how the writing style facilitates an upending of the exchange of power in her characters' sexual interactions, as well as discarding the interchange of sex work as a purely neocapitalistic exchange.

Ultimately, these contemplations foreground an analysis of how Menstrual's stories subvert canonical narratives that invariably result in *travesti* death. I argue that this subversion transpires in her instrumentalized engagement with the necropolitical as she flips the script of

power dynamics in numerous stories of sexual encounters in which the cisgender johns come to untimely ends rather than the *travesti* character. As such, I construct a framework that I have entitled “*la trayectoria de la Manuela*” (“Manuela’s trajectory”), in which I contend that Menstrual’s characters reject canonical literary portrayals of *travesti* demise. This framework initiates my study of the necropolitical fascination in portraying violent interactions with *travesti* and trans\* characters, indiscriminately ending in their physical and sexual brutalization and premature deaths. Named after the *travesti* protagonist and her anticipated downfall in José Donoso’s seminal narrative *El lugar sin límites* (1966), his foundational literary representation of *travesti* identity propagated innumerable portrayals of their lives and deaths. In examination of Menstrual’s characters and in dialogue with theorist Sayak Valencia’s work on vicious transfemicide, necropolitics, *transmortem politics* (Valencia 181), and trans\* activism in Mexico, I demonstrate how Menstrual rejects these portrayals, contending with who can be carelessly tossed aside or violently removed with impunity. By not using the ghostly presence of *travesti/trans\** people as an invocation to the masses for the vitality of their cause, Menstrual’s stories exist as inimitable contributions not only within the *neobarroso* writing style, but also as a political intervention that vehemently refuses and subverts widespread transfemicide and its ubiquitous portrayal. Comprehensively, I contend that Menstrual demonstrates how *travesti* lives should be understood as thriving both within and beyond literary explorations that dare to conceive of their unbridled futures and joy.

### CHAPTER THREE

Finally, in my third chapter, I analyze how Camila Sosa Villada utilizes the speculative fiction genre in the 2019 publication *Las malas*, in which I argue that the *travesti* characters are portrayed as a monstrous hybridity— including the transformation of *travesti* characters with

disabilities into werewolves and birds— to reframe what is socially understood as evil, immoral or frightening. Through the construction of a chosen *travesti* mother, sisterhood, and household, the inhabitants of the novel come together in inimitable kinship to protect and nurture these monsters and each other, as well as an abandoned infant that they find in a park and collectively raise. In this analysis, I contend that Sosa Villada’s novel, standing as an ode to her lived experiences and chosen *travesti* family, creates unique literary opportunities to examine the axes of *travesti*’s significance, Indigenous systems of knowledge, and disabled embodiment through their historical material conditions of social and economic discrimination. The chapter presents a close reading of how the speculative fiction genre is instrumentalized within *Las malas* by first placing it into dialogue with *travesti* activist Susy Shock’s poetic demand to reclaim her monstrosity (Pierce 311) in “Yo, monstruo mío”—“I, my own monster” (Pierce’s translation, 311), and Joseph Pierce’s corresponding analysis of Shock’s monstrous lens in “I Monster: Embodying Trans and *Travesti* Resistance in Latin America.” Subsequently, its examinations of monstrosity move to connect this discourse to presentations of Guaraní folklore autochthonous to Argentina within the novel, as well as Sami Schalk’s pivotal examinations on disability, race, gender, and sexuality within the speculative fiction genre in *Bodyminds Reimagined*. Setting the work into mutual dialogue with *travesti* artistry and activism, Disability Studies, and Indigenous folkloric oral tradition across speculative fiction’s principal characteristics, I evaluate its exploration and reclaiming of the concept of monstrosity, in which fear of the unknown is outright rejected— and instead nurtured and declared. Definitively, I argue that *Las malas* must resist being understood within cisheteropatriarchal, canonical literary traditions, as the strategies Sosa Villada employs within the speculative fiction genre allow for the inscription of an imaginative vision and reclamation of *travesti* identity, Indigenous systems of knowledge,

disability, and modes of kinship that perpetually question what is understood and defined as real—an assertion that can only be understood within the realm of the literary.

## Chapter 1: Novel Visions and Garbages of Eden: *Travesti* Subjectivities and Aesthetics in *La Virgen Cabeza*

Mis compañeros de trabajo no estaban de acuerdo con mi afición a los peces. Afirmaban que traían mala suerte. No les hice el menor caso y fui adquiriendo nuevos acuarios, así como los implementos que hacían falta para tener todo en regla.

— Mario Bellatin, *Salón de belleza*

### Introduction

With the publication of *La virgen cabeza* in 2009, Argentine author and journalist Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, born in 1968, burst onto the literary scene with the bold and irreverent tale of a *travesti santa puta*<sup>18</sup> by the name of Cleopatra Lobos, more commonly referred to as Cleo. Throughout the novel's undertakings, Cleo acts as an unlikely vessel for the miracles and desires of la Virgen María herself, as well as a guardian of *bonarense* citizens deemed socially unworthy of protection (orphans, *travestis*, prostitutes, people of color, and generally speaking, the poor). With her religiosity personified in a quite literal sacred head (hence the referential *Virgen Cabeza* title), Cleo receives unconventional visions of prosperity from la Virgen and questions them not—rewarded for her unhesitating commitment and loyalty to these revelations, Cleo is not only able to provide protection for the impoverished *villa miseria* that has been aptly dubbed *El Poso*,<sup>19</sup> but also apportions an unfathomable bounty of sex, koi fish, and kinship to her community of discarded social undesirables. Largely narrated and filtrated through the voice and perspective of her lover and partner Qüity, an ambitious journalist and aspiring writer, the novel guides the reader through the revolutionary methods of survival that Cleo has created as the

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<sup>18</sup> In the fourth chapter of the novel, central character and narrator Qüity chooses these descriptive words to refer to Cleo upon commencing a story about her life and community (31).

<sup>19</sup> The spelling of *poso* invites a fascinating linguistic complexity, in that it could be understood in numerous ways based on literal interpretations and possible misspellings, all of which I will discuss in a forthcoming section in the chapter.

leader and conceivable mother of this community of outcasts, as she transforms into the primary advocate of their perseverance and proliferation. As the story evolves and more of Cleo's version of events are unveiled, we become privy to the trials and tribulations of their romantic journey together, including the eventual impregnation of Qüity by Cleo. Through these revelations, we are likewise exposed to the bold ways of living that form the foundation of *El Poso's* subsistence, ultimately magnetizing the presence of violent police oversight that leads to the utopian community's destruction, while also catapulting Cleo, Qüity, and their in-utero daughter, María Cleopatrita, into exile in Miami, Florida.

It is without a doubt plausible that the novel's notoriety, innovative subject matter, and noble reception were all paramount to forging ongoing discussions of exemplary contributions to *la Nueva Narrativa Argentina* (NNA) in the new millennium, as proposed by Elsa Drucaroff in *Los prisioneros de la torre. Política, relatos y jóvenes en la postdictadura*.<sup>20</sup> Met with literary awe and impressive international response, Cabezón Cámara's contributions to the broad movement didn't cease after *La virgen cabeza's* phenomenal reception, as she published numerous additional novels that elaborated on pressing socio-political issues such as human trafficking, sexual and gender diversity, femicide, and gender violence in works such as: *Le viste la cara a Dios* (2011), *Romance de la negra rubia* (2014), *Y su despojo fue una muchedumbre* (2015), and *Las aventuras de China Iron* (2019) many of which were received with critical acclaim. However, the first chapter of this study focuses specifically on her debut novel's subject matter and aesthetic elements—namely, that which is conveyed through its *travesti* protagonist, Cleo.

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<sup>20</sup> In this expansive text, Elsa Drucaroff explores written works roughly between the 1990s to the early 2000s, drawing attention to both the marginalized and non-academic literary voices that had gone unexplored, in tandem with conversations on what being a member of a disenfranchised generation of literary writers entails in post-military dictatorship Argentina (Drucaroff 13-34).

Primarily focused on social issues that plague the historical present in the Southern Cone country, narratives that form part of this new literary movement (NNA) tend to center historically marginalized voices, with the propensity to focus on those who belong to non-conforming sexual and gender identity categories and the struggles that they face. Characterized by this emphasis on ostracized members of society, such as trans\* and queer characters,<sup>21</sup> many of these new NNA texts explore what latent power lies in allocating narrative dominance to figures from these communities that often remain hidden from the public eye. Consequently, critical analyses of these works tend to underscore the significance of how shedding light on their stories provides essential models that move away from stereotypical, violent, and demonizing representations of their dissidence.

The socio-cultural importance of works within this movement likewise expands on inquiries commenced by Beatriz Sarlo's *Tiempo pasado*, which looked to interrogate the accounts of subjective, personal experiences as verifiable truths in a post-dictatorial economy of memory. Questioning an emergent fascination with the marginalized subject in her book, Sarlo asserts that their discursive extension into public spaces is precisely due to a novel interest in their persecution that has clear limitations. "Estos sujetos marginales, que habrían sido relativamente ignorados en otros modos de la narración del pasado," she states, "plantean nuevas exigencias de método e inclinan a la escucha sistemática de los 'discursos de memoria': diarios, cartas, consejos, oraciones" (Sarlo 19). Put another way, Sarlo goes on to infer that the exclusive interest in the stories of the marginalized lies in how their non-normative identifications mobilize new methodologies for reading accounts of memory. While Sarlo questions the place of

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<sup>21</sup> As presented in the introduction, this chapter will continue underscore how the employment of Queer and Trans\* in the Global South is a complexly interwoven linguistic conversation; while not entirely dismissive nor mutually exclusive from regional identities such as *travesti*, the use of both trans\* and queer involves contextualization and troubling of its Globally Northern implications.

subjective memory and instead looks to reframe focus on theory's vital placeholder in cultural evaluations, the NNA seems to offer somewhat of a blatant rebuttal.

Hence, while discussing *La virgen's* role within the NNA in the article "*La virgen Cabeza: las voces de la villa y de las diversidades sexuales,*" scholars such as Adrián Alberto Ponze establish the impetus for writers in the new millennium to shift away from these limiting discourses, as well as canonical texts that focused on the mindset of the bourgeoisie and middle-class universe—along with their class-centered concerns—during both boom and post-boom years (33). Rather, the new literary movement's focus, as Ponze highlights, shifts its axes to the portrayal of characters with expansive sexual and gender identity categories, while also intertwining their development with issues of amassing poverty that is met with trivialization and silence in the landscape of Buenos Aires (33).

While the existence of such inquiries within canonical literature both boom and post-boom in Argentina often entirely rejected the very notion of a livable existence for these sexually dissident and gender non-conforming characters (and exceedingly so at the junctures of race and poverty), the stories, social issues, and rebellious bodies presented within this movement, as Ponze explains, look to portray how they are only further belittled at the intersections of their identities and these class-based concerns—without protagonizing politics or the economy within the novels themselves (33). Within the NNA movement, the weight of such intersectional elements of oppression becomes remarkably clear when the overlapping identity categories of race, class, and gender identity in characters such as Cleo inform our readings of their layered experiences of discrimination.<sup>22</sup> Cleo is no stranger to these incidents, as she not only identifies

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<sup>22</sup> Developed by Black feminist scholar and researcher Kimberlé Crenshaw in the early 1990s to describe and identify the impacts, interactions, and repercussions of racial and gender discrimination, intersectionality provides a contemporary framework for understanding the unique oppressions that Black women experience specifically at the intersection of race and gender (Crenshaw 149).

as *travesti*, but is also a former sex worker—a career she engaged with both out of necessity and in the financial pursuit of her most desired physical embodiment. Furthermore, as an effeminate young person formerly identified by the name Carlos Guillermo,<sup>23</sup> she has suffered extensive physical and sexual violence at the hands of both law enforcement and her blood-related kin; what is more, although it is subtly revealed throughout the narrative, it is also clear that Cleo is a person of color as she is often referred to as *negra*,<sup>24</sup> implying the possibility of identifying as an individual marked by her racialization.

As Ponze and other critiques of the novel have highlighted, the contributions made by authors such as Cabezón Cámara are shifting conversations regarding who has indeed been forgotten in the margins of literary tradition, and consequently, whose lives are thus deemed representable, i.e., livable, in historically rendering them (in)visible. Representations such as Cleo, as well as other *travesti* authors and characters that enhance our understanding of her analysis, are pushing for a platform where these realities are rescued within the realm of the written word so that they may be publicly disseminated and better understood. Contrary to the typical necropolitical fetishisms associated with the violent, consumptive tales of trans\* and *travesti* bodies, the story of Cleopatra Lobos within Cabezón Cámara's debut narrative is but one of many in an uptick of novels that aim to recognize how these voices, and the unspoken truths

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<sup>23</sup> For the purpose of literary analysis and understanding the character's development throughout her childhood portrayal, it is necessary to reference Cleo's childhood name not for the practice of deadnaming, but rather to make connections across the novel's characters and flashbacks without sewing confusion.

<sup>24</sup> While *negro/negra* can often be utilized in Spanish as a term of endearment in diverse regional contexts, it can also be interpreted literally in reference to skin tone and color, which is dependent on how the word is being deployed by the speaker. As discussed by prominent *travesti* activists of the Southern Cone, as well as in *Transgender Study Quarterly's* "Trans en las Americas" special issue article "Mais Viva!: Reassembling Transness, Blackness, and Feminism," by Dora Silva Santana, the liberation of *travesti*, trans, and Black bodies in the Southern Cone (in this case, Brazil) is often intertwined at the intersections of their racialization, sexualization, and resulting objectification, which have frequently resulted in instrumentalized instances of their oppression at their axes (Silva Santana 210-222).

that they hold, seek to shatter compulsory notions of cisheteronormative comforts through their literary capture.<sup>25</sup> Collectively explored throughout this dissertation, this restorative approach towards mislaid *travesti* voices and histories expresses itself through an excavation of the uncompromising promise of their fictional representation. While this process of recapture will begin with *La virgen cabeza*, I will continue to address the responsibility that scholars and critics alike must take upon themselves in their decolonized literary, historical, and cultural analysis in an attempt to unearth these voices from the margins—a task that this chapter endeavors to do with great care.

Thus, in dialogue with Cole Rizki’s “Latin/x American Trans Studies: Toward a *Travesti*/Trans Analytic,” I argue we must instead incorporate a comprehension of these characters and *travesti* identification as a method of subversion of “... both normative expectations of femininity and trans politics [which is] structured around assimilation and respectability,” and furthermore that, “Claiming ‘travesti’... is a way of inhabiting these complex histories of survival and resistance” (149). Rizki’s focus on the necessity of parsing out these distinctions and the implicit entanglements of geopolitical categories of the “U.S.” and “Latin America” that inform trans\* and *travesti* understandings, concomitantly accentuates the inherent instabilities across connections of trans\* vs. *travesti* as much as it destabilizes the topographical notions of the Global North and the Global South (147). Rizki’s analysis of *travesti* as an identity therefore “underscores instead the impossibility of such disarticulation” as proposed through the

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<sup>25</sup> In continuing a dialogue with a framework of intersectionality, it is important to note how the characters analyzed throughout this study simultaneously challenge notions of compulsory heterosexuality, as defined by Adrienne Rich in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” as well as compulsory able-bodiedness, as understood by Robert McRuer in *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. As McRuer notes, queerness has been historically articulated within the medical framework as a mental disease. Thus, the cisheteropatriarchal imaginary draws both a compulsory system of mental health and cishet existence ultimately subverted and challenged in the novel through *travesti* existence.

use of English terms such as transgender (148). Aligning Cleo's reading with Rizki's proposal, in this sense, demonstrates how these multifaceted *travesti* subjectivities are "not meant as a corrective of trans," but rather look to "...center travesti as an identification, a critical analytic, and an embodied mode of politics" (148). In shifting this lens of paradigmatic power, we can also comprehend the missteps in discerning Cleo's narrative portrayal and approach this restorative reading.

This critical perspective thus informs this chapter's explorations to illuminate how our approximation to an aesthetic engagement with *travesti* expression, as well as the genre styles that are used to capture their literary imaginations, enhances our considerations of the *travesti* community and their material realities without essentializing nor erasing them through globalized perspectives on transgender identity. Informed by characters such as Cleo, their intrepid narrative modes of existence are thus best framed within genre stylings that speak to their literary defiance, thereby capacitating a framework of *travesti aesthetics* that I outline in this chapter to further facilitate the comprehension of their fictional subjectivities and representation.

In essence, as Cabezón Cámara mechanizes dystopian worlds to unveil how norms regarding pleasure, respectability, police authority, and identity politics are defied through Cleo's vision in *La virgen cabeza*, her utopian frameworks of subverted garbage lay to bare the matchless tools for building these new worlds of interdependent and unconventional life that simultaneously connote *travesti's* geopolitical deciphering. I aim to provide such a decoding through a mapping of *travesti aesthetics* made discoverable through genres best suited for portraying more than just their mere survival. Deemed realizable throughout this chapter's undertakings and initiated through the vessel of Cleopatra as a central character, the dystopian

realm put forth by Cabezón Cámara—posed as an idealized model of being—thus subsists as much on the destruction of the state of things as we know them as it does on the offer to build a new network of care amongst those who bring everything crumbling down. Employing this aesthetic framework to formulate the architecture of these new worlds, this emergent demand for an avant-garde humanity incorporates the lens of a *travesti* subjectivity that understood its inherent fragility all along.

#### CENTERING *TRAVESTI* VOICES AS THE CRITICAL FRAMEWORK: PRELIMINARY STEPS

Through the analysis of properties particular to the fictitious realm of *La virgen cabeza*, as well as Cleopatra Lobos as a character, this chapter offers but one enumeration of the genre considerations that facilitate an express recognition of a system of *travesti aesthetics*. Subsequent chapters in this dissertation will expand on this dialogue through the works of *travesti*-identifying authors Naty Menstrual and Camila Sosa Villada as they capture their very real lives, histories, and activism in literary modes and styles that contribute to the critical discerning of *travesti* subjectivity and existence within contemporary Argentina. This chapter aims to outline the properties of Cabezón Cámara’s novel that contribute to the construction of this critical framework, including a revision of the novel’s past analysis.

As this chapter will show, much of this novel’s examination has assigned employments of *transgénero* to her character, failing to outline inquiries into her Southern Cone gender identity marker. In fact, even while doing field research in Buenos Aires in 2018 myself, I arranged an interview with Cabezón Cámara to discuss the intentional use of *travesti* rather than *transgénero* for her principal character. While seated at a local coffee shop in San Telmo, I unassumingly asked her, “¿Y por qué decidiste usar el término *travesti* en vez de *transgénero* para el personaje de Cleo?” To which she, slightly dumbfounded, replied, “Porque era un

homenaje a mi amigo quien se murió muy joven, y así se identificaba” (Cabezón Cámara “Personal Interview”).<sup>26</sup> In retrospect, my question and Cabezón Cámara’s response might seem inconsequential and banal to some, but it highlighted a core problematic of communicating *travesti*’s central characteristics across cultures, languages, temporalities, and even adjacent regions.<sup>27</sup> Looking deeper for clues regarding Cleo’s identification boiled down to the simple nature of using terminology this individual engaged with to describe their own reality. Cleo’s life and identity thus stands as an homage to a friend who had died prematurely but lived fearlessly on their own terms.

Following this biographical and factual rationale, throughout this chapter I will continue to connect my analysis of *travesti aesthetics* to anecdotal, statistical, and historical substantiation of the *travesti* community in Buenos Aires to my navigation of Cleo as a character. But when considering all of this, it is also necessary to ask—to what extent can we apply such evidence by mode of interpretative value, irrespective of their foundations in the narration of very real or perhaps imagined lives? Flesh and bone figures of Argentina’s *travesti* community, such as Lohana Berkins, Marlene Wayar, Susy Shock, and Naty Menstrual, offer up examples of their subjective perspectives that facilitate the analysis of not just Cleo, but in turn also mobilizes a revised lens of paradigmatic power of trans\* and *travesti* issues within the Global South. The substantiation of *travesti* existence and history through such figures is immutably bonded with

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<sup>26</sup> Anecdotally, I find it necessary to introduce information that came directly from an interview with the author. It seems pertinent to share as this chapter continues to justify historical argumentation and correlations with cultural realia as it is represented within the novel, particularly as the portrayal of a *travesti* aesthetic stretches past the limitations of narrative imaginations.

<sup>27</sup> The validity of such inquiries continues to accumulate in recent publications such as Erika Almenara’s *The Language of the Inbetween: Travestis, Post Hegemony, and Writing in Contemporary Chile and Peru* (2022), which explores the interplay of these activisms and literary expressions between the two countries.

Cleo's deciphering. As each one contributes to a scaffolding of *travesti* defiance, activism, philosophy, and ingenuity, their present and historical subjectivities assist in the construction of this framework, collectively speaking to the potentiality of both the fictional realms and potent futures that they inspire.

My approach to this structural outlining of *travesti aesthetics*, as it is understood both through and within the novel *La virgen cabeza*, will thus be explored as follows: firstly, we must address what operational tools are at our disposal to appropriately identify when and how *travesti* subjectivities are expressed within the novel. The nature of this task is complex, as the subsequent section of this chapter will demonstrate, given that the plot development of *La virgen cabeza* transpires in two different voices: that of Cleo's (our *travesti* character) and that of Qüity's (her lover). I will critically engage with the episodic nature of the novel, grappling with the power dynamic that is often represented in these real-life scenarios: the oppressed are not allowed to speak on their own behalf for various reasons, engendering a demand to let Cleo's voice rise to the surface. By dissecting narrative points of view, historical legacies of the subaltern character in Argentina will inform our reading of Cleo's voice, as well as assist in identifying Qüity's strategic value in making sure that Cleo's story is told.

Second, this chapter calls on past academic readings of *La virgen cabeza* and engages with common threads used in its analysis. Repeatedly, a discussion of the character's ingenious approach to poverty and survival is associated with a queer futurity that, as I come argue, is inappropriately transcribed onto Cleo's story through an attendant misreading of the legacy of Néstor Perlonger's *neobarroso* within its narrative stylings. This section will endeavor to engage with these readings of the novel with a restorative approach which indeed bonds Perlonger's *neobarroso*, the ability to imaginatively *make do* in impoverished scenarios as proposed by

Víctor Goldgel-Carballo, and Cecilia Palmeiro's concept of *trasheo*. However, I argue that these concepts must be restructured through the lens of *travesti subjectivity* and survival; mobilizing Naty Menstrual's self-proclaimed genre category, *literatura travesti trash*, as *travesti praxis*, I move to combine her work with these previous readings in an amalgamated concept I refer to as *trasheo travesti*, which serves as a core strategy in the identification of components relevant to *travesti aesthetics*.

Finally, this study will engage with the manifest resourcefulness of *trasheo travesti* in characteristics of the dystopian genre as it both redefines survival strategies and creates decolonized queer pathways that propagate a novel conception of humanity. This discussion will be composed of deliberations on *travesti kinship* and chosen family structures that contribute to a reconceptualization, or trashing, of past utopian models. In dialoguing with cumbia, kinship, and travesti methods of care as modes for the creation of these new worlds, these final deliberations will pull back the metaphorical curtain on better, realizable futures that are discerned through the lens of *travesti subjectivity*. In leaning into the literary structural embodiment of *trasheo travesti* as depicted by Cleo, and incorporating their unapologetic endeavors, the novel also provides an opportunity to shed notions of her life and community as pure fictionality; in doing so, it will outline how *travesti* realities create new, vibrant conceptions of humanity that bear the promise and potentialities of *travesti futurities* and radical liberation.

#### NARRATIVE POINTS OF VIEW: ON DEFYING CANONICAL LEGACIES AND *TRAVESTI* ERASURE

To understand the consequence of what I will come to refer to as *travesti aesthetics*, this chapter must first address the structural dynamics established in *La virgen cabeza*; this will be accomplished by identifying the narrative voices that propel the events of the story forward in a

perpetual game of balancing both tension and care. The structure of the narrative itself reflects two subjectivities that enter into stark contrast, highlighting important questions of class, race, and gender that will come to demarcate vital attributes of *travesti* subjectivity, while underscoring the risks of erasure that this study looks to unequivocally combat.

While *La virgen cabeza* is clearly a novel, it is also a conversation between two lovers in deep disagreement about narrating a central tale. Recounted with an autobiographical tone, from the onset we are immersed in the visceral banter of an epistolary nature that fuses two first-person portrayals of the storyline's events. Transpiring in *El Poso*'s contemporary setting of *una villa miseria* in the capital district of Buenos Aires, Qüity as an author dominates the tale's narrative landscape, although she is interrupted by the sparing, yet powerful interjections that come from Cleo's chronicle of happenings. Cleo, her lover, has been given a copy of the genre-bending novel that Qüity has written in the recapitulation of their saga; she interjects with her account of the events through numerous audio recordings, which are reflected as transcriptions inserted into the novel by Qüity herself. This metafictional gesture— in which the text seems to be, in part, incomplete and unedited— in turn allows for the reader to both engage with the structure of the novel as a whole and critically analyze, question, and debate how the accounts of each author are posed throughout the tale.

Although texts within the NNA are innovative in their subject matter, techniques such as the deployment of tensions between the dominant narrator and the subject in these works demonstrates how novels like *La virgen cabeza* are still deeply influenced by the Argentinean literary legacies. For many analysts of this novel, such as Carolina Ruiz in her article “Cuerpos y literatura disidente. *La Virgen Cabeza*,” Cabezón Cámara's portrayals of Cleo, Qüity, and *la villera* community of *El Poso* are indebted to Argentina's specific literary and cultural

imaginary. As Ruiz remarks, there are noticeable elements that present themselves in new waves of Argentinean works, such as the resurgence of a literary history that mechanizes violence to both dominate the Other and overtly animalize them (360). Throughout her analysis, the familiar notion that Argentinean literature was written with the blood of the Other materializes (in *La virgen cabeza's* case, *travestis*, the poor, people of color), in tandem with the author's frequent acquisition of fame upon successfully making the tales of the uneducated, uncivilized subject both digestible and legible to the lettered public. Ruiz thus contributes to a sea of academic critiques that connect both the slaughterhouse environment of Echevarría's *El matadero* and the *gauchesque* adventures of *Martín Fierro* with the characters, conflict, and ambiance present both in and around *El Poso* (363-364). These foreseeable ties to civilized and barbaric behavior that are endemic to Argentinean literary analysis provide a productive praxis of historical knowledge and viewpoints, whether in the form of the noble and tortured *unitario*, the epic *gauchesque* poems that arise from the untamable Pampas in *Martín Fierro*, or how this central conflict was first dichotomized in Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's portrayal of legendary gaucho figure Juan Facundo Quiroga in *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie en las Pampas Argentinas*.<sup>28</sup>

This dichotomy and these narrator-character tensions are echoed, and yet complicated, by the inclusion of Cleo as a second narrator in the novel, who on more than one occasion disputes Quity's authority, privileged status, and her forging of narrative elements on her behalf. Critic José Javier Maristany in his article "Usos de la voz subalterna: lesbianas y travestis en dos novelas argentinas," also argues that the appropriation of the charming, poor, and "uneducated"

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<sup>28</sup> As described by scholar Roberto González Echevarría in the introduction of the text's contemporary circulation, "in proposing the dialectic between civilization and barbarism as the central conflict in Latin American culture, *Facundo* gave shape to a polemic that began in the colonial period and continues to the present day in various guises (the latest being the vapid debate about globalization" (González Echevarría 2).

voice has clear echoes in the tales of *Martín Fierro*, making a strong *gauchesque* connection between *La virgen cabeza* and the nationalized subaltern tale (116). Mobilizing Spivak's argument that the subaltern subject is unrepresentable in history and cannot speak for themselves (24-28), Maristany points out that lettered narrators such as Quity appropriate marginalized voices such as the gaucho without second thought, and consequently, the comparison with Cleo's circumstance arises. The voices of narrators such as Quity and our anonymous *Fierro* author are therefore forever registered in the transcription of oral histories never divulged by the subjects themselves (117). Maristany's perspective is solidified with yet another nod to the literary tradition of the upper-class subject that attempts to speak on behalf of the oppressed in Víctor Goldgel-Carballo's "The Reappropriation of Poverty and the Art of 'Making Do' in Contemporary Argentine Cultural Productions," as he states:

In Latin America, these questions are related to a long history of cultural encounters between relatively well-off artists and subaltern sectors of society; in terms of literature, for example, we could mention the nineteenth-century *gauchesca* poetry (where the *gaucho* dialect is folded into the intellectual's attempt to speak for him) or, in terms of theater and performance, the *teatro del oprimido* ("theater of the oppressed") developed in the 1960s, which linked workers, marginalized people, and artists in a collective, interactive project (119).

Goldgel-Carballo's commentary on numerous post-crisis productions in Argentina, such as *El Nexo*, *Estrellas*, and *La virgen cabeza*, reaffirms this project's interrogation of Quity's place as central narrator in the novel by both implicitly and explicitly speculating about when and how the poor are allowed to weaponize their own circumstances, and in fact, monetize them, as I will analyze later through the scholar's analysis. But overall, these inquiries in the form of

geopolitical and socio-economic considerations become a fundamental takeoff point for understanding Qüity's role as a dominant narrator. Through deliberation on the legacies of elite subjects speaking on behalf of the oppressed comes a grappling with the use of Qüity's intellectual skills as a tool for remapping Cleo's destiny (alongside an assessment of its potential benefits). Qüity's focal point within the narrative, after all, is to tell the miraculous tale of her *travesti* lover and the cult-like following she has established within *El Poso* with at least *some* degree of love and care. But as chapter after chapter develops, the way the story is told by each voice shifts in tone, precision, and partiality, which begs the question—to what degree should Qüity's account be recognized and under what circumstances? And perhaps self-evident—is she yet another example of a learnt figure exploiting the tales of the subaltern subject for her own benefit?

In any case, although the trajectory of her story is filtered through her refined, lettered partner and mouthpiece, Cleo's voice still punctures Qüity's transcriptions. As discussed in the article “De villas y paraísos perdidos. Memoria y literatura en *La virgen cabeza* (2009) de Gabriela Cabezón Cámara,” Liliana Tozzi concurs with my presumption regarding these dictations, deciphering the tensions that are covertly revealed between the two authors' versions. As a consequence, I would add that the balancing of their stories and banter often displays how they view the world, which at times appears to be affixed to distinct hemispheres of thought (Globally Northern queerness through Qüity and Globally Southern *travestismo* through Cleo), as well as different linguistic registers (Qüity's being more formal and Cleo's more colloquial).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Concerning the utilization and recognition of Cleo's (and by default, Qüity's) enchanting, yet vulgar language, Carolina Ruiz, for example, acknowledges the principal narrator's adaptation to Cleo's language as a testament to this cultural mixture that is folded into the novel's overall arc, saying, “El lenguaje que utiliza para contar la historia, en ocasiones de alto vuelo poético, es violentamente cortado por el uso de vocabulario escatológico o vulgar. La autora nos pasea por este subi-baja tonal que es uno de los encantos de su obra” (Ruiz 354).

Moreover, there is a coexistent problematic presented in using *la voz letrada* of Qüity as an instrument to tell Cleo's tale, who we can infer lost at least some degree of access to an education due to her gender identity and expression.<sup>30</sup> Drawing on comparisons with Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo*, however, Tozzi touches on the importance of publishing a book in order to give a testament of the facts, thereby inscribing the history of the marginalized into the larger collective History (9). Nevertheless, it also gestures us towards the interrogation that propels forth this section by way of extending these past examinations through contemporary globalized concerns of gender identity (in)justices—what transpires when testimony is not shared through the voice of the marginalized figure themselves, but rather by a privileged witness, which as Spivak deduced, captures their story irrevocably through their own subjectivity (24-28)?

This key inquiry into Qüity's credible role as an author and storyteller of the novel paves the way for an analysis of points of view, while also cleaving new possibilities for Cleo's narrative authority. This can be explicitly examined through the following reoccurring structural patterns in the text: Cleo and Qüity's polarized views of the world and *El Poso*; Qüity's mystification of both Cleo and *El Poso*'s inhabitants, which is coupled with a consideration of her intent; and finally, the employment of Globally Northern queer and trans\* terminology vs Globally Southern terminology in relationship to the *travesti* community. As I will come to show throughout these patterns of analysis, Cleo's responses will also manifest directives to ethically engage with the analysis of her voice so that it may in turn rise to the surface.

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<sup>30</sup> As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation project, statistical evidence gathered by Lohana Berkins in *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas* shows the drastic drop in access to education by these impacted communities, particularly in conjunction with the loss of a stable home environment and financial security (Berkins 77, 164-166). This evidence speaks to the necessity of analyzing Qüity, at least in part, as instrumental in telling Cleo's story; this is coupled with Cleo's remarks throughout the novel, which demonstrate that she views it as Qüity's responsibility to assist her with its telling.

## VOCES LETRADAS, DIVISIONS OF VISIONS

Era preferible que la Manuela jamás olvidara su posición en su casa—el maricón de la casa de las putas, el socio. Pero aunque no se tratara de eso sería fácil para ella enamorarlo, tan fácil como en este momento era quererlo...  
—Oye, Manuela, no te vayas a enamorar de mí.

— José Donoso, *El lugar sin límites*

Upon opening the introductory chapter, “1. Qüity: ‘Todo lo que is born se muere,’” the novel introduces us to our first narrator Qüity by name, while presenting a rich aesthetic preview of the novel’s amalgamations of style, language, and narrative viewpoints. Each subsequent chapter makes evident who is regaling their version of the events that transpired in *la villa* by starting the section with the name of the author, followed by a colon and a descriptive title. Little by little, these introductions also begin to prime the reader for their polarizing versions, in turn highlighting each narrators’ perspectives of the world. On the one hand, Cleo’s voice is that of the *travesti* visionary that leads the community of *El Poso*, whereas the learnt *voz letrada* of Qüity is the mastermind that ultimately assembles the chapters for the commercialization and distribution of their story—*La virgen cabeza*. Although Cleo’s portrayal and intimate dialogue is omnipresent throughout Qüity’s narration, it is critical to note that her voice is only directly presented for the first time in the third chapter entitled: “3. Cleo: ‘Fue por la Virgen María’” (21). Moreover, when comparing the overall quantifiable structure of the novel’s chapters, there is a lop-sided nature to Qüity’s sanitized version of events: Cleo’s protagonism through narration appears a total of five times, whereas Qüity is the author of twenty-one chapters. But these are not arbitrary details; while the quantity of Cleo’s chapters is sparse, it is part and parcel to grasping the significance of her burgeoning representation. The resultant forcefulness in her expression will thus be intrinsically tied to the role she plays in a shaping of *travesti aesthetics* that transpires through a demand for the recognition of her subjectivity.

Embedded in the semi-episodic and epistolary narration across Cleo and Qüity's chapters is an interwoven understanding of their conflicting personalities, their vastly different experiences of loss and mourning, their outlooks on love and sexual encounters, and unexpected revelations that shape their future trajectories. But when trying to understand the importance of Cleo's voice, style, and presence as a first-person narrator, it is pivotal to address the privilege that Qüity possesses as an educated, cisgender character. Her delivery of these details is partnered with a subconscious lens that reveals her intimate thoughts, whether it be her fixation on her own predicaments, her opinions of *El Poso's* less than tidy atmosphere, or the objectifying glance towards the bodies that live and move through it.

What is more, at the novel's commencement, Qüity is quick to reveal how they became lovers in their industrialized *locus amoenus* in but a matter of pages, ultimately culminating in Qüity's impregnation; this storyline is brusquely followed by her fixated mourning of the death of Kevin, a young boy who is murdered in the final days of *la villa's* existence. Having come to view Kevin as her adoptive son within *El Poso*, for Qüity, their flight to the United States is marked by his ethereal presence; unjustifiably shot down in a deluge of police bullets while reaching out for his stuffed animal, his premature death hovers over the life she has created with Cleo and how she sees their future taking shape, including the imminent birth of their child, María Cleopatrita. In Miami, they seek a better existence, new identities, and a cultivation of the religious fan base that has brought the Virgin's head and Cleo (acting as her spiritual conduit) to great fame and considerable wealth. Nevertheless, Qüity's narrowing in on meticulous details, intrinsically opposite to what Cleo feels they have experienced, emphasizes the nature of their polarized views on community and kinship.

Fundamental to comprehending this spectrum of their individual knowledge and points of view is Quity's lived experience *outside* of *El Poso*, which contributes to this somewhat censored and often bleak version of events that transpire in the unconventional community. This is made evident to the reader due to Cleo's repeated interpolations where she voices her truths in response to *El Poso*'s opaque portrayal. As Cleo enters the novel, her first interjection is strong-willed, rife with qualms, and reproachful of Quity's initial assessment of the story, which to Cleo's dismay, has commenced with the *villa*'s premature demise. Her first objections question Quity's chosen elements for their story's inauguration by indeed highlighting the fact that to many stories, many beginnings belong; for Cleo, the beginning of that story is, above all, a love story:

Ay, Quity, si empezarías las historias por el principio entenderías mejor las cosas. ¿Qué cuál es el principio? Ternura de mi corazón, hay un montón de principios porque hay un montón de historias, pero yo quiero contar el principio de este amor, que no te lo acordás bien vos, Quity, un poco contás las cosas como fueron y otro poco no sé qué hacés, mi amor, ponés cualquier pelotudez, así que también voy a contar la historia nuestra. Te la voy a grabar, mi vida, a vos la vas a poner en tu historia (21).

This opening interjection cannot be taken lightly, as it provides initial evidence of divergent narrative views, as well as a persistent dynamic throughout the novel that shapes a seminal *travesti* aesthetic framework. For as one visits and revisits chapter after chapter, deductions of opposites in every conceivable form emerge: Quity's narration of events, for one, pursues an imagery replete with death and grief: that of young Kevin, *El Poso*'s violent and bloody destruction, and a predisposed perception of *la villa miseria* as "...el reino de la eterna juventud: nadie se muere de viejo sino de enfermedades curables o tiros innecesarios" (54).

Certainly, Qüity's outlook can be understood in relationship to her own subjective reality and privileged perspective; after all, both her inauguration into and departure from *El Poso* were defined by experiences with violent death that decidedly shaped her despairing outlook. Of note is the seventh chapter of the novel, in which a concise summary of Qüity's informal induction into *El Poso* as *una villera* is posed through her mercy killing of a young girl named Evelyn just outside its walls. Having been taken hostage by a human trafficking ring led by a character known simply as *La Bestia*, young Evelyn attempts to escape; as a consequence, she is set on fire in such a way that eliminates any possibility for survival. Qüity, who had been stationed in her car observing *El Poso* from afar, details how the young girl set aflame fell from great heights in front of her very eyes. Burnt beyond recognition, Qüity takes it upon herself to give her "un tiro de gracia" (48), that subsequently moves her across the plane of two worlds: that of *la villa's* daily realities versus the realm of those who choose to obstinately ignore it. Throughout the short chapter, right before her official entrance into *El Poso*, her thoughts detail why she opted for Evelyn's mercy killing: in guileless summary, she admits she couldn't stand to witness her suffering. But as the section closes, she also reveals how she views it as her unofficial baptism in blood as a *villera*, saying, "Evelyn fue mi ticket to go, mi entrada a la villa. Yo la maté y ella me hizo villera" (49). Qüity's life, unlike that of Cleo's and other inhabitants of *El Poso*, is not accustomed to the constant onslaught of violence and mortality, and the firsthand experience understandably transforms her. Her initiation into this atmosphere is therefore a process of filtering through this preliminary exposure to a viciousness with which she was previously unfamiliar. In any case, her perspective is admissibly jaded and her outlook regarding these incidents becomes quite bleak; her exit from *El Poso*, marked by the death of young Kevin, only further fosters this perspective.

On the other hand, while Cleo's narrations are oftentimes frank and abrupt, they also celebrate the moments where she and her followers make harrowing escapes. After all, when every day existence is marked by torrential violence and a sea of bullets, they enthusiastically celebrate dodging these threats to their existence. Qüity remarks of these festivities as a generalized celebration of life reborn; as anthropologists, students, photographers, and more begin to invade the space of *El Poso*, they view them as emblematic of a new form of life, that: "... para todos la vida tenía un sentido nuevo y nos queríamos en esa novedad, en esa alegría en que vivíamos y estaba también en la cara de los otros, era un fiesta sostenida, valía la pena vivir, éramos libres en esos días de alegre multitud... La prensa empezó a hablar del 'sueño argentino' para referirse a nosotros" (89-90).

Although Qüity's perspective in this moment is constructive in relationship to her other assessments, Cleo is quick to intervene and inform her as to why she has misunderstood the nature of these celebrations within *El Poso*:

Mi amor, te olvidás de todo vos, voy a tener que grabarte cada dos páginas que leo, no vamos a terminar nunca si seguís así; tengo que decir la verdad: hablaban del 'sueño argentino' pero nos cagaban a tiros. Festejábamos cuando no nos mataban a los cien porque nos tiraban, como a los patos de la lata de esos parques de diversiones que paraban cerca de la villa cuando yo era chico nos tiraban, como si les dieran premios. Yo me los imaginaba, a veces cuando ya era chica, ligándose un peluche por cada negro muerto. Porque nos tiraban por eso, mi amor, por negros, por pobres, por putos, por machos, porque nos cogían o porque no nos cogían; qué sé yo por qué: a lo mejor practicaban para la guerra... Entonces festejábamos cuando a los cien tiros no había

muertos, porque era un milagro que no nos dieran, y ahí tenés una prueba de la existencia de Santa María, no puede ser que no te des cuenta, mi vida (91-92).

Cleo's frank considerations offer uncomfortable truths, in which she reveals in a Butlerian sense that some lives will always be "highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable'" (Butler 32). Although Globally Northern in origin, Butler's theory regarding the precarity of life extends to universalized questions that attempt to balance the metaphorical books of hemispheric power in relationship to global violence, asking, "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And finally, what makes for a grievable life?" (20). Cleo's admonishing response to Qüity in this excerpt corresponds to the callous nature of the world her life is subjected to. For Cleo, the lives of *El Poso's* inhabitants bear no weight outside its perimeter and everyday survival warrants massive celebration. These festivities in the mind of Qüity and other outsiders are merely a gluttonous manifestation of corporal liberation, but for Cleo and her followers, it is that and more, as it transforms into an unabated expression of love for one another and their dogged pursuit to not just live, but thrive.

Conversely, Qüity's tale is replete with descriptions that are informed by living an experience that in essence is not truly hers; as she was not born into the circumstances that necessitate viewing *El Poso's* existence as a safe haven, she cannot refrain from seeing the environment as awash with filth and death, irrespective of her investment in Cleo. What is more, as someone who has only recently begun to dwell in *El Poso*— although outsiders such as herself are incorporated into its vision— her perspective looks to justify her various prejudices and fears, which only become clearer by the chapter. For Cleo and her followers, however, conservative festivities are not in the cards when grief and mourning are auspiciously

circumvented; in response to the outside world's attempts to literally snuff them out, orgiastic, drunken, and cumbia-filled festivities run rampant in *la villa*. Summarily, Cleo's description of the celebrations that transpire in *El Poso* are daily affirmations of love, survival, and a unique kinship forged in thriving against the odds—it is what they have come to deem a happy and livable life.

Accordingly, Cleo makes evident throughout the novel that Qüity's incapacity to fully regale the story of *la Virgen* and Cleo is due in part to her biased worldview and outsider status. Additionally, it's clear that she believes that Qüity's fascination with *El Poso* is rooted in an exoticizing gaze, as her idealizations of the community manifest, in part, through a fascination with the joy they experience despite their adverse realities, and ultimately highlight her sentiment of unbelonging. Qüity approaches the community as if unearthing an anthropological marvel, thereby mystifying its nature and inhabitants, and treating them as subjects to be examined. This glance, coupled with an examination of Qüity's narrative intent, only further advances the cause for Cleo to blossom as a subject. Cleo's account in this sense reveals her ability to discern its subliminal intent— particularly when recalling the day of Qüity's arrival to *El Poso* and even going as far as to recount the absurdity of her clothing upon entering their unorthodox society:

Ese día los vi bien a ustedes en la villa. Era muy temprano y llegaron fresquitos, como listos para un picnic, vos incluso tenías zapatillas y pantalones de aventura, la misma clase de ropa que te ponés ahora para ir de vacaciones a la selva; te creías que ir a la villa era ir de safari, qué sé yo qué te creías, parece que te habías dado cuenta de que nosotros vestíamos normal, como todo el mundo, con ropa de ir a trabajar o de ir al baile o de estar en casa, no como vos que te venías como si fueras a cazar un oso o a pisar arenas movedizas (22-23).

Cleo's assessments of Qüity's contact with *El Poso* in examples such as these are uniformly straightforward throughout the text. Evident in her adroit ability to not mince words, her embodied existence has emboldened her in myriad ways, especially concerning Qüity's superficial conclusions about her. In moving through her recapitulation of events, Cleo capacitates an austere tone that both humorously and dotingly identifies the objectifying approach with which Qüity entered their community. But even in this regard for the lens with which Qüity viewed their beginnings, Cleo's methodology in correcting her is largely amorous in nature (with a few exceptions). Nevertheless, while drawing chapter three to a close, Cleo makes her commandeering presence on the story known, swearing to Qüity that "Este es mi turno, y yo te voy a seguir grabando mis comentarios, Qüity, que vos escribís todo y yo quiero contar mi verdad también..." (24)— although her requisitions within the novel certainly don't end there.

This firmness on Cleo's part is more than reasonable, especially when additional developments of the novel reveal intimate monologues that prominently feature Qüity's othering gaze and motivations for entering *la villa*. Although apparent from her first-person narration that she is very much in love (and lust) with Cleopatra, she also erodes her credibility as a narrator throughout her own account, which transpires not only through Cleo's transcribed contradictions, but also when speaking of her own personal aspirations. These self-reflective descriptions, in turn, demonstrate how she visualizes herself as set apart from Cleo and the other *villeras*, while simultaneously pointing to the innumerable exit plans available to her as an educated, cisgender individual.

Having been previously interested in a career as a narrative author, for example, Qüity reveals that she temporarily set her dreams aside to make ends meet by working for a Buenos Aires' law enforcement agency and writing up archival reports. In divulging these past

aspirations, Qüity's very own passages provide the reader with a revelation of her initial interests in Cleo's story. Her past unequivocally reveals her motivations in getting involved with Cleo, further magnifying her exploitative gaze and economic intentions for first entering *la villa*, as she states:

Yo también había querido ser escritora y había sido estudiante de letras clásicas, pero dejé mis ambiciones artísticas y el griego por el diario y la buena cocaína que me garantizaba el trato fluido con la policía. Lo único que hacía era trabajar y tomar mercas y mis fuentes, mis policías, dealers, ladrones, jueces, abogados y fiscales, se fueron haciendo mis amigos, mis amantes, mi familia. Eso era mi vida.

Cuando Daniel me contó algo de la historia de Cleopatra, pensé que había encontrado el tema para hacer el libro que me permitiría postular a los cien mil dólares que la Fundación del Novoperiodismo adelantaba para financiar las crónicas que le interesaban. Y una *travesti* que organiza una villa gracias a su comunicación con la madre celestial, una niña de Lourdes chupapijas, una santa puta y con verga les tenía que interesar. Yo podría dejar el diario y volver al principio, a la literatura, a los griegos, a la quieta voráGINE de las traducciones y a la violencia seca de las polémicas de academia (31).

Although this segment of the novel precedes Qüity's entrance into *El Poso*, it also divulges her intent as a protagonist to digest, filter, and sell Cleo's story, signaling us back to this chapter's initial musings on the elitist ingestion and regurgitation of Argentinean tales of subaltern realities. With the ever-changing nature of their relationship, and her subsequent romance with Cleo, it is of course plausible to suggest that Qüity's perspective could shift in nature through ongoing contact with Cleo and her community, allowing for a significant paradigm shift and reimagination of how the narrative construction of this society could be made beyond Qüity's

cisheteronormative lens. Nevertheless, it is apparent that Qüity's initial intent was not only monetarily motivated but was also incentivized by the notion of acquiring fame within both literary and academic spaces. These intellectual pursuits also play a role in how Qüity views Cleo's identity and corporal reality, leading this relational viewpoint analysis to its final component, which grapples with the contrast between Qüity's employment of Globally Northern Queer and Trans\* terminology and Cleo's own provincial self-awareness of *travesti* identity and community as discerned through a Globally Southern lens.

To begin, Qüity's descriptions of Cleo's gender identity, gender expression, and physical embodiment often seem to overshadow Cleo's self-affirming language and representation of her own subjectivity. This is made clear in response to Qüity's presumptions surrounding Cleo's conscious knowledge of her own presentation and desires; in essence, her responses frequently contradict how Qüity views her with unyielding confidence as Cleo admonishes her, saying:

Bueno, seré machista yo también, Qüity, aunque haya renunciado a ser un macho según decís vos, que no sos curiosa un poco porque todo te importa un carajo y otro poco porque agarrás y te inventás las historias que te vienen bien. La verdad es que no fui nunca un macho, querida mía. Pero no quiero hablar de eso hoy, quiero hablar del principio y que yo haya sido o no un macho no es el principio de nada, me parece (22).

As Cleo and Qüity's versions of events interact with each other in a dialogistic manner, they present us with an ongoing dilemma of representation. Accordingly, Cleo's honest descriptions of her personal narrative respond by refusing to be relegated to the existence of a queer character in Qüity's novel, thereby catalyzing a conceptualization of her own literary subject formation.

In this regard, we continue to see the weight of historicizing the novel within the parameters of the *travesti*, *transexual*, and *transgénero* movement in Argentina, which generates

collaborative responsibilities that we must uphold regarding how the author pays homage to a dear friend's memory. Additionally, in moments where Qüity's narrative tone makes a deleterious shift that exposes the gaze through which she sees her lover, Cleo's voice punctures numerous chapter interventions that ground us in an initiatory praxis of *travesti* knowledge. Embedded in the applications of these interjections is the impetus to understand *travesti*'s geopolitical significance and adjoining history, further enriching our grasp on the globalized systems of knowledge that inform the two characters' divergent worldviews. In doing so, the novel transforms into an invitation to give Cleo's story its merited authority, ergo placing Qüity's version of events on the metaphorical backburner.

In tandem with our understanding of the Globally Northern terminology and ideology that Qüity utilizes in her accounts comes the recognition of her privileged contact with educational institutions. The marked differences between the lives of Qüity and Cleo are shaped by the access to or absence of fundamental human rights as well as basic opportunities; this can be primarily assessed through how this contact informs Qüity's narrative style and theoretical affiliations with a body of Euro-North American poststructuralist queer thought. As Qüity's narrative style takes shape, its ongoing mirroring of many of the canonical texts that forever molded Argentinean national discourse concurrently provide insight into her ideological leanings; this echoing manifests most clearly in her gendered presumptions of the novel's principal characters—Cleo and the *villeras*. Particularly informative are the theoretical ponderings that Qüity employs, predominantly using vocabulary indicative of queerness and trans\*ness as it is understood in the Global North, a factor that augments the previous discussions regarding the mystification of Cleo's identity. Informed largely by Qüity's very own voice, this in turn generates proliferative academic analyses of both Cleo and the novel's

thematic content that has systematically misread her as a promise of *queer* futurity,<sup>31</sup> rather than situating her in a critical *travesti* framework. My examination of these common misunderstandings of Cleo's identity as queer, trans\*, transgénero, and more are crucial, as I assert that her analysis mandates the use of *travesti* in discursive applications of gender identity markers and corresponding shifts in theoretical frameworks.

All of this presents a clear problematic when Qüity attempts to describe her partner and their budding relationship by deploying theoretical queer ideology with which Cleo does not identify, simultaneously arming a class politics that dismisses her intellectuality and stakes in the conversation. For example, when Cleo presents her knowledge of the classics by quoting texts such as *The Odyssey*, Qüity interrogates her capacity to be knowledgeable about such material by stating, “A mi hijita ya le gustaban los discursos de la más queer de sus madres, parecía bailar mientras la escuchábamos. Y a mí me sumía la perplejidad, ¿cómo podía citar la Odisea casi letra a letra? No podía haberla leído en su pobre puta vida. ¿De dónde sacaba cosas como esa? ¿Existirá la Virgen y le dará por los clásicos y las putas pobres?” (17). The reader is thus exposed to the political privilege embedded in Qüity's queer academic formation, thereby emphasizing the fissures in how they frame their personal and relational identifications and rendering visible how Qüity's use of such terms subscribes to hegemonic Argentinean ideologies of dominant versus other—both past and present. Qüity's viewpoint, as I have mentioned, has

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<sup>31</sup>*La virgen cabeza* is often referred to as a work about two characters that are exemplary representatives of *queer* discourse and its development in Argentina. While citing Jack Halberstam, for instance, Martínez Gil attempts to identify Cleo as trans\* and *transgénero*, arguing that it is a liberal usage of the category that she falls into because Cleo herself is difficult to define (21), a factor that is an intrinsic element to *travesti* existence. Martínez Gil is not alone in this reading, but he also appears to misunderstand the historical significance of *travesti* identity, claiming that it is a migratory identification for a young Cleo who occupies the space of a sex worker, in contrast with an older version of herself who has left sex work behind and is in full recognition of her mature transgender identity—a term that neither Cleo nor any other character corroborates in any moment.

subsequently attracted the academic tendency to then supplement additional terms from global Trans\* Studies such as trans\*, transgender, or *transgénero* in Cleo's analysis.<sup>32</sup>

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, deliberations surrounding these applications of globalized queer and trans\* theory in the Global South thus enacts the posing of a tenacious question—does our primary narrator discern her own miscalculations in deploying them, and simply disregards them, or is she simply unaware of *travesti*'s cultural significance and potential? Our deductions are crucial in further evaluating Qüity's character, although I contend that we should steer clear from total condemnation of her intentions, her construction of Cleo's story, and the nature of their romantic relationship. Indeed, throughout various passages, Qüity attempts to portray her lover with respect and care. For example, her utilization of female pronouns, adjectives, and articles for Cleo is intentional and respectful—and largely in alignment historically with the *travesti* community (Berkins, “Un itinerario” 153),<sup>33</sup> especially considering the complex nature of the often requisite deployment of gender in Spanish and many other romance languages.<sup>34</sup> This can be discerned almost immediately in a second chapter passage where Qüity describes Cleo's first enchanting appearance on a sunny Miami morning after their flight from Buenos Aires:

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<sup>32</sup> See above, footnote 14.

<sup>33</sup> As described in a piece written by Mercedes Bluske Moscoso on Marlene Wayar and the *travesti* journal *El Teje*, she documents Wayar's perspectives on trite trans\* discourse of being “trapped in one's body,” and instead describes Wayar's views saying, “Marlene es travesti y se niega a describirse como una mujer atrapada en el cuerpo de un hombre. Con sus 1,90 de alto, prefiere explicar que una travesti es una persona que ha decidido, optado, por construirse en el género femenino más allá del condicionamiento biológico” (Bluske Moscoso).

<sup>34</sup> As discussed by Ártemiz López “Tú, yo, elle y el lenguaje no binario,” ongoing changes to gendered nouns and pronouns, including, but not limited to examples such as: todxs, todes, tod@s, elle, and more continue to inspire debate regarding the utilization of gender-neutral pronouns within the Spanish language (142-150).

“Buenos días, Qüity, mi amor”, empezó a parecer Cleo. Bella y parlante como es, nunca aparece sencillamente: siempre se la escucha primero. Toda hogar, mate y medialunas, la oí, la olí y por fin la vi. Se tiró en mi cama y me besó la lengua, tan largamente que se le corrió el maquillaje, se le cayó una pestaña y se la arruinó el peinadito de Doris Day que se había hecho. “¡Se despertó la bella durmiente!”, empezó a reírse y le brillaron los dientes; ella es pura alegría blanca y radiante y maricono y devota y enamorada y está siempre como entre boleros de novia camino al altar (15).

While scenes such as these facilitate an understanding of the love, adoration, and respect that Qüity fosters for Cleo, they also address how Qüity’s perspective brushes over the specificities that speak to *travesti*’s strength and individuality. While the use of *maricono* in this passage is not mutually exclusive from *travesti*, the idea of its interchangeability or being synonymous with *travesti* is a complex interrogation.<sup>35</sup> Why not, instead, speak of the power and implications of *travesti* in its own right? Deployed inconsistently in Qüity’s narration, its intertwinement with terms and ideologies that she deems negotiable elides details pertinent to Cleo’s lived, embodied reality and her material conditions.

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<sup>35</sup> As addressed by Arielle A. Concilio in their discussion of Chilean author and artist Pedro Lemebel’s life, work, and gender malleability as a methodology for genderqueer translation praxis, they argue that Lemebel’s self-identified status of *loca*, *travesti*, and *marica/maricón* make clear that these translation issues do not have singular responses or embodiments, as they state that “...for Lemebel, the word *marica* becomes a site or a focal point against which to combat claims that he is not a poet, not *travesti*. ‘No necesito disfraz / Aquí está mi cara / Hablo por mi diferencia’ (I need no disguise / Here is my face / I speak from my difference), he says. Here, Lemebel affirms her identity as poet, as *loca*, as *marica* — a complex multiplicity that both destabilizes the notion of a singular identity and again reflects the multiple nature of gender, genre, sexuality, and identity” (Concilio 471). This is further addressed in the scholarly study of Copi, author of works such as *La guerra de las mariconas*. Following the lecture series on the life and writing of Copi provided by César Aira, Matthew Edwards proposes that in order to understand Copi’s writing, we must also understand a historical reading of his marginalization (“How to Read Copi,” 66). Thus, evaluations of words such as *maricono* must consider its relationship with *travesti* as their intersections are indeed relevant, but should not be rendered synonymous.

This is clear when put into dialogue with the introduction's presentation of Cabral and Viturro's legal analysis of transgender legislation in Argentina, which highlights the unique precarities faced by the *travesti* community—especially in relationship to those who identify as *transgénero* or *transexual*—as they make clear that “...it is impossible to make explicit, in a few pages, the complex discrimination that is experienced by Argentinean *travestis*, given that it is based not only on gender but also for reasons of class and ethnic origin” (272). In relationship to Cleo's representation throughout the novel, including allusions to her raced, classed, and gendered status as both a child and an adult, an engagement with her character within a *travesti* analytical framework becomes compulsory, thereby avoiding confluences of her struggle with the legal and historical triumphs that have been enjoyed by the local and global trans\* community.

This becomes pertinent, for example, when considering how Qüity presents what might be construed as a legal success story during their forced exile to the United States. Upon arriving in Miami, Qüity names the significance of a long-sought-after name change on Cleo's documentation, albeit in the form of falsified passports, thereby providing what she views to be an account of a transitional moment, saying: “Nos cambió un poco la identidad; yo terminé siendo Catalina Sánchez Qüit y Cleo logró uno de sus sueños más difíciles: tener su nombre en sus documentos. Desde entonces, por fin y para siempre, se llama Cleopatra Lobos” (19). Considering her previous framing of Cleo's identity under the lens of queerness, it's necessary to invite contemplation on how she may be lumping Cleo's *travesti* identity into a Globally Northern sphere of transgender decryption. Within the context of U.S. trans\* theory, studies, and civil rights, after all, these name changes and the legal certification of said change is frequently regarded as an important rite of passage for the self-actualization of trans\* individuals (Stryker ix-xiii).

Of additional consequence within both Argentinean legal contexts and the novel's publication at this point and time is a necessary turning to what these experiences entailed in 2009—namely, the impossibility of changing one's name and gender on identity documentation for those who didn't prove themselves to be "*verdaderos transexuales*" (Cabral & Viturro 265). But even after the 2012 passing of the globally praised Gender Identity Law (three years after *La virgen cabeza*'s publication), *travesti* identity remains isolated from its legal considerations. While Qüity's passage might portray a respectful recognition of Cleo's liberty vis-a-vis documented identity recognition, her trained academic background in Latin American hegemonic traditions and Globally Northern perspectives diminishes her capacity to fully discern her partner's struggle. As discussed in the introduction through Wayar's dissent to the GIL's passing, this framing of transition as a fixed, binary destination—and nothing in-between—was and is largely a non sequitur in relationship to one's *travesti* identity, which has been segregated from the allocation of such legal benefits. Put another way, Wayar's written dissent after its passage, which inquired—"Where's the T?" (Wayar, "¿Qué pasó con la T?")—frames its shortcomings in an acute fashion. Thus, aligning Qüity's lack of comprehensive perspective also connotes a key questioning of being rendered visible, i.e., surveilled, in the first place—meaning, if this moment were registered from Cleo's perspective, would it be framed as a perceptible triumph, or merely another mechanism to engender their escape and survival? Arriving at this predicament in the text, Cleo's voice is metaphorically silenced, impeding a revelation of her genuine preferences and dreams.

As this section on narrative points of view has argued, there is much to wrestle with regarding the literary legacy of *la voz letrada* speaking on behalf of the subaltern subject in Argentina's history. Qüity's power and role as principal narrator within *La virgen cabeza* has not

escaped this inquiry, as grappling with her stronghold on Cleo's story, resisting its ongoing continuity, and strategically examining Cleo's rebuttal to her narrative overreach are all essential steppingstones in discerning the impetus for outlining *travesti aesthetics*. Qüity's passages only continue to develop evidence that her voice is unnecessarily dominant in the story, as she commandeers the delivery of details and feigns her status as omniscient narrator in her account.

Nevertheless, in parallel consideration, we must also factor in Qüity's presence as instrumental in mapping out Cleo's story. Due to Cleo's experiences as a young Carlos Guillermo, in which familial and institutional violence resulted in her expulsion from social safety nets, it is easy to correlate her story to common experiences of *travesti* youth in Argentina. As discussed, this loss of stable home environment due to circumstances of familial rejection, resultant poverty, and the need to resort to sex work as a method of survival, often resulted in the material inability to access higher education. Therefore, we can surmise that Cleo's transcriptions transpire for obvious reasons: she does not possess the fundamental skills to write her own story, and Qüity becomes categorically necessary for distributing it amongst the lettered public. While troubling Qüity's reliability as a narrator, we must also acknowledge that she facilitates the salvaging of Cleo's story from the margins. By the same token, her tale functions as a directive to the reader to discern why Cleo required her assistance within these hierarchal power dynamics in the first place. Our responsibility, then, is to facilitate an understanding of the subjugating structures inherent in these literary tools and advocate for their active dismantling. In rejecting the inevitability of narrators like Qüity, who function as a mouthpiece for the subjectivity of the oppressed, a corresponding space breaks open for Cleo's voice that seeks to forever relegate these filtered subjectivities to the past.

These final structural considerations of Qüity and Cleo's narrative viewpoints in *La virgen cabeza* thus mobilize an understanding of the aesthetic landscape of *travesti* expression that is indeed shaped by the format of performative interjection and disruption.<sup>36</sup> In Cleo's authored chapters, for example, her bombastic and vivacious orality emerges with an intense and triumphant honesty that both entices and repels her readers. Often provocative in nature, her descriptions of sex, life, and love reveal her disregard for polite discourse, whether she is recounting past sexual encounters with her lovers by saying, "Bueno, Qüity, vos tampoco eras virgen y sabés que antes de vos yo con las minas nada, no había pasado de chupar alguna concha cuando mis clientes más viciosos pagaban por el show..." (23) or discarding perceptions of her otherness in the defense of her vision, as she narrates, "Loca me dijeron muchas veces, desde chiquita, a todas las mariquitas nos dicen locas, y ni hablar de los que hablamos con la Virgen o con algún santo o con Dios mismo: todos se piensan que estamos de la mente, relocos se creen que estamos, no sé por qué... pero no soy loca, nunca me sentí loca a pesar de como vos me hacés aparecer en tu libro, Qüity" (123). As she repeatedly rejects the neat and clean version of events given by her partner, her considerations of Qüity's character also emerge as simultaneously damning, loving, and raw, saying, "...creo que sí, te enamorastes de mí vos también, me querés, a tu manera. Y ya ves, te conseguistes la mejor historia, la mejor mina y la poronga más grande del conurbano bonaerense todo por el mismo precio, mi pajarita" (78). With garish delivery, and adjoining bald-faced sexual humor, Cleo's recorded thoughts resolutely capture our attention through the transcription of her ruthless orality.

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<sup>36</sup> This is clearly evidenced by a history of vibrant political responses, such as Wayar's interventions in early discussions on gender identity discrimination protections within Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires' legislative discussions. Speaking to the binary protections being proffered, she highlighted how *travestis* were being alienated from discourses of citizenship defined by man/woman because, as she interjected "...no somos hombres y tampoco mujeres; somos construcciones con sustancia propia; es un ordenamiento absolutamente personalísimo" (Wayar, "Intervención").

In closing this section's deliberations, I maintain that the format of Cleo's volatile responses in conveying her reality have been made evident in these initial approximations. Qüity's elision of details and resultant narrative inaccuracies necessitates a brutal rupture—emergent in Cleo's disputes, her viewpoint pushes beyond the constrictions of respectability politics. Her burgeoning narrative subjectivity, in this sense, is representative of a structural aching to provide more space for her unfettered voice, serving as an initial blueprint for creating these aesthetic frameworks of irreverent expression. Consequently, this proposed system of *travesti aesthetics* that I will put forth will be mechanized by putting Cleo's analysis into contact with the literary and cultural representation construed by *travesti* authors themselves. This will be key in my next section's introduction of Naty Menstrual's *literatura travesti trash*, which will offer up revelations of perspective in my analysis of not just literary characters and the intimate portrayal of their lives, but also a revised lens of paradigmatic power when we view and decipher trans\* and *travesti* issues in the Global South entirely. As readers, then, Menstrual's introduction and implementation into this framework will demonstrate that it is essential that we are not swayed by the sanitized version of Cleo's story as narrated by Qüity, nor disillusioned by Cleo's insolence. In refusing the sterilized and polite narration of *La virgen cabeza*'s events—and embracing Cleo's unrelenting truths by way of Menstrual's methodologies—we stand to unearth a more profound understanding of this community's complex history and legacy.

**BOLD, IRREVERENT, AND UNAPOLOGETIC: CAPTURING CLEO THROUGH *LITERATURA TRAVESTI TRASH***

Throughout the previous sections of this chapter, I have been working towards the aesthetic recognition of the *travesti* subject's expression in Argentinean literature, as well as a corresponding methodological framework for approximating an accurate rendering of their perspectives. Considering the historical validations and more that I have used to frame the

complex facets of *travesti* identity thus far, I submit that the realm of the literary not only speaks truths to these political specificities and realities through the power of storytelling, but it also bolsters the affective experience of the bold and irreverent nature of *travesti* expression; understanding the systems of knowledge presented in these affective texts is crucial for not contributing to its further erasure, which is compounded by examinations of *travesti*-identified authors in this study's scope. Thus, as an imperative strategy for developing this aesthetic framework, I assert that a preliminary exploration of Menstrual's self-proclaimed genre, *literatura travesti trash*, serves as an essential reading for mapping the praxis of *travesti* knowledge and expression; employing her work in a reading of Cabezón Cámara's *La virgen cabeza* will further add to this aesthetic emphasis moving forward.

In Osvaldo Baigorria's review of *Continuadísimo* published in *Ñ*, we encounter an elaborate attempt to define what can be understood as Menstrual's *literatura travesti trash*, inspired by her blog's namesake. Difficult to succinctly express, Baigorria's enumeration of elements captures a wide gambit of Menstrual's essence as an author, which is written "[...] casi sin corrección política ni estilística, literalmente a las corridas, en un lenguaje claro, legible, ameno, extrañamente apto para todo público a pesar de lo obsceno" (Baigorria). In this list of obscene descriptions that Baigorria contends occur within Menstrual's style is an understanding that it emanates from:

[...] la voz de la canaleta, del patio trasero, del mundo de abajo, prostibular, drogón, reventado, *travesti*, marica o chongo, fuera de la ley y de lo gay... Esa voz dice puto, pisa mierda, busca pija y lame culos pero jamás arruga, nunca se doblega ni censura [...] Su incontinencia verbal cuenta escenas que atraen y repelen, romances delirantes [...] Una

picaresca pesada, de géneros bajos, donde lo trash y lo trans se trituran juntos en la compactadora de basura para reciclarse en broma bisarra (Baigorria).

Baigorria's review captures Menstrual's writing techniques and genre impeccably, as her uncomfortable toying with these tensions throughout her publications is viscerally tangible. The outright rejection of cleanliness and censorship expressed through her literary works, in this sense, provides the necessary intimacy to approach, feel, and comprehend first person narratives of *travesti* existence that consistently extract sensual experiences of awe, sexual wonderment, and frequently, very palpable pain. Therefore, the experience of reading and directly communicating with Menstrual's texts—namely, the short stories of *Continuadísimo*—is frankly, something that simply must be *felt* to be deciphered, which is the express result of how the author has construed the narrative imagery to her subjectivity.

What is quite clear is that the literary is already deeply and inherently affective; depending on the nature of a description, it will evoke strong imagery in tandem with feelings that often subjectively correspond to the nature of that constructed visual image: disgust, joy, arousal, fear, and shame. The ability to construe that imagery, nonetheless, is dependent on the skills of the author who conjures them. In relationship to *travesti* authorship and their ability to communicate an affective sphere of their realm and understanding, Sara Ahmed's employment of the word "stickiness" in "Happy Objects" is a perceptive expression of how these experiences manifest in the reader (29), providing insight into how *travesti* identity and culture can be corporally felt through the literary—particularly within the world of Menstrual. Once the affective attachment has been "set," an intimate connection with *travesti* authorship and representation frequently expresses itself in an unavoidable physical reaction on the reader's part through long-sustained raised eyebrows, or perhaps the subconscious hiding of one's blushing

face behind the binding of the book, only to be matched by a sudden turn in disgust/great thrill/surprise that escapes in an abrupt gasp or a slowly, but deeply projected bottom lip.

While Menstrual's work is not limited to the narrative forms found in *Continuadísimo* (2008),<sup>37</sup> this brief focus on its genre-inspiring contents—serving as a preview for the second chapter's explorations—is an explicit paying attention to the embellished descriptions within them, which are deeply representative of truthful renderings of *travesti* histories. Whether it's the consumption of an old lover's safeguarded piss in a bottle that transforms into devoted love-making in “Lluvia dorada sobre mí,” the visceral necessity to release gas during penetrative sex in “Amado Kombucha,” or nostalgic descriptions of the best rim job she's ever had that turns deadly in “Negro beso negro,” Menstrual's aesthetic takes the taboo and delightfully embellishes it, transforming the supposedly lewd and unacceptable into beautified and poetic rhyme, yet erotically and provocatively flirting with the grotesque. What is more, in paying attention to Menstrual's careful placement of adjectives and upending of syntax, for example, her narratives transform lustful acts of pure physicality into poetic experiences, such as the titular character of “Sabrina Duncan y su dulce cabellera” in which Sabrina “[...] no laburaba de travesti, solo se dejaba llevar por su necesidad femenina cuando estaba caliente como una perra y el aire fresco de los jardines de Palermo le traía a sus narinas el aroma joven de la carne pendeja, rebosante de hormonas y ganas de ponerla fuera donde fuera” (21). Not limited to Sabrina's sexual trysts that ensue in a public park, page after page, Menstrual's lively, yet dark twisting of descriptive material sensually rattles us both in form and content in a way that escapes concise description.

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<sup>37</sup> As a travesti-identified author, Menstrual has also authored a brief genre-bending text entitled *Batido de trololo* (2012) and an exceptional body of poetry, some of which is published within a collection that speaks to its recovered nature and an homage to her past: *Poesía recuperada* (2016).

Undeniably, as each exacting and raw short story of Menstrual's *Continuadísimo* unfolds, they jointly reveal truths that are made tangible in an affective, fictional form that speaks to the reality of her experiences. As readers, we become proficient in her *travesti* characters' unapologetic and brazen nature in pursuit of their most physical desires, in their paths to safe havens of kinship and love, and the utterly honest descriptions of an obstacle-laden path to arrive at their most desired corporal reality. The capturing of this irreverent nature is elemental to a building of *travesti aesthetics* and an attempt to convey their unique subjectivity that isn't mutually exclusive from *transgénero* identity but sets itself apart, denying an existence relegated to the margins of Northern considerations. Through the richness of textual manifestations, particularly within the narrative genres of the novel and short story, there is a deep mastery of descriptions in the likes of *travesti* authorship such as Menstrual's that is unparalleled, providing an embodied textual affectivity of their characteristic disobedience that allows the reader and outsider to enter their realm. These descriptions provide us not only with a more complex understanding of their subjective experience, but ultimately demonstrate their ability to be builders of collective *travesti* worlds comprised of a rejection of the humanity that they seek to shed.

Through a retooling of language specific to *travesti* identity that cannot be neatly filtered through translations of transgender or *transgénero*, Menstrual's work asks us to subvert our understanding of reality itself through *literatura travesti trash* and strive towards a reimagination of the world as we know it, rebuilding and reconceptualizing it along the way by sifting through its metaphorical and physical garbage. In the next section, I submit that by uniting Menstrual's genre with Cecilia Palmeiro's *trasheo*, that an even bolder promise lies in the expansion of *literatura travesti trash* that I will come to refer to as *trasheo travesti*; deployed in Cleo's

reading, this literary device informed by their subjectivity will come to serve as the ultimate refusal of *travesti* identity to be quantified and cleaned up.

TRASH AS THE FRAMEWORK FOR SURVIVAL: *TRASHEO TRAVESTI*

Using Menstrual's writings and Baigorria's characterizations of *literatura travesti trash* as a praxis of *travesti* knowledge, methodologies, and aesthetics, I assert that with an imaginative fusing of theoretical ponderings that attempt to understand *travesti* authorship, we can arrive at a more insightful consideration of their subjectivity that encompasses the ingenuity that is shaped by their experience. I specifically argue for this reformulation due to the growing need to recognize *travesti* autonomy and authorship, and to reexamine past interpretations of characters and explicitly name them as *travesti*—taking great care when employing the signification of trans\*/transgender/*transgénero* when it is chosen.

By expanding on Baigorria's definition of Menstrual's *literatura travesti trash* and applying it to other literary embodiments of *travesti* identity in the Argentinean landscape, such as Cleopatra Lobos in *La virgen cabeza*, there exists a boundless potentiality of *travesti* worlds and imaginations in both reality and fiction that simultaneously functions as a communal archive of their stories. I contend that by reading Palmeiro's concept of *trasheo* through the lens of *travesti* subjectivity in Menstrual's *travesti trash*, an essential component to *travesti aesthetics* is born within the conceptualization of what I will refer to as *trasheo travesti*—which commits to this audacious literary promise.

Initially mapped out by Cecilia Palmeiro in *Desbunde y Felicidad: De la cartonera a Perlongher* and inspired by Néstor Perlongher's *neobarroso*, *trasheo* is defined as a literary mixing of linguistic high and low culture but seeks to take it further:

*Trasheo* de la herencia cultural que se presenta de antemano como ruina de la que

únicamente se puede extraer, como joya del barro, lo no dicho, lo que no debe ser dicho... Trashear es aquí arrastrar la alta cultura (y la cultura política), en tanto restos, por el barro del Riachuelo para producir la joya.—el efecto de la sensación, el brillo, la iridiscencia. La lengua literaria mezclada con el lunfardo de barrio, con una lengua lumpen (de “puto de barrio”, como le gustaba decir a Perlongher). Y así como la cultura se hace detritus, basura, el barro se hace joya (26).

Palmeiro’s initial defining terms of *trasheo* are fundamental, for they speak to the influence of Perlongher’s *neobarroso* work broadly and the innovative approach to baroque themes in contemporary Argentinean poetry, prose, and narrative. These recurrent acknowledgements to Perlongher are not arbitrary in this study’s examinations, as his kitschy legacy and *neobarroso* technique and stylings—marked by extreme adjectival opposites, sexualization of the written word, a sensual “perversion” of literature that passes “through the body” (Palmeiro 26)—are ubiquitously used to examine *travesti* characters and authors in Argentinean literature (as well as other “queer/cuy(r)/cuir” identities). However, this often leads to using theory affixed to the Global North and erases *travesti* and regional understandings of “queer” identities altogether. Juan Martínez Gil’s “El devenir queer de Cleopatra,” for example, attributes many of the qualities of the novel to the *neobarroso* aesthetic, while advocating for its vigorous connection with queer discourse, utopias, and futurities in Argentina.<sup>38</sup> My qualms are affixed to the issue

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<sup>38</sup> Martínez Gil’s argument attempts defend this discourse further by framing the novel as unmistakably queer, primarily because of the assumed nature of “*lo queer*” as a fleeing identity-marker (13). The scholar then solidifies this essence of queerness and irreducibility by arguing that Cleo is an entity of many, ever-changing names (*puto, maricon, travesti, transgénero, mujer*), thereby making the unpredictable mixture of narrative forms and identities a testament to the idea that no hegemonic form exists in queerness (13-16). Consequently, they link these queer deductions by default to its *neobarroso* heritage in the construction of the novel and its principal characters (16-17), making connections between the clear influence of Perlongher on Cabezón Cámara’s work and the applications of queerness as most appropriate in Cleo’s reading. While these various readings of *La virgen cabeza* clearly incorporate

that many of the scholars who look to discuss Cleo's identity in this fashion repeatedly assign transgender to her while also employing queerness as an interpretative strategy, missing the promise that is encapsulated in *travesti's* engagement itself. As I have already outlined this approach as inherently problematic, Palmeiro's approaches facilitate these restorative readings.

Thus, in playing with the concept of mixing "high and low-class" language and culture through both vulgar and elegant descriptors and imagery, Palmeiro achieves this expansion of his work by arguing that it's a necessary beautification that is capable of turning literary verbal garbage (colloquial language, street language) into gold. Palmeiro's stylization of *trasheo* therefore argues for this mixture and extension of *el neobarroso* as it reaches for the literal and figurative detritus of one's surroundings, dragging elements of high culture into its sphere and rubbing them together in the metaphorical dirt, subsequently making all of their components shine. These implications are taken further, I maintain, and find even more generative connections through *travesti* subjectivity, when Palmeiro speaks to the perversion and undermining of language that is performed through a corporealization and sensualizing of the written word (26). Understood through Menstrual's work but pushing the roadmap of *travesti aesthetics* even further in *La virgen cabeza*, *trasheo travesti* takes Palmeiro's concept of *trasheo* to a new level in its combination with *travesti* ingenuity. Born out of sheer necessity in the material and fictional realm, the concept describes their resourcefulness through a framing of an acutely fundamental skill: their ability to re-envision both literal and figurative trash and how it is used as the ultimate method of survival.

Within these *travesti*-specific narratives, these critical methods of subsistence revolve around reexamining trash and *making do* with what one has been given in such a novel way that

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myriad facets of Argentine cultural productions that make connections with *el neobarroso* tangible, I believe they ultimately find themselves entreated to return to an amplification of Cleo's subjecthood.

it carves out considerably remapped futures for how humanity can function, fictional or otherwise. Explored in other contemporary Argentinean works that speak to the nature of *las villas*, this concept of skillfully navigating one's poverty is not necessarily new, as Víctor Goldgel-Carballo discusses in "The Reappropriation of Poverty and the Art of 'Making Do' in Contemporary Argentine Cultural Productions." However, this mounting landscape of *travesti* authorship and representation expands on that ingenuity in ways that refuse the exclusion of their subjugated knowledge in this new vision for humanity.

To commence the methodological filtering of these theoretical and academic works through *travesti* subjectivity, I would thus like to revisit the scholar's use of *making do* within the article, which revolves around the agency of the impoverished in the Global South—namely, when they are allowed to monetize their own status of poverty and use it to their advantage. His "restaging of social inequality" (112) within the analysis of various contemporary Argentinean cultural productions dares to demonstrate how precarity, when given center stage without the burden of shame, becomes a tool for the disadvantaged to build new realities, stating:

In the contemporary cultural production of a city like Buenos Aires... a critical acknowledgement of poor conditions is often at the base of agency; far from being a conformist rehashing of lack as plenitude, this reappropriation is often characterized by a satirical and defiantly carnivalesque drive that re-stages social inequality in a spectacular fashion and advances inventive modes of action. In stark contrast to public discourse in the US, where poverty often evokes shame, poverty in Buenos Aires is not conceived merely as an impediment; instead, it demarcates a site for distinctly creative forms of enunciation (113).

Instrumental to Goldgel-Carballo's reframing of *making do* within the cityscape of Buenos Aires is what the scholar defines as the outright acknowledgment of poverty that thus mobilizes action through these characters. Such admission of hardship within the Global North, as the scholar deduces, typically weighs on discourses of poverty in Western tradition (113), thereby leaving its corresponding literary characters sullen and destitute, rather than in the Global South where its acknowledgment leads to the envisioning their circumstance as a rallying agent for change (113). Goldgel-Carballo makes additional nods to the "alliance of literature and poverty" and the tenacious connection between lack and creative production that has persisted in Argentinean culture in myriad ways (123); this is made evident in examples such as the *bonarense cartoneros* and how their makeshift cardboard cover creations bind the books of celebrated authors, such as César Aira's *La villa* (123). Alongside other cultural objects brought into their analysis, Aira's *La villa* serves as another exemplary representation of a nation's inability to resolve cyclical economic crises that Cabezón Cámara's work mirrors; in portraying Buenos Aires post-2001 economic crash, the novel follows a growing population whose most basic needs are not being met, which is countered by the ingenuity of disadvantaged characters who construct new worlds out of next-to-nothing (Aira). The connections across these cultural productions are unmistakable, as many of these characters quite literally subsist off their skillful collection and utilization of the city's garbage, an occurrence that the inhabitants of Buenos Aires recognize as increasingly more normalized.

Elemental to distinguishing these portrayals from Cleo's universe, however, is that *El Poso*'s construction is born out of a compulsory acknowledgement of her unique precarities and intersectional oppressions at the axes of race, sexuality, and gender identity. While the lack of other *bonarense* characters in the works of *La villa*, *El nexo*, and *Estrellas* undeniably compels

them to develop new strategies for inventive survival, the world envisioned by Cleo and captured by Cabezón Cámara both builds upon and augments the notion of *making do* through explicit recognition of *travesti* precarity and resultant innovation. The mapping of this ingenuity can therefore be clearly connected to historical referents that explicate the emergence of improvised shelter communities for *travesti* and trans\* individuals, such as the late 1980s installation of Hotel Gondolín.<sup>39</sup> As discussed in *Cuerpos desobedientes*, Fernández acknowledges Gondolín’s importance in providing sanctuary for *travesti* individuals who had been displaced from their homes;<sup>40</sup> in assisting so many individuals, and to such a great degree, the hotel eventually transformed into a site of historical significance, when after years of being financially exploited by its owner, its *travesti* and trans\* inhabitants eventually took ownership of the establishment after his death (Sabarots 13-14). Additional past instances that reference their unique ingenuity can be found in Cristián Alarcón’s prologue in *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*, which takes great time and care to honor the newfound homes and novel modes of kinship that were created by *travesti* “mothers” such as Pocha Escobar. Connecting the anecdotes of Berkins to Escobar’s legacy, Alarcón’s dedication to her in the text directly attributes the survival of Berkins, who received shelter under her protective wing in the early 1980s, to spaces such as these (13-15).

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<sup>39</sup> As noted by Mariana Álvarez Broz in “Familia ‘entre pares’. Relaciones de solidaridad y vínculos de fraternidad entre travestis y transexuales de la Argentina contemporánea,” Hotel Gondolín “...es una emblemática pensión donde a partir de la década de los ’90 comenzaron a alojarse las travestis y las transexuales que llegaban del resto de las provincias del país a Buenos Aires. Está ubicada en la intersección de las calles Aráoz y Jufre en el barrio porteño de Villa Crespo. Desde el año 2000, luego del fallecimiento de su dueño, es gestionado por un grupo de travestis y transexuales, y años más tarde se convirtió en Asociación Civil Gondolín” (139).

<sup>40</sup> As described in Josefina Fernández’s *Cuerpos desobedientes*, Hotel Gondolín became a common sanctuary for *travestis*, *transexuales* and *transgénero* individuals who had been displaced from their homes and families due to their non-conforming gender identities; the text also confirms and speaks at length about a common association of sex work with those who resided in the hotel, as it was the only vocation available to many of them to enact their survival (90-114). This is further corroborated by Berkins and Fernández in *La gesta del nombre propio* (Berkins and Fernández).

All of this to say—that the installation of communities like *El Poso* cannot be severed from these historical instances, quantitative and qualitative data, and anecdotal evidence; as these components further meditate on instances of creating refuge that are particular to both Buenos Aires and *travesti* identity, the implementation of these voices and their lived realities becomes unavoidable in determining how *El Poso* and Cleo must be deciphered. As Cleo’s *travesti* lens intensifies the applications of *making do*, it manifests in the creation of spaces that normative, orthodox society would outright reject as undesirable. Redefining conventions of poor circumstance, the creation of these unconventional safety nets become powerful testaments to mutual forms of aid and collective care.<sup>41</sup> Thus, while *making do* commences as a fundamental take-off point that is intrinsically tied to their economic precarity, *trasheo travesti* dictates further explication on how the creation of *El Poso*’s way of life incorporates complex embodiments of *travesti* survival.<sup>42</sup>

Specifically, in *La virgen cabeza*, Cleo’s story becomes an exemplary method of transforming both literal and figurative rubbish into stable living methods that go beyond just getting by, ultimately creating unparalleled methods of survival and kinship borne out of a rejection of the humanity that has attempted to eradicate them. This is very clearly portrayed in the physical environment of *El Poso* itself—manifested as a literal garbage of Eden imagined by Cleo—in which the community players work for their mutual survival, using refuse and socially undesirable methods of sustenance to their gain. Ranging broadly from discarded food, to

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<sup>41</sup> Written in response to amassing global crises such as Covid-19 pandemic, climate change’s ongoing devastation, rampant racial and gender discrimination, growing wealth inequality, and the state’s failure and inability to comprehensively respond to any of these horrors, Dean Spade’s *Mutual Aid* examines how the inventions of everyday people are creating unique support networks of care for the most vulnerable, or as the text concisely conveys, “Survival work, when done alongside social movement demands for transformative change, is called mutual aid” (Spade).

marmalade made from oranges collected throughout *el barrio*, to stolen devices to be sold for the community's collective good, no item is deemed useless within a society systematically founded upon the reconceptualization of refuse—including the very salvaging of the cast-off humans who reside in their unconventional wasteland.<sup>43</sup>

At the heart of these collections of garbage is Cleo's altar to la Virgen, whose timely rescue of a beaten and bloody Carlos Guillermo, "...a punto de ahogarse en su propia sangre y la leche de toda la comisaría" (35), transforms her into our *travesti* protagonist saint, who is consequently inspired to install this haven of trash for all those who fall under her care. In cooperative efforts and gratitude, "las 'hermanitas', ex compañeras de trabajo de Cleopatra..." assiduously bring offerings to Cleo's altar for la Virgen, as they "...iban y venían presurosas llevando basura, trayendo caballetes y tablonos, todo en la espalda como buenas, industriosas y maquilladísimas hormiguitas *travestis*" (52). Seen as communal gifts made by those amongst their *travesti* kin, their cooperative efforts sustain *El Poso* and help it thrive. Dwelling amongst these undesirable accumulations, *la villa* becomes envisaged by its inhabitants as a new world, a lost paradise, an industrial *locus amoenus*, "un Edén que huele a mierda" (80). As their innovative ways of life engender entirely new ecosystems—that even go to the extent of collaboratively cohabiting with the ubiquitous presence of rats—their existence outside of

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<sup>43</sup> In consideration of Micah McKay's work "Trash and the Coming Community: Portrayals of Trash and Trash Workers in Argentina and Brazil," *El Poso* also dialogues with his conceptualization of trash as "...a material manifestation of the threshold" (48) in its reimagination of what is deemed useful or valuable. As McKay continues, he incorporates Agamben into his assertions, stating, "The logic of the threshold is strikingly similar to systems that we use in our attempts to distinguish between useful and useless material objects, or rather, things worth keeping and things that are trash. The words Agamben uses to denote the actions that constitute the threshold—abandonment and exclusion—resonate with the gesture that turns a thing into trash: disposal" (48). With *El Poso*'s environment existing as both literal and metaphorical threshold, and following McKay's assertions, its space serves to resignify our approximations to disposal.

compulsory capitalism asks Quity and the readers of the novel alike to contemplate the alternatives that are born out of their distinctive precarities.

Embodied through the most profound vision that Cleo receives from la Virgen regarding their future prominence, it is revealed that *El Poso* will become self-reliant through the creation of a man-made pond; posed through la Virgen's directive to fill it with koi fish, Cleo declares that their bounty will provide continual sustenance for its inhabitants. Known broadly as *carpas* in Spanish and *carp* in English, the koi presented in the novel exist in many global variations—but most importantly, they are known for being a fish not coveted for consumption.<sup>44</sup> Rather, koi fish, often speckled and striped in colorful variations, are mostly used in recreational areas for the upper class such as the Japanese Botanical Gardens of Buenos Aires. As Cleo and her followers become aware of the vision that la Virgen has for them, this impractical task of collecting and consuming these high culture fish does not even appear to be questionable to *la villa's* spiritual leader. As young *villero* Ernestito asks her why the fish must specifically be koi, for example, she blatantly responds by saying ““Son tan hinchapelotas. Qué sé yo por qué carpas, son unos pescados lindos, qué mierda quieren, que cultivemos delfines acá en el medio del potrero? La Virgen dijo carpas, ni tiburones ni ballenas, déjensen [*sic*] de joder. No se le puede cuestionar a la Santa Madre cada palabra que dice”” (68). In Cleo's adherence to la Virgen's vision for *El Poso*, she shows a clear demonstration of strength and resilience born out of her subjective precarity, which doesn't question non-normative modes of sustaining life; clinging to the objective of stealing the koi fish from the Japanese Gardens, she elicits the help of her community to bring them back to their newly created pond.

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<sup>44</sup> Koi, literally meaning carp in Japanese, has a legacy in both Japanese and Chinese culture as being read as a symbol of prosperity, fertility, and wealth (Ogiso 162). Although tied to distinct legends and meanings, its associations with the Japanese Garden of Buenos Aires have clear interpretative indications.

Given the location of where the construction ultimately materializes, it's significant to also note that because koi fish are known for being a species that will consume nearly anything—including, of course, garbage—*El Poso*'s literal walls offer a bounty for them to feed upon. Moreover, since the luxurious fish are also known for their prevalence for overbreeding, this cyclical engagement of fish-garbage-feast-fish-garbage eventually begets an endless buffet of carp for its inhabitants. In the pond's radical success, the koi, served with chimichurri and all, becomes the foremost method of sustainability in which they no longer must subsist on the outside world. Comprehensively, their collective methodologies of survival altogether eliminate the need to steal to endure, ultimately creating a self-sustaining world within the city limits of Buenos Aires. What is more, these revolutionary approaches to life in *El Poso* within *La virgen cabeza* reach much farther than just the building of a makeshift fish hatchery within the walls of its metaphorical "well," as chapter after chapter offers a liberated approach to sex and pleasure, as well as matchless kinship and notions of liberated family structures informed by the tenets of *trasheo travesti*, irrevocably tied to our reading of Cleo's *travesti* personhood.

Thus, *trasheo travesti*, as it has been explained throughout this section, provides the necessary framework to approach and articulate *travesti aesthetics* and the promise of the literary captured through the lens of trash and *travesti* subjectivity. Set into dialogue with the value inherent in engendering publications that feature this knowledge production, Marlene Wayar offers a response through the creation of her project *El Teje*, the first *travesti*-led journal to feature their subjective experiences. Contributing her thoughts on these epistemological groundings through the journal, she remarks, "En una sociedad donde el destino de la mayoría de las travestis es la prostitución, y en la que tenemos prácticamente vedado el acceso a la salud, la educación, la vivienda digna... *El Teje*, mediante la capacitación y la transmisión de saberes y

conocimientos, nos incita a construir otras posibilidades de ser en el mundo para vivir de una manera más igualitaria” (“Las travestis somos”). Personified in Wayar’s goals and exemplified in Cleo’s literary embodiment, this reconceptualization of how and when a new humanity is possible transpires through the discarding of the social structures that have perpetually failed them; this alternative system that explores their work also opens the door for the restructuring of the *travesti* community’s lost past and history through its capture in the written word.

In speaking truth to the vision of collecting this lost past, Wayar makes an additional contribution with her own hybridized philosophical and literary work. Infused with the performance art and intimate conversations of the Argentinean *travesti* community, Wayar’s *Travesti: Una teoría lo suficientemente buena* in its titular role alone (a theory that is “good enough”) is yet another restorative vision of defining what is suitable both in the written form and contexts of social acceptability, metaphorically trashing the notion of theory by upending its expectations and simultaneously enriching it with her revelations. In connection with this dissertation’s larger roadmap, this section’s final reflections look to incorporate Wayar’s text as it reaffirms the objectives of outlining this system of aesthetics, which speaks to uprooting compulsory norms and facilitating aspirations for a novel humanity.

Discerned through her advocacy for the breaking of violent systemic realities born out of oppressive, patriarchal, and heteronormative structures, and instead courageously creating new bodies of family and care, Wayar asserts that “Con nuestros saberes maricas, tortas y travas infantiles ponemos en crisis la piedra nodal del sistema heterosexual, la responsabilidad social de las funciones paterno-maternales” (Wayar, “Travesti: una teoría” 26). Incorporating the work and voice of performer Susy Shock that shouts “No queremos más ser esta Humanidad” (Shock, “Poemario” 8), Wayar’s theoretical corpus generates a mandate that is central to the lens of their

identity, in a deliberate break with the nodule of the nuclear family as essential, and an independent vision of the promise that *travesti* perspectives hold for our futures.

Wayar's unraveling of the cisheterocentric and the function of parenthood as possession in the text is thus a proposal that foregrounds how we can perceive *El Poso*'s realities in *La virgen cabeza* as a *desirable* wasteland, in which notions of paternal and maternal relationships are replaced entirely with avant-garde togetherness. Inside *El Poso*, all forms of communal living are welcomed: whether it's raising ragtag children from the streets, participating in unorthodox orgies, or endless consumption of *cerveza* and *porros*—everything is shared with interminable trust and care. While labels of familial relationships are not eradicated by any means, all who form a part of *El Poso*'s existence invest in the structure of a larger collective where no one is isolated or left behind. From an outsider's perspective (a cisheteronormative, institutionalized, patriarchal viewpoint), this world is replete with failure—but for those who dwell there, these ingenuities are in fact the greatest demonstrations of their will to live. No longer reliant on patriarchal structures that Wayar criticizes, the destabilization of the nuclear family through this community of *travesti* kinship generates enterprising constructions of inclusive models of care.

As this chapter's final sections will come to deliberate, whether the form is fictional, e.g., in *La virgen cabeza*, or *Continuadísimo*, or sourcing from Wayar's creative ensemble of *travesti* thought, this growing literary collective demonstrates a utopic vision in which this new order of humanity can be established—but through a system of *travesti aesthetics* and fearless modes of being, as they contain the tools that are integral for building these novel worlds of interdependent life. Through the form of the written word, which inimitably propagates the potentialities of these inspired realms, these *travesti* authors and thinkers boldly attempt to carve out this lost history and past as they reimagine and propose wild futures.

SUSTAINING *TRAVESTI* UTOPIA: CUMBIA, KINSHIP, AND DYSTOPIA'S TRASHY VALUE

Elemental to a conversation on these *travesti*-informed humanities is the response to an initial, albeit expected question: what forms of utopia and new humanity do we dare speak of in these analyses? This query provides us with an impetus for defining these new civilizations, and how our most vulnerable characters, both real and imagined, must be championed in their construction. In order to speak to this remapped humankind that exists within *travesti aesthetics*' potentiality, this final section will move through the following elements in its delineation: defining what kind of utopia we speak of in these conceptualizations; how the presence of cumbia, class, and race plays a definitive role in its outlook; and finally, how these elements jointly contribute to innovative kinship structures and networks of care that inform a vision of *travesti* futurities.

While engaging with conceptualizations of world-building and utopian existence, Cecilia González in her article “La desclasificación de los cuerpos: formas estéticas y políticas de la utopía en *Barbie también puede estar triste* de Albertina Carri y *La Virgen Cabeza* de Gabriela Cabezón Cámara” incorporates Fredric Jameson's ruminations on “The Politics of Utopia.” González's employment of Jameson's work makes a key distinction regarding how *El Poso* can be seen within this framework, thereby going beyond Thomas More's socio-political, satirical vision of the “New World” in our postmodern imaginations.

Chiefly, Jameson's distinction illustrates two possible readings of utopia's idealizing prospects. One vision asserts that there is a prospect of existence where the world is liberated from all evils and therefore its burdens; the other, by contrast, describes a new society that envisages entirely new projects for a distinct civic order and outlooks for human nature (40). González argues that Carri's film and *La virgen cabeza* dare dream of the latter, using the realms

of cultural production and fiction to make a bid for novel societies. Their argument builds on the premise that *El Poso*'s inhabitants have created a novel existence where sexual liberation and freedom from violence is central to their community. In the creation of Cleo's safe haven, the socially expelled that occupy the *villa miseria* thus develop a method of living that highlights the best characteristics that human nature has to offer— gentleness, warmth, and acceptance (69). My analysis moves in a parallel manner but stresses that this distinct civic order must center *travesti* subjectivity and aesthetics to fully encompass utopia's etymological roots; in doing so, there is an implicit returning to More's initial pun in coining utopia from its Greek origins of eu-topos "a good place," and ou-topos "no place" or "nowhere" (More). Functioning as commentary on the subversion of dystopian genre strategies deployed by the author, these visions of garbage are restorative in nature through Cleo's subjective vision; *El Poso* thus exists as an embodiment of returning to the realizable material prospects of this "good place," where these worlds of innovative survival are plucked out from the space of "nowhere" (ou-topos) and become a lived reality of *travesti* joy (eu-topos).

One fruitful element to incorporate into this discussion on the narrative's novel society is the name of *la villa* in and of itself: *El Poso*. In González's piece, she provides prospects for its analysis as a clandestine utopia, particularly given the impossibility to stumble upon its existence and its figurative "islandic" properties. As González points out, the nature of *la villa* is demarcated by closed walls, eliminating the possibility of arriving there casually (69); Qüity only happens to so through her connections with police authority that surveil the community.<sup>45</sup> Functioning in part as a critique on authoritarian oversight that are key to dystopic fictions, its

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<sup>45</sup> As explained in the novel, the first time that Qüity encounters Cleo is through video surveillance that has been set up by the police to observe *El Poso*'s happenings. Daniel, a key observer of *la villa*, allows Qüity to see it and is mesmerized by her presence in the recording, eventually enticing her to explore the community further.

clandestine location is imperative to its preservation. Only upon its discovery by the rich and powerful—who complain of its defiance to dominant social order—is its future put into jeopardy.

Furthermore, the spelling of *poso* invites a linguistic complexity, in that it could be understood in numerous ways through this critique. The misspelling of *pozo*, meaning a “well,” as proposed by González, corresponds with interpretation of those who come into *la villa* as if falling into the metaphorical well, although she makes it clear that this place replete with dirt, shit, piss, and cum is also a bastion of protection (70). Moreover, as Liliana Tozzi argues, there are varying interpretations of the play on words inherent to *poso* and *pozo*, from vast accumulations of water in lower land zones to the remnants of coffee grounds left in a cup (3). Within the framework of reading detritus and its value, however, I argue that the alternative spelling of the word “*pozo*” with an “s” speaks strongly to the prophetic remnants of tea left behind in one’s cup that are read to see one’s future. Brought further, I contend that the notion of tea leaves—or dredges and traces of grime and the indigestible—has even more potential in this study’s implications, as it is yet another indicator of how the discarded inherent to even *la villa*’s name plays a fundamental role in considering the new realities and futurities it forges in its existence. *El Poso*’s title thus serves as an interpretative strategy for Cleo’s role of metaphorical tasseographer, daring to read beyond compulsory definitions of their garbage-laden existence. Firmly grasping the socially and materially discarded, she reads their potential through her subjective lens, and instead turns to form a novel society.

Natural to this discussion on prophetic futures, however, are their resultant spiritual inquiries. González for example, argues that the pagan religiosity within *la villa* revolves around the mystic properties attributed to *la Virgen*, who ultimately dictates how the inhabitants of *la*

*villa* behave (70-73). This interpretation regarding the spiritual lives of the *villeros*, I contend, erases the characters' agency and spiritual autonomy within their divine pagan order. Although I concur that the nature of the community's utopian existence is pagan—while *la Virgen* clearly summons a particular religiosity—I argue instead that her use as a literal figurehead is at least a partial pretense for Cleo's larger vision. By using the ornament of *la Virgen* in the form of a sacred head, it becomes a linchpin to garner loyalty amongst her followers while also creating a heightened degree of communal religiosity. However, when *la Virgen* speaks to Cleo, it gestures us towards generative associations with motherhood, both conventional and unconventional. Cleo's utilization of *la Virgen* as a maternal model, while perhaps a bit contrived, dialogues with her role as a visionary in their unusual formations of kinship. Serving as an interpretative strategy, her sage advice and leadership shift to take on transformative spiritual meanings.

For example, as miscellaneous prophecies and philosophies emerge from Cleo's very mouth, they act just as much as tenets of public health amongst the sexually active as they do with the navigation of coping mechanisms that plague their marginalized lives. Speaking to their exceptional existence and sexual relationships, for example, she advises that "...suicidarse no es solamente cuando lo hacés queriendo y te pegás un tiro en la cabeza: también es cuando tomás demasiadas drogas o cuando cogés sin forros..." (89). Cleo's prophecies and advice, interlaced with a desire to go beyond mere subsistence and survival for her *travesti* kinship, thus transform into *El Poso*'s true vision and divine order. Aligned with Naty Menstrual's humoristic advice piece on the wide array of breast shapes, body modification possibilities, and medically transition-related dangers (un)available to her *trava* public in, "Dime qué tetas tienes y te diré quién eres,"<sup>46</sup> it's easy to align this irreverent expression of *travesti* care in very material ways.

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<sup>46</sup> Naty Menstrual published this short piece in *El Teje*, where she classified the various ways in which prosthetic breasts could be made and shaped through inventive strategies that her *travesti* comrades used

As the messages are directed towards chosen families and kinship, their tenets are intrinsically tied to their historical suffering; whether coming from Cleo or Menstrual, their messages are compelled by a need to disseminate shared practices of survival.

Additionally, in a chapter detailing their communal style of prayer, Quity remarks on the secular religiosity that holds them together as a community under Cleo's guidance:

No pasaba nada más que eso: rezaban y yo los escuchaba. Me asombraba que no supieran que los “Dios te salve, María” no los oía nadie más que yo. Después entendí: no los escucharía ningún dios, pero se escuchaban ellos juntos y esa unión era fuerza, y eso de que “los hermanos sean unidos porque esa es la ley primera” en la Argentina lo saben hasta los analfabetos (60).

Quity's assessment of their prayer gatherings speaks to its purity: its function within *la villa* is not out of loyalty to the institutions of the Catholic church, nor to María herself, but rather serve as a transformative practice in which their prayers and community-based concerns represent a gospel of their own network of love and care. Cleo, understanding their distinctive survival needs, is set apart as the unconventional mother of their chosen family within this context of *travesti* sociocultural order. Similar in structure to “houses” of kinship in U.S. ballroom culture (Livingston) and reified by stories like Pocha Escobar and Lohana Berkins, *El Poso* and Cleo's leadership provided a space unparalleled outside its walls. Through an acknowledgment of the compulsory structures that have rendered the lives of its inhabitants illegible and therefore unlivable, the very formation of their community—a physical manifestation of Butler's

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with limited financial resources, such as “tetas de silicona,” “tetas de aceite,” “tetas de trapo,” “tetas de globo,” “tetas en plataforma,” “tetas en doble media de seda,” and “tetas de harina.” Accompanied with a series of photos of fruit to playfully convey her message (watermelons, grapes, lemons, etc.), she reminds them, “Chicas, a cuidarse y cuidado con lo que hacemos. Nunca olvidemos que nuestra salud está de por medio. Si es tu ilusión tener tetas, tenélas de la mejor manera. Y si es solo para que las disfruten los tipos, deciles que se las pongan ellos” (Menstrual, “Dime qué tetas tienes” 4).

“constitutive outside” (“Bodies that Matter” xiii)— is built on practices that thus enact their own boundaries for survival and indeed serve as capacity to thrive.

Moving beyond ritualistic prayer, the care network of the community is expressed through additional unconventional practices within its walls, taking shape in limitless celebrations that are catalyzed by cumbia’s revitalizing qualities—a musical genre that is also intimately tied the histories of working-class, poor, and *travesti* communities in many regions of Latin America. As previously mentioned, Qüity has written an *ópera cumbia* of the book’s namesake that has contributed to her and Cleo’s growing wealth and fame, while it also stands as an homage to cumbia’s essential function in *El Poso*’s formation. Taking note of this genre selection within the novel is paramount in relationship to the larger role it plays in the landscape of *travesti aesthetics*. Afterall, as Berkins notes in the introduction to *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*, cumbia was and is an essential genre to the *travesti* community in times of bonding and relationship-building, as she rhetorically interacts with the title of her authored text:

. . . ¿por qué *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas* y por qué en ese orden? En principio, se trata de tres momentos que conforman un ciclo vital... La “cumbia” hace referencia a la música que escuchamos y bailamos cuando nos celebramos. Entonces, muchas veces pasamos al “copeteo” y sumamos el brindis y los convites al baile. Las “lágrimas” llegan cuando la emoción está a flor de piel y se mezclan las añoranzas y la borrachera: allí comienzan a aparecer las historias de alegría y de dolor que entrecruzaron nuestras vidas (8).

Berkins makes evident cumbia’s past and ongoing importance, namely, that the Afro-Latino musical genre is associated with expressions of deep communion. Much as we see depicted throughout the novel, and as reiterated by Berkins above, cumbia is celebratory but also

mobilizes intimacy; additionally, within the novel, it is indicative of surviving another day. As such, Qüity notes the genre's omnipresence in *El Poso*'s sacred celebrations of life:

Entonces estábamos casi todos vivos, y festejábamos esa ocurrencia y esa persistencia de nuestras vidas. Siempre había alguno que contaba los tiros de los ratis y cuando llegaban a cien sin víctimas humanas ni sacras, cumbia, porro y cerveza... Y éramos Dios, algo de lo sagrado circulaba entre nosotros. Por ahí tenés razón, Cleo, mi amor, por ahí era la Virgen hecha aire puro. Es cierto que logramos que no hubiera ni olor a mierda (96).

The comparisons between Berkin's introductory statement and *El Poso*'s atmosphere are clear: cumbia's enigmatic vibes are intertwined with a corporal celebration of self, and additionally, *travesti* community. Mirroring the words of Berkins, this jubilation was also often met with a catharsis of drunken tears, pain, and happiness; noted by Cleo at the earliest stages of the novel, it takes on various shapes, whether it was "...cumbia feliz, cumbia triste y cumbia rabiosa todo el día" (27). Capable of conveying her community's greatest joys and deepest melancholies, Cleo instrumentalizes the genre's rhythm and cultural sentiment to connect with the masses; its danceability, popularity amongst the poor, and varying genre presentations in turn reveal its own geopolitical histories of cultural rebellion.

While cumbia is a musical genre already associated with the struggles of poor, ethnic, and working-class individuals, it takes on additional signification in the space of *El Poso* through trends in its popular subsets. As a genre born out of an amalgamation of factors in the Americas— Spanish colonialization, the transportation of African slaves, and the influence of Indigenous communities— it has repeatedly metamorphosed due its malleable nature; first "re-born" in Perú in the 1970s, its transformative beat became omnipresent in working class communities and frequently "...could be heard in oil-drilling Amazonian towns" (Garsd).

As Peruvian and Bolivian working-class immigration rose in Argentina in the 1990s, at a time when the accumulating toll of neoliberal economic policies was being displaced onto the already economically subjugated, its transformation into the subgenre of *cumbia villera* has transparent titular origins. Often narrating the communal and corporal politics of the marginalized, as a musical form it's associated with the specific poverty and circumstance of *las villas miserias*, *los pibes chorros*, *los negros*, and a resistance to forming part of the working-class politics that reject them. Frustrated by constraints of traditional capitalism and neoliberal idealizations of individualized success that negate their ability to “rise out of their circumstances,” the lyrics of the genre frequently speak to their community-specific oppressions.

Argentine anthropologist and sociologist Pablo Semán, whose ethnographic work in part focuses on the production, migration, and reception of rock music and cumbia in Latin America, summarized central facets of the genre in a brief piece entitled “La cumbia villera es una gran ventana para ver cómo se procesa la desigualdad.” Semán provides details for understanding *cumbia villera* as a form of social protest by saying:

Tiene elementos de protesta que identificaban un obstáculo en las consecuencias sociales del proceso que, independientemente de su fecha de origen, tuvo en los años 90 su consumación. Tampoco nos sirve absolutizar una parte de la verdad sociológica para caracterizar a la cumbia y su relación con la situación social: autotitulándose “negros”, incluso “pibes”, con una connotación cercana a la delincuencia y la transgresión, interiorizaban el mandato de una sociedad que los expulsaba del mundo del trabajo. Se reconocían “vagos”. Pero no está claro hasta dónde ese camino, en el que habitaba la indignación, no es el que los llevó a concebirse como una juventud con derechos. Esa

otra parte integra las complejidades con que se desarrolló realmente la cumbia en Argentina (Semán).

Although *cumbia villera* in Argentina is not immune to critique of sexism and overt overconsumption of recreational substances, as Semán explains, the relevancy of its politics become apparent when considering the genre's champions, who are understood to be people of color and the poor, especially when their poverty is perceived through prejudiced class-based assumptions of appearance (Semán). In a clear reappropriation of that rejection that is tied to race and poverty, many *cumbia villera* artists, such Damas Gratis, Yerba Brava, and El Dipy make those titular roles a point of pride. Taking its working-class origins further, the cumbia that emanates from *las villas* rejects the notion of labor-centered life altogether, and in turn, becomes a transformative denial of the structures of capitalism that refuse their capacity to survive.

Pushed to the literal (*la ciudad vs. las villas miserias*) and figurative limits of existence (*dispossessed linguistic and cultural elements*), Esteban De Gori's brief publication on *cumbia villera* further solidifies the premise of understanding its roots as a linguistic strategy in *La virgen cabeza*, in that it provides a linguistic encryption that understands the genre as "...positivamente constituyendo una identidad y un movimiento cultural opuesto a la riqueza y a la ausencia de posesión de bienes materiales y culturales" (366). Through use of language pertinent to their experience of living on the limit/brink of annihilation, *cumbia villera* transforms not only into a form of self-expression, but also as a vindication of an experience that thrives around the concept of lack. Amplified further through Bourdieusian terms, there is an inherent power in exploring the social and political implications of solidifying this language forever in a lyrical exchange, with an emphasis on the value of capturing common, colloquial language in variable written forms (Bourdieu). *Cumbia villera* as a genre thus concretizes a

social landscape of communication into its lyrical formations and recordings made for popular public distribution. Consequently, Cleo's employment of the genre's stylings and language both elevates our understanding of her community, while forever transcribing its colloquial importance and adjoining identity politics onto literary history.

What is more, while cumbia has already been determined to be an integral component of *travesti* communal bonding, featuring *cumbia villera*'s expressiveness at the heart of the *travesti*-centered novel only further underscores the value of Cleo's expression of personal truths regarding her multiple marginalization as *travesti*, *negra*, *ex-prostituta* y *pobre*. Whether through cheeky revelations about past associations with sex work for survival "...vos te enojás por cualquier cosa, vida de mi alma, como si no supieras que antes de la Virgen yo era puta. ¿De qué mierda te creés que vivimos las travestis, mi amor?" (75), or pragmatic quips to her partner, her interjections convey a disregard for social acceptability that is highlighted at these raced, classed, and gendered intersections. As such, much like in popular *cumbia villera* themes, her discussion of her racialized status does not provoke shame, but manifests as pride. This is specifically relevant as she associates her own *negritud* and dedication to la Virgen with the pilgrimage of Manuel, the Black slave and sacred custodian of la Virgen de Luján:

La llamaban "la Virgen estanciera" y "la patroncita Morena" también, que es parecido a como le dicen a la nuestra, "la Virgen Cabeza", por nosotros, que éramos todos cabecitas como nos decían las viejas chetas del barrio, pero a la Virgen de Luján en esa época le decían morena, para mí que por el negro Manuel, porque los estancieros en esa época tenían a los negros amontonados adentro de las casas, no como tenían a nosotros, Qüity, al lado de las casas pero afuera, amontonados en las villas. El negro Manuel, te decía, estaba ahí cuando era chiquito y se enamoró de la Virgen y entonces los patrones lo

dejaron que la cuide y toda la vida se la pasó el negro cuidándola. A la Virgen le gustamos los negros, Qüity, y las negras también le gustamos y las negras travestis para mí que le gustamos el doble (125).

Key in this analysis are two components: first, an understanding of Manuel's importance as a Black slave entrusted with the care and pilgrimage of la Virgen de Luján (where they still pay homage to him today); and second, the utilization of *cabecitas*, which conclusively makes ties to Cleo, *El Poso*, the title of the *ópera cumbia*—"la virgen cabeza," and the historical implications of race connected to the term. Through Guadalupe Maradei's work on the genealogy of "cabeza" as well as "cabeza negra," the community of *El Poso* is definitively tied to a historization of working-class migrants of Indigenous descent:

Esta comparación y el título mismo de la novela suponen una provocación en tanto recuperan un modismo despectivo adjudicado a las clases populares y lo transfieren como advocación apócrifa de María. En la comunidad lingüística rioplatense, el sustantivo "cabeza" adjetivizado retoma una expresión que deriva de "cabecita negra", una locución que apareció en la ciudad de Buenos Aires en la década de 1940 cuando comenzó la gran migración interna desde zonas rurales de las provincias hacia la capital con el fin de encontrar trabajo, de la mano de la industrialización promovida por el primer peronismo. La expresión fue utilizada para denominar a esos migrantes de ascendencia indígena con un sentido fuertemente peyorativo y que pervive hasta la actualidad en el discurso de sectores medios y altos que lo utilizan para denominar despectivamente a sujetos de clase trabajadora y tez oscura (1).

Through this explication, it's clear that Cleo's community is a cultivated response of reappropriation, actively defying hegemonic social figures such as "*las viejas chetas del barrio*"

that promoted the public rejection of a raced and classed presence in their neighborhoods (125). In remapping the pejorative employment of *cabecita* through her own utopic pilgrimage to engender *travesti* survival and *El Poso*'s sustainability, for Cleo, her approximation to the term's marginalized status is also an identification with her role in the liberation and empowerment of her community. By grounding these narrative revelations in the socio-cultural relevance of *cumbia villera*, Manuel and la Virgen de Luján, and the etymological origins of *cabecitas* that inspired her community's roots, we not only begin to identify the through lines that establish the cultural make-up of her community, but it also foregrounds the importance in narrating how their innovative strategies for survival—which have been built out of a material nothing, plucked from a space of dislocation, exclusion, a fundamental lack, a “nowhere”—have persisted in producing embodied, communal, and spiritual joy. In conversation with the ambitions of *trasheo travesti* and Cabezón Cámara's linguistic games of reading *El Poso*, these contemporary conversations on the employment of garbage as survival through Cleo's subjective *travesti* vision present the reader with an opportunity to read beyond the refuse and seek out its embedded future promise—through a literary resignification and beautification of what's in the trash.

#### CONCLUSION

As made evident throughout *La virgen cabeza*, through a seminal shaping of *travesti aesthetics* within the literary, we can arrive at a reinvigorated reading of *travesti* characters such as Cleo, which further facilitate a more comprehensive engagement with the resourcefulness unearthed in *travesti* survival, irreverence, and ingenuity. Whether it's the imaginative use of a koi pond, copious and joyous *cumbia villera* celebrations, or the construction of *El Poso*'s environment in and of itself, Cleo's leadership demonstrates a unique ability to create

imaginative methods of subsistence rooted in one radical truth that informs her methodology and *travesti* praxis—only trash survives in trash.

But with the success of the community raging brilliantly, it magnetizes publicity and police oversight in tandem with a deluge of fatal bullets—and the premature destruction of *El Poso* becomes imminent as the outside world attempts to close in on their innovation. Cleo’s mission moves forward, however, as the novel poses the ultimate suggestion that her vision is necessary for a world of restructured *Posos*, in which humanity’s imminent failure becomes dependent on the resourcefulness born out of her subjective precarity. Having been pushed to the brink of annihilation numerous times due to her embodied *travesti* identity, Cleo’s conceptualization for radical alterities of reality becomes a dire need for a remapped world—for it looks to shed conventional notions of family, love, survival, and trash—and to create new networks of care that shift conceptualizations of humanity altogether. The prophecies of Cleo, interlaced with a desire to go beyond mere subsistence and survival for her *travesti* kinship, transform into the true divine order of *El Poso*’s vision and speak to the power, potentiality, and sacred nature of *travesti* existence and how Cleo aims to protect them.<sup>47</sup> As the novel draws to a close, the urgency with which she feels this mission must be met with her skills concomitantly suggests that perhaps we have already arrived at that moment—and we must simply follow her lead.

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<sup>47</sup> Cleo’s aesthetic and subjective vision dialogues well with an end-of-times narrative that demands a novel interjection as expressed in Jill Casid’s “Melancholy as Medium,” as they state, “At the end of the world, in the wake of the retraction of the convivial promises of human life lived together under what is called democracy (remember rights, access, agency, autonomy, something called the “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”?) that have yet to materialize as “unalienable” for disabled, queer, trans, and racialized life lived in conditions of exacerbated vulnerability and forced precarization, this pandemic-turned-endemic moment, in which we must figure out how to live with more than one virus, presents a critical moment for aesthetic intervention” (Casid, “Melancholy” 3).

These contemplations will further expand in the following chapters that explore *travesti* authorship directly, as this work continues to consider narrative, performative, and artistic representations of the *travesti* community through the work and activism of Naty Menstrual and Camila Sosa Villada. As *travesti* visibility in these artistic depictions becomes more prevalent moving into the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, these subsequent chapters will endeavor to engage with the manifest power unveiled when they speak—and write—on their own behalf.

## Chapter 2: *El Neobarroso's Filthy Legacies: Subverting Neoliberal Sex, Desire, and Necropolitical Travesti Death in Naty Menstrual's Continudísimo*

Immobilized in life, and barred from spaces designated as white (the good life, the Global North, the gentrifying inner city, the university, the trans community), it is in their death that poor and sex working trans people of color are invited back: it is in death that they suddenly come to matter... What would a trans politics look like that refuses such murderous inclusion?

—C. Riley Snorton & Jin Haritaworn, “Trans Necropolitics”

### Introduction

As the previous chapter of this dissertation has explored at considerable length, there is a clear imperative to establish, historicize, and critically contemplate the notions of a *travesti* subjectivity, identity, and system of aesthetics when engaging with their cultural and literary analysis in the Southern Cone. Throughout the exploration of two additional Argentinean *travesti* authors in this dissertation's scope, I will expand upon the discussion of *travesti* authorship in its collective archival and present-day applications, as well as the imaginative employment of distinct literary subgenres as a method of escaping or contesting the strict codes of realism that stifle *travesti* lives.

Moving forward with this section's thematic, it is essential to first address that while *trasheo travesti* has been specifically informed and inspired by Naty Menstrual's concept of *literatura travesti trash*, in this second chapter dedicated to the narrative works of Naty Menstrual, I won't be focusing on further delineating the framework I constructed to examine *La virgen cabeza*. Rather, I will demonstrate how within *travesti* authorship and aesthetics, the genre of the baroque (more specifically, Nestor Perlongher's *neobarroso*) is expressly instrumentalized by Menstrual in numerous short stories where her deployment of death, darkness, decay, and the grotesque portray a subverted reality of *travesti* lives—one of

consumptive joy and satiation that moves away from the trite and unsettling trajectory of *travesti* demise.

In this vein, trash and its many iterations will not be the exclusive methodology and approach through which Naty Menstrual's work will be framed. While this chapter will assess the components that are often at play in the critical examination of Menstrual's *Continuadísimo*, it will also move to incorporate elements that have rarely been accounted for in the analyses of her literary production. But to further contemplate the relevance of her fictional short story work within both the context of *travesti* authorship, and broadly within the Southern Cone, I argue that Menstrual's very own narrative trash creations must be put into conversation with her implicit instrumentalization of *el neobarroso*, the explicitly pornographic, and the necropolitical.

This chapter aims to turn common critical readings of her narratives into sites of new production by altering the paradigm of analysis traditionally evoked in the connections made between *travesti* lives, the cisheteronormalization of their hopes and desires, and superficial market logic. Through the merging contact of these methods of analysis, I will demonstrate how her works actively resist neoliberal portrayals of sex and desire in a demonstration of delight and pleasure as the goal. As this chapter delves into the narrative components of her short story collection *Continuadísimo* (2008), it concomitantly seeks to explore how these distinct narrative strategies embody unique forms of *travesti* joy. Consequently, these decryptions remove her stories from the overtrodden path of viewing their lives through an exploitative necropolitical extraction of value that is carved out of the violence that they frequently encounter, or put another way—yet another mournful synopsis of their premature and avoidable deaths. But to understand how this is accomplished in Menstrual's narrative creations and how I will frame this

exploration, it is essential to introduce the context through which her writing and contributions to other *travesti* publications first began.

While the artistic oeuvre of Naty Menstrual expands widely over the practices of plastic arts, poetry, and performance, one might say that it is both unwise if not perhaps impossible to ignore the collective political stance detailed in her fictional narrative works, which are compiled across two separate publications, *Continuadísimo* (2008) and *Batido de troló* (2012).

Considering the role that poetry played in the development of neobarroque and *neobarroso* stylings, such as in the work of poets such as Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy, and Perlongher himself, this study cannot evade an incorporation of Menstrual's poetry alongside these considerations. However, while I very briefly consider her poetry within my argumentation, I focus nearly entirely on the narrative strategies present in her fictional work, *Continuadísimo*, as I feel it best exemplifies her utilization of *el neobarroso*'s stylistic markers.

Born in 1975 in Buenos Aires, Menstrual's life was just beginning during what might be considered the apex of Argentina's most dire political crises, followed by one of the most brutal dictatorial regimes the Southern Cone would experience in the postcolonial period. But as Menstrual pointedly remarks in various interviews, her life truly began during the experience of her "*segundo nacimiento*" at the age of 30 ("Escribo para tapar un vacío"). Having first begun to *travestirse* in the early 1990s, Menstrual's life transformed upon recognizing that, "...desde niño se sintió 'mariquita' y que, luego, vestirse de mujer fue más que un juego" ("Escribo para tapar un vacío"). Rarely shying away from personal prodding and negating any proper and "respectable" comportment with journalists, audience members, and strangers alike, Menstrual's interviews demonstrate a negation of easily filtered conventions regardless of the subject matter, including her own identifications as *travesti* and as an author. Never coy and often a bit of a

provocateur, her answers show an affinity for indirectly satisfying her interviewers. Letting the spectator or interrogator surmise their own conclusions about her, she allows herself to be vaguely shrouded in mystery—whether regarding her opinions on sex, writing, identity, or the inevitable conversations that veer towards *travesti/trans\** activism and politics in Argentina.

Within the deep bench of engaged, passionate, and overtly political *travesti* activists with which this work has already been engrossed, Menstrual's contact with militant *travesti* activism could be in many regards juxtaposed. At the time of budding political visibility and *travesti* group advocacy formation (ATA, ALITT, OTTRA), Menstrual was in the early stages of *travesti* self-discovery, with her intertwinement with local activists relatively limited and just starting to blossom in the realm of written publications. Nonetheless, it's clear that she believes her engagement with the notion of a political personhood is not restricted to this social imaginary of *travesti furia* that emanated from these local groups, as she states in an interview by the syndicate *Agencia Presentes* entitled "Naty Menstrual: La militancia es la forma en que vivís." Speaking to her existence as an embodied mode of politic in a 2018 interview, she remarks that, "A mí me parece bárbara la militancia y que las chicas formen parte de eso que se llama institucionalmente militancia..." ("La militancia"). Menstrual instead marks herself as a *travesti* author who capacitates a remapping of the meaning of *militante* in comparison to her *travesti* comrades in saying, "Yo creo que cuando te portás de una manera, cuando en tu vida cotidiana reivindicás tu identidad, salís a la calle vestida de una manera, decís lo que decís, estás militando... Creo que uno milita hasta en la forma de tener sexo" ("La militancia"). By the same token, upon revisiting these published interviews and attempting to describe the nature of how Menstrual is pushes the limits of *travesti/trans\** representation, it's hard not to recall how she playfully toyed with my questions surrounding *travesti* identity in 2018 when I informally

interviewed her in a San Telmo bar. My inquiries for her were a seemingly endless opportunity to inspire a visceral reaction on my part, telling me she started to *travestirse* at the “late” (*sic*) age of 30, “porque así sabía que iba a conseguir la mejor pija” (Menstrual, “Personal Interview”). Her desire to provoke and simultaneously entice you into her web are as tangible in her written language as they are in her sheer enigmatic presence and raw energy, ranging from personal interactions to her famed street poetry readings; it is the essence of how she personifies an ever-changing and indefinable politic. Prodded further regarding whether or not she feels the category of *transgénero* suits her as a *travesti* individual, she would be prone to reveal to you that she believes it’s more revolutionary to renew her DNI under her assigned-male-at birth status while presenting as her quotidian Naty self, than change her gender identity documentation altogether.

For those who know her, or even have an experience with the aura of her public persona, these refusals to adhere to classifications are not difficult to discern, as Menstrual’s life, work, and art collectively highlight and reject social longings of cisheternormative social acceptance. Perhaps best embodied in the work of her textile projects, Menstrual’s plastic art endeavors to gesture us to the uniqueness of difference and the incapacity to reproduce any two things that are truly the same. Hand painted onto t-shirts that Menstrual displays and sells in *la feria de San Telmo*, one message is consistently displayed across innumerable items that suggest we are unified and yet, will never be alike: “Todos somos raros” (Edwards 138). Moving across the various mediums that Naty Menstrual employs to convey her inner reflections, the idea that we all share this innate strangeness is salient in whatever artistic encounter one has with her work. Attributing her literary influences in part to the stylistic departures of *porteño* writer Roberto Arlt (Menstrual, “La literatura desencadenada”), the twisted, strange, and dark *barrial* narratives that

Menstrual has created in her fictional narratives are no exception in pointing us all towards the dark, *Erdosainic*<sup>48</sup> corners that dwell within us while evaluating their potential signification.

Pivotal to note in this exploration of Menstrual's literary inspirations and creative works is recognizing first and foremost that she is one of the first self-identified *travesti* authors to publish narrative not only in Argentina, but globally in the literary Hispanic world. Adding to the remarkability of her trajectory as an author also warrants consideration of the humble beginnings of her project's first installations. As detailed in chapter one, her individual endeavors commenced with the undertaking of a blog defined by her own literary genre's namesake: Naty Menstrual Blog: Literatura Travesti Trash.<sup>49</sup> Periodically holed up in the web cafés of Buenos Aires, Menstrual's authorship commenced on the keyboards of publicly rented computers throughout various *locutorios*<sup>50</sup> in the capital district. Through the budding popularity of her blogspot inscriptions and a growing following, her poetry, narratives, and philosophical rantings (accompanied by carefully curated imageries) found their permanent home in the blogospheres of the internet from as early on as 2005.

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<sup>48</sup> First published in 1929, Roberto Arlt's *Los siete locos* features the misadventures and failings of Remo Erdosain, a worthy precursor to the anti-hero literary figure and the Latin American literary boom. Picaresque in nature, with unreasonable aspirations to escape perpetual failure in both laboral and romantic realms, Erdosain as a protagonist explores the seedy underbelly of Buenos Aires along with its questionable inhabitants. Desperate to flee his own circumstance through bizarre inventions and untrustworthy alliances, Erdosain stands as an early representation of the crushing forces of capitalism and the dark realities of surviving urban life (Arlt).

<sup>49</sup> One can explore (and enjoy) her internet archive of blog posts, still available here at: <http://natymenstrual.blogspot.com/>

<sup>50</sup> The English equivalent of *locutorios* as they are understood in Argentina is in essence an internet café, where one can purchase rented time on the café's computers and telephones while enjoying coffee, maté or more. Not exclusive to Argentina, in many regions of the Global Hispanic world they are discerned as sites of agency, where those without regular access to phone and internet are able to rent their use in a highly technology-dependent world (Sabaté Dalmau).

Menstrual's involvement in less clandestine projects grew as well as she became a member of the *equipo de producción* of a publication by the name of *El Teje* in 2007 (known as *el primer periódico travesti latinoamericano*), alongside well-known trans\* and *travesti* activists and artists such as Marlene Wayar, Diana Sacayán, Pedro Lemebel, and more. Initially organized by Marlene Wayar who functioned as the director of *El Teje* alongside feminist organizers Maria Moreno and Paula Viturro, the publication employed resources from el Centro Cultural Rector Ricardo Rojas de la Universidad de Buenos Aires to cultivate a literary space for contributors who looked to shed light on *travesti* issues and their social activism (Méndez 144).

More specifically, Wayar had contacted Viturro as a friend in search of a space for young *travestis* to express themselves in the written form (Méndez 144-145). Menstrual, who had just recently begun to discover her voice as a performer and writer who spoke to the *travesti* experience, formed a regular part of the editorial team offering up her short stories, drawings, and more. As Mariela Méndez notes in their article “El Teje: Primer Periódico Travesti Latinoamericano, o de cómo resignificar cuerpos que hablen y militen,” contributors such as Wayar and Menstrual utilized *El Teje* as a platform to “... [poner] en primer plano su voluntad explícita de insertar en el campo de lo público y visible la problemática travesti: desde la denuncia ante situaciones de discriminación, opresión y muerte, pasando por las demandas por la aprobación de leyes, hasta la exposición de múltiples iniciativas que desbaratan la ya consabida asociación entre travestismo y prostitución” (144). As a principal organizer of the publication, Wayar has explained that *El Teje*'s goals and mission were to function as a space for the production of *travesti* subjectivity— most explicitly for those that looked to go beyond binarisms of gender, sexuality, and sex (Méndez 144). It's no wonder that through Menstrual's growing involvement in these forms of publication—in tandem with her underground poetry readings

throughout Buenos Aires— that Menstrual’s work started to gain momentum, earning the attention of editors and publicists alike. Having fostered relationships with Viturro and Moreno at *El Teje*, the facilitation of compiling Menstrual’s *travesti* narratives at that juncture seemed entirely imminent.

Consequently, as these themes regarding *travesti/trans\** personhood began to swell in circulation, she organized her blog stories for the publication of *Continuadísimo* in 2008 with the independent editorial house Eterna Cadencia of Argentina. Within a few years’ time, the budding attention and praise of her “erotismo escatalógico” style (Moreno, “Review Excerpt”) culminated in the dissemination of her work, as her second publication, *Batido de troló* (2012), was then published by the independent editorial Milena Caserola. Expansive in its artistic explorations, the *poemario*’s contents featured an assortment of essays, short stories, photography, drawings, and poems; demonstrating exceptional promise and bold thematic content, Menstrual’s audacious works earned her comparisons to Manuel Puig, Copi, and Pedro Lemebel. Although the initial edition with Milena Caserola stopped in circulation some years ago, its ongoing popularity resulted in recently released new edition with Editores Ignorantes (2019)—with a suggestive new book jacket and all.

Foundational to the many connections that Menstrual established in the literary community at this point and time, I believe that *El Teje* serves as an important point of takeoff for both Menstrual as a published author as well as a foundation for understanding her work. Between Menstrual’s creative endeavors and *El Teje*’s preliminary explorations, there were clearly mutually beneficial points of contact. Vital to this connecting premise is the shaping of *El Teje*’s discourse in its public presentation,<sup>51</sup> which shares many commonalities with Menstrual’s

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<sup>51</sup> As Wayar also discussed in an interview with *Verdad con Tinta*, she spoke of the use of teje’s linguistic importance in the communication of information *intertrava*, saying, “...Es la palabra cómplice entre

fictional *trava* characters and their corresponding worlds. What is more, even in the construction of the publication's namesake, Wayar offers complexity vis-à-vis the nuanced embedded knowledges that seek to be unearthed in *travesti* authorship and storytelling through the explication of its titular significance, stating:

“En la jerga travesti”, aclara Wayar en una entrevista, “Teje es una palabra comodín que usamos delante de los heterosexuales para que no se enteren de lo que hablamos” (“Las travestis somos capaces de producir conocimiento . . .” web). Lxs tejedorxs usan su jerga e instalan su propio discurso a contrapelo de los discursos oficiales del sistema heteronormativo que regula corporalidades y subjetividades, y lo hacen dentro de un espacio institucional alternativo, el Centro Cultural Rector Ricardo Rojas de la Universidad de Buenos Aires (Méndez 144).

Going further, Méndez's article regarding *El Teje*'s formation argues that upon politicizing the *travesti* subject, *El Teje* functioned simultaneously as a political and cultural intervention, “...en lugar de un gesto meramente discursivo, que resulta instrumental para provocar consecuencias tangibles en las condiciones materiales de vida de la población travesti” (154).

Indisputably, the work of Menstrual not only directly contributed to these results, but as I will argue, takes them further through the creative subgenre possibilities that break free from the restricting codes of realism that devastate *travesti* lives. For this very reason, as this chapter's contents will reveal, I contend that Menstrual takes these cultural and political interventions, posed through the lettered formation of *travesti* subjectivity, and expands their applications. By embedding first-person *travesti* narratives into the literary world, Menstrual is not only taking the

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nosotras, de lo que no queremos que el otro se entere: tráeme el teje, por la cocaína; o mira el teje, es cuando tiene la billetera con dinero. Es lo que el otro no puede entender. Y es ese el nombre de la revista” (Wayar, “La trava”).

grounding principals understood in publications such as *El Teje* and weaving them into the fictional realm, but she is also recovering erased histories and breathing new archival life into them for generations to come. Throughout this chapter, my analysis will portray the narrative works of Menstrual as an act of compulsory socio-political intermediation that indeed extends beyond the literary realm, foregrounding an emergent strategy to subvert the traditional *travesti* narrative that I entitle *la trayectoria de la Manuela*,<sup>52</sup> which incontrovertibly ends in their brutalization and permanent silence. I will accomplish this by providing an analysis of how her utilization of the subgenre of *el neobarroso* facilitates an active resistance against neoliberal understandings of sex and desirability through the explicit use of the filth, grime, and the pornographic; this argument will then be further sustained through the lens of Diana Torres' *pornoterrorismo* and its ties to the movement of *posporno*. Secondly, I will engage with various works authored by Menstrual that resist the biopolitics of disposability, as numerous examples of her work contend with the notion of who can be carelessly tossed aside and allowed to perish or who can be violently removed with impunity. Menstrual's narratives in this sense actively subvert *travesti* narratives of death in her instrumentalized engagement with the necropolitical. And finally, these conversations will dialogue directly with Menstrual's work as it acts and breathes as a methodology for resisting the necropolitical extraction of value from their expired lives. By not using the ghostly presence of travesti/trans\* people as an invocation to the masses for the vitality of their cause, Menstrual's stories exist as unique contributions not only within

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<sup>52</sup> Named after the *travesti* protagonist and her anticipated downfall in José Donoso's seminal narrative *El lugar sin límites* (1966), his foundational literary representation of *travesti* identity propagated innumerable portrayals of their lives and deaths. In examination of Menstrual's characters in the sections to come, and in dialogue with theorist Sayak Valencia's work on vicious transfemicide, necropolitics, "transmortem politics," and trans\* activism in Mexico, I will argue through this framework that Menstrual rejects these portrayals, contending with who can be carelessly tossed aside or violently removed with impunity.

the *neobarroso* writing style, but also as a methodology that demonstrates how these lives can thrive beyond literary explorations that dare to weave them into fictional worlds of unbridled *travesti* futures.

As these conversations ensue throughout this chapter, its contents perpetually return to the observations of *El Teje*'s ambitious goals and how one might understand them to be intertwined with Menstrual's independent explorations in *travesti* authorship. In summation of *El Teje*'s consequential impact as a publication, Méndez's scholarship offers up a fitting description of the future *camino* of *travesti* authors who were merely getting started by contributing to its mission and ideals. As we turn towards the fictional works of Menstrual, not only do these words offer guidance about the implications of a recovered *travesti* past and the proliferation of their history, but they also serve as an initial departure to comprehend their past and present experiences and how they dare to weave better futures, saying, "Queda mucho camino por recorrer, pero lxs tejedorxs, con publicación o sin ella, seguirán tejiendo" (154).

AGAINST NEOLIBERAL SEX AND DESIRE: NATY MENSTRUAL, *EL NEOBARROSO*, AND *PORNOTERRORISMO*

While well-received and recognized in smaller publishing circles within Argentina such as Eterna Cadencia, as well as Buenos Aires public poetry performances where her provocative subject matter enraptures passersby on the street, Menstrual has been read, analyzed, and reviewed by very few. What is clear is that the most notable and circulated academic discussion of Menstrual's work is excised by scholar Matthew Edwards in his compiled text, *Queer Argentina*, in which he dedicates an entire chapter to "The Queer Consumption of Naty Menstrual." While incorporating numerous elements of Menstrual's authorship, public persona, and plastic arts, however, Edwards' approach towards Menstrual at times leans towards a neocapitalistic reading of her life and work, which is often portrayed as a successful selling and

commodification of her marginality. As such, his analysis of Menstrual is partially framed as a consumption of queerness and trans\*ness that satiates public desire to belong within marginalized communities. Principally, he argues that this transpires through consumer purchases of her plastic arts, such as her hand painted t-shirts, hoodies, dolls, aprons, and more, which are emblazoned with provocative imagery and messages.<sup>53</sup> Convincingly, Edwards' reading contends that Menstrual's images and catchphrases on the aforementioned merchandise attempt to distance themselves from the social and political discourse of tolerance and equality, "voicing an explicit critique of heteronormativity from a distinctly marginalized position" (131), with which I agree. Curiously, however, Edwards' reading vacillates from speaking about her remarkability to examining how her difference is silently accepted and digested by her public audience.

Throughout his analysis, Edwards swings the pendulum back and forth between normalizing Menstrual's difference vis-à-vis "we're all different, therefore in some vein, we are all the same," to alternatively analyzing her plastic arts as a mechanism of resistance to homonormativity and a spectacle of accepting difference. Frequently, his readings of her artistry and physical presence in San Telmo's public market seem to almost contradict themselves, as he speaks concomitantly to the commodification of her difference and how her work opposes global

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<sup>53</sup> For those unfamiliar with Menstrual's exceedingly successful artistic endeavors at the Sunday outdoor marketplace, Menstrual hand paints t-shirts, hoodies, dolls, aprons, and more which are emblazoned with intentionally provocative imagery and messages such as "Todos somos raros," "Muera Barbie, Ken puto," "Monster Fashion," "Estoy Re Loca," "Ken Trolo," "Pide Pija," "Super marica," and much more ("Naty Menstrual Artist Home Page"). Edwards' reading attempts to evaluate these provocative phrases and stick figure drawings as neutral entities without gender or sexual identity in his critique, remarking that, "... there are no signs of social diversity, or class/gender/ideological intermingling: equality and crosscultural dialogue are of no interest to the subjects of these still frames. Rather, their smiles and postures exude confidence; the portrait protagonists have nothing to prove except the quotidian nature of life itself. They are different, but so is everyone: and that is their message" (131).

capitalism, which may very well be the point. But the dissection of her plastic arts is both convincing and yet incongruous with a deeper reading of Menstrual's life and work as it appears to subscribe to tenets of neoliberal feminism to at least some degree. The mere purchase of the artistry of Menstrual should not be read as a commodification of her identity nor widespread social acceptance; indeed, one would likely argue that this reading is perhaps insensitive to the artist's needs and means for making a living. After all, whether in the realm of plastic arts, public performance, or narrative publications, the creators behind these scenes frequently must engage with the buying and selling of their artistry as a means to a simple end—to survive. Furthermore, while his analyses are simultaneously convincing and puzzling from the onset of the chapter, the problematics of this reading become evident as he applies these market logic principles to physical manifestations of the *travesti* and trans\* body as his examinations at times seem to gloss over entirely that these characters often participate in sex work as a means for survival (even if it's a practice they enjoy).

This approach to her plastic arts further extends into Edwards' literary analysis, which at times borders a reductionist reading of her literary characters. While acknowledging the unique capacity of Menstrual's *travesti* characters to navigate class-crossings and their expertise in variable social interactions, his readings of her characters often fixate on the physical construction of the trans\* subject—a matter I will expand upon in a later section. For obvious reasons, I contend with this narrow reading of Menstrual's characters, as he reduces their portrayal to a marketable life in the sex trade that is analyzed through “class-based inequalities characteristic of contemporary neoliberal frameworks” (139).

While Edwards' reading of the socio-sexual marketplace is not misguided, there are frequent moments in which his analysis of Menstrual's characters suggest that there is an

impossibility of a livable life for *travesti* characters who exist as anything other than *passing*. In this neo-capitalistic reading, in which being *travesti* or being visibly trans\* is simply a corporal space to escape through market purchases (a slimmer nose, silicone-injected hips, breast implants) and gradual social and class ascent, Edwards fails to comprehend that *passing* is often a tool of survival, rather than uniquely located as a method of attaining social equality and recognition (Stryker ix-xiii). What is more, there is a categorical resistance historically within *travesti* political activism to these notions of forced social and legal gender decipherability and legibility, to the extent that this monsterring of their personhood has been actively reclaimed by artists such as Susy Shock and Claudia Rodríguez (Pierce 310).

While I do not reject wholesale the erotic offerings and possibilities of Menstrual's characters that Edwards' readings offer, I do assert that his market logic interpretations of the character Sissy's marginality (both *travesti* and sex worker), are a cisheterocentric and capitalistic rationalization of her essence and her characters. The aims of this chapter's analysis, then, perhaps share more commonalities with Jorge Luis Peralta's "La narrativa travesti de Naty Menstrual," in which *Continuadísimo* is portrayed as an inversion of heterocentric realities that Menstrual dares to challenge at every turn (family, gender roles, sexual practices). Peralta's short scholarly analysis of Menstrual offers observations of how even the titular role of the text is key when considering that, "La referencia a los «continuados», es decir, de los sistemas de proyección de los cines de películas porno, no es meramente anecdótica: el superlativo hace pensar en el flujo ininterrumpido, real y figurado, del deseo sexual, elemento clave que atraviesa los textos, ya sea como fuente de placer o como generador de violencia" (108). Going further, and as I will contend throughout this section, I believe there is even more to unfold in these literary interactions by focusing on how she mechanizes the corporal for sheer pleasure,

decolonizing contemporary desirability politics that often fixate on, objectify, and subsequently punish the visibly *travesti*/trans\* body. In intertwining these literary interactions with genre-based and theoretical connections in Néstor Perlongher's *neobarroso* and Diana Torres' *posporno* performative measures (both on the page and on the stage), I will elucidate an understanding of Menstrual's sexual engrossment, both embedded with delight and defiant of cisheteropatriarchal norms. These efforts will show how her work moves beyond contemporary, neocolonial desirability politics and neoliberal conceptualizations of sex and desire altogether.

But frankly, this is evident as one moves through Menstrual's compiled works, which never shy away from the sexually taboo and adventurous. Story after story, readers are enveloped in the embellished accounts of *travesti* characters that indubitably have origins in Menstrual's personal experiences, consisting of a life of limitless sexual adventurism and rife with possibility, as well as financial and physical precarity. Whether situated in the dark seats of a porno theater, the hidden corners of a public park, or in the backseat of a stranger's car, Menstrual conjures enthralling tales of pursuing carnal desire at all costs and to its greatest heights, with every story tailored perfectly from titular construction to the final gasp. Upon commencing the short narrative works of Menstrual's *Continuadísimo*, for example, one is confronted with the book's five-part segmentation: "Lluvia dorada sobre mí," "Corazón de mujer," "Camarada Kaposi," "Continuadísimooooo," and "Negro beso negro." Already suggestive in nature, the framework of the text's separations immediately harkens comparisons to Pedro Lemebel's legacy of groundbreaking Chilean *travesti* authorship: *Loco afán: crónicas del sidario*, *La esquina es mi corazón*, *Tengo miedo torero*, *Adiós mariquita linda*, and more. These comparisons, of course, proliferate when one explores similar divisions present in *Batido de troló*— even from its evocative title, loosely translated as *Faggot Milkshake*— as Menstrual

splits them fittingly into “Mi sexo,” “Mis ojos,” and “Mi corazón.” As one becomes immersed in the parallelisms that could be made between the authors’ political, sexual, and romantic inclinations, it’s clear that her work forms part of a tradition of *maricona/loca/travesti* writers such as Lemebel, Copi, Perlongher, and Puig, in which comparable subject matter is explored. The titular descriptions alone call the attention of an exacting category of reader, both globally and locally, as they evoke both textual and sexual longings associated with international queer/*cuir* and *travesti/trans\** identifications, even as the work of creative translation comes into play.

Stylistically, Menstrual’s syntactical structures summon heaps of comparisons to Néstor Perlongher’s *neobarroso*, an Argentinean writing style and movement that we’ve seen discussed at length in the first chapter. Being a style that’s deeply influenced by verbose and overly ornate descriptions, it’s not difficult to find these characteristics of “...un ‘barroco de trinchera’ que tiene a la lengua como arma” (Palmeiro 25) as one pours over Menstrual’s fictional creations. Her playful tooling of sentence structure provokes a deep crevasse of imaginative baroque opposites that offer up a carefully placed hyperbolic wink or dropped jaw, all while biting your fingers in excitement. This goes hand in hand with a rich expressivity of adjectives in which situations typically associated with vulgar behavior— “...la perversión de la lengua, el trasheo de los materiales culturales...” (25)— are described with a deliberate mixing of “high and low culture” notable in Perlonghian comparisons; these descriptions present themselves both in linguistic selections as well as within content. As many Argentinean authors have engaged with the utilization of *el neobarroso*, the writing style present in Menstrual’s works is not exclusive to her narratives or *travesti* authorship, as Perlongher’s influence has been prolific. However, this analysis of Menstrual’s work and how she instrumentalizes Perlongher’s stylistic creation and

twisting of the neobaroque genre, as I will argue, relies heavily on an emphasis of one exacting element— writing through and with the corporal.

Understood in part by briefly returning to Cecilia Palmeiro’s work on Perlongher’s legacy, Palmeiro’s analysis not only proposes deliberate definitions of *el neobarroso* itself, but leaves us with rhetorically posed questions that beg to be answered regarding the sensualization of language and perhaps its consequent liberation, as she probes, “En el mundo neobarroso, la perversión de la lengua supone un *socavamiento* que pasa por la corporalización de la escritura... Para Perlongher la pregunta es recurrente: ¿cómo sensualizar la escritura? ¿cómo articular el plano de la expresión con el plano de los cuerpos?” (26). As one dives into the intricacies of Menstrual’s semi-autobiographical *travesti* fictions, the reader is prone to discover immediately in her imagined antics that she deeply engages with corporal descriptions that evoke the rawest of reactions, inspire affect bordering on the visceral grotesque, and transfuse sexuality into the pervasive and unapologetic filth of her textual encounters. Pivotal to understanding how this plays out in this section’s deliberations is the analysis of a smaller subset of short stories within *Continuadísimo* including: “Continuadísimooooo,” “Sabrina Duncan y su dulce caballera,” “Lluvia dorada sobre mí,” and “Medialuna de manteca.”

Amongst this selection of stories taking place in the capital district of Buenos Aires, Menstrual’s relation of content skillfully intertwines the lived realities of associations with sex work, interactions with law enforcement, and discrimination with a scatological and *esperpéntico* flair.<sup>54</sup> Through this explication of the corporal sensualization of literature that occurs in her texts, I submit that Menstrual employs *el neobarroso*’s stylings in direct resistance to neoliberal

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<sup>54</sup> Initially introduced by Spanish author Ramón María del Valle-Inclán in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, *esperpento* became a highly influential genre that used highly distorted, grotesque, and exaggerated depictions of reality as a method of social criticism (Valle-Inclán).

understandings of sex, consumption, and desire, as well as a methodology of embracing alternative visions for *travesti* lives. In this sense, I will argue that the role of *el neobarroso* in her work should be understood through the following elements: in that the use of the writing style radicalizes elements of the body in her fictions through the rejection of cleanliness and biopolitical machinations of control; that it concomitantly magnifies an understanding of the body as an explicit vehicle of sheer pleasure, satiation, and consumption; and finally, how the writing style facilitates an upending of the exchange of power in these sexual interactions, as well as discarding the interchange of sex as a purely neocapitalistic exchange. Through these developments, her *neobarroso* stylings will be collaboratively read through a discussion of Diana Torres' *pornoterrorismo*, functioning as a dialogistic component. As an effusively anticapitalistic activist, author, and public sex performance artist, Torres' work and *pornoterrorista* manifesto highlights the methodologies implicit in Menstrual's work that reject biopolitical control, enhancing our reading of her characters' lived experiences and the genre strategies employed to bring them to life. These contemplations will guide us toward an exploratory vision of literary *travesti* joy that connects with the subsequent section's meditations on her literary rejection of *travesti* demise.

Hence, this collaborative melding commences by introducing Torres' work as a connective theoretical framework that demonstrates how sex and the body can be employed through literary, discursive, and physical practices in defiance of biopolitical constraints. The scaffolding of these ideas will then be integrated into a comprehension of Menstrual's literary works while delineating how the corporal function of *el neobarroso* is instrumentalized and fortified through these genre-based and theoretical strategies. Cecilia Palmeiro's work on Nestor Perlongher's writing style will be implemented regularly in our comprehension of *el neobarroso*'s

signification at large. As the incorporation of Torres' work and 2011 publication *Pornoterrorismo* will come to demonstrate— as well as a brief introduction to her life's work will unveil— the intertwining of these literary interactions, theories, and performative measures on the page elucidates an understanding of sexual engrossment embedded with delight and defiant of cisheteropatriarchal norms; in doing so, our readings of Menstrual's work consequently move beyond contemporary neocolonial desirability politics and neoliberal conceptualizations of sex and desire altogether.

#### ON MANIFESTING PUBLIC PLEASURE

Hailing from Spain, Torres as a queer ex-performance activist, artist, and author originally started her activism by holding regular performance workshops that centered her own achievement of female ejaculation in front of a public audience. Having mastered the experience instinctively, her performances endeavored to impart the knowledge of these physical practices to people with vulvas while opening dialogue regarding the substance of the exercise itself. Encouraging participants to let it happen and "...correr a chorros, montas un escándalo en la cama..." (37-38), Torres looked to empower audience members who wanted to achieve the same goal while freeing the practice from any connotations of inhibition or shame. Gradually expanding her workshop set in both material and discursive nature, Torres' personal politics on sex, sex work, and the taboos surrounding what we do with our bodies in public and private, became central to her written *pornoterrorista* manifesto. Meanwhile, as her performances and *pornoterrorista* methodologies grew in sophistication and engagement, she endeavored to do the "unspeakable" on stage. Ranging from deep anal and vaginal fisting, fucking, orgasms, and other fluid exchanges in front of the audience, her practice demonstrated that absolutely nothing was off limits.

Frequently, in her expanding performance methodologies, her calls to awaken an audience juxtapose the supposedly physically and sexually violent scenes on stage with the projection of quotidian news media images featuring war, blood, and physical suffering. Torres herself makes the intent clear: simultaneously arousing myriad senses of the audience, she interjects with an interrogation of their hierarchized visual violence. Rife with examinations that come from a space of discomfort, Torres' activism and performance pushes categorical boundaries of violence and why the public consumption of some brutal imagery (mutilated bodies, human suffering, devastating war) is allowed, but not others, even when the sexual practices result in immense pleasure (fisting, fluid play, etc.). Torres explains her intent further, saying:

Yo saco esas imágenes...de su hábitat usual y las planto en un contexto en el que cabe la posibilidad de que haya gente excitada, con la mente despierta. Las descontextualizo para devolverles su valor orgánico, su fiereza, su brutalidad. Su parte de sentido que les había sido sustraída para idiotizarnos... Siempre sentí como si el morbo de ver imágenes de gente follando y el morbo de ver gente descuartizada fueran una misma cosa; ese quiero y no quiero, la restricción emocional que nos imponemos. Porque estamos acostumbradxs a que nos protejan de todo pero de ellos no nos protege nadie (74-75).

Going further, Torres argues that a similar experience can occur in the consumption of pornography; viewing rest as an essential practice in its viewing, she provokes critical thought at the axes of both lack of excitement from overexposure as well as arousing elements that might be troubled. Conjointly, the comparison of these images and the questioning of widespread social acceptance of our total immersion in violent media imagery offers a tipping point for many of the questions that both Torres and Menstrual intentionally and inadvertently pose, specifically why we are often protected from some— but never from others.

As Torres goes on to explain the overarching goal of her work—that we do whatever we want with our bodies and sexuality, whenever and however we please—one might initially discern it as oversimplistic in explanation, as every individual’s capacity to enact free will and autonomy over their bodies is often seen as limitless. However, as one looks to effectuate the change inherent to her mission, its enactment proves to be an arduous task within biopolitical analysis. Breaking with moralistic restrictions and impositions on what a body is/is not allowed or can/cannot do, her written manifesto became an elaborate composition on her lifelong reflections on societal bodily restriction. Moving against such constraints, her public workshops, performances, and personal and written practices expanded in engagement, as she participated in sexual interactions of every kind with every imaginable iteration of partners, sex work and its entrenched desirability politics, the porn industry—and the tenets of *posporno* that surged in resistance to it, and the overarching decolonized applications of *transfeminismo*.<sup>55</sup> Evident in the explications of her personal political practices in *Pornoterrorismo*’s first chapter, the points of entry in collaboration with Menstrual’s work becomes quite clear:

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<sup>55</sup> According to Latin American Queer and Trans\* Studies scholar Claudia Sofía Garriga-López, “El transfeminismo es una expresión de feminismo interseccional fundada en el entendimiento de que sexismo y transfobia están interconectados y se refuerzan mutuamente, funciona como una aplicación de análisis y métodos feministas para el avance de la liberación y empoderamiento de las personas trans. En la primera década del siglo XXI, el transfeminismo se concretó como movimiento social transnacional a través de una combinación de activismo político, trabajo académico, expresión artística, y subculturas sexuales radicales. Esta red fue establecida y fortalecida a través de varias conferencias feministas académicas y activistas, en internet y otros medios digitales de comunicación, y a través de los circuitos de migración hacia y desde Europa y las Américas... El término transfeminismo fue articulado por primera vez en España a finales de los años 80 durante una serie de jornadas feministas que argumentaban a favor de la inclusión de las mujeres trans en la política feminista (Fernández Garrido y Araneta 2017). Desde aquellos primeros años, el transfeminismo se ha convertido en parte de una subcultura más amplia que incluye la resistencia al capitalismo neoliberal y las medidas de austeridad; una articulación de políticas antirracistas, poscoloniales, y críticas pro-migrantes de las políticas estatales; movimientos sociales sin líderes como *los indignados*; y la escena de performance posporno (es decir, pos-pornografía) que se destaca por apropiarse y subvertir el medio de pornografía” (Garriga-López).

Cuando una va conociendo mejor su cuerpo y la cantidad de cosas que se pueden hacer con él, simultáneamente se va produciendo también una sensación de espanto por la cantidad de cosas que están prohibidas, que están marginadas o que sencillamente son delito. Descubrir la propia sexualidad es también descubrir hasta qué punto eso que llamamos «nuestro sexo» no nos pertenece en absoluto. Pertenece a la heteronorma, a la sociedad de consumo, a la Iglesia y al patriarcado, a la pornografía mainstream, a la medicina, a las farmacéuticas, a la moda, a (larga enumeración en la que tu nombre no está incluido) (33).

Expanding further, one need only read but a few paragraphs more to understand the direction of her text. Enumerating the various forces that look to control sex and the autonomy of one's body, Torres gives metaphorical shape to Foucault's description of how "the law always refers to the sword"<sup>56</sup> in the form of an ominous monstrosity. In turn, she describes how she— and collectively, we— can partake in practices that resist these mechanisms of power:

Imaginando la estructura que se arma detrás de la manipulación de las sexualidades de la gente veo un monstruo gigantesco, antiguo, que desde las profundidades de la Historia y la política (que no la naturaleza, porque el ser humano es por naturaleza curioso) manda y ordena, recorta de aquí y de allá, ciega, enmudece y lobotomiza a placer. Y yo, diminuta pero rabiosa, me resisto a su voluntad de titán y aunque solo sea por joder y llevarle la contraria, me corro como una fuente, dejo que mi coño engulla lo que le plazca, como

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<sup>56</sup> In Foucault's discussion of the development of biopower, biopolitics, and their unfolding consequences on the administration and control of life, this reference alludes to the corrective strategies at play within the enforcement of the law. While discussing the perpetuation of purported norms and how they are socially enforced, Foucault's analysis of biopower and how it's mechanized explicitly references how the juridical arms of the law enact sovereign power as regulators of life and death, continuously qualifying and measuring the value and utility of life and punishing those who dare to transgress the norm (144).

coños, me follo hombres por el culo, me dejo fustigar, me pajeo donde y como quiero, utilizo prótesis y dejo que mi placer fluya y se desparrame por doquier (34).

In analysis of sections such as these, which speak to liberation of bodies and expressive rage that exudes in its pursuit, I attest that it's evident in Torres' work that this emancipation doesn't exclusively occur in physical, material realities, but also when they are embodied in the written word. Passing over section after section of her work, in which she details sexual experiences of childhood and adolescence, young adulthood, and transnational and transfeminist conversations in both Spain and Mexico, the impetus for putting her physical workshops and sensorial experience into written form becomes apparent. In the same way, it transforms into a powerful, tangible tool in the reshaping of these discourses. As Torres looks to cast off the constrictive, imagined boundaries of both language and body, she also allows for the corporal to be viscerally personified and sensualized through the use of provocative, unyielding language.

Such is the case as well in Menstrual's pushing of sexual-textual boundaries, which similarly gesture us to contemplate how her life and her narrative characters cast-off the shackles of biopolitical constraints; these initial Foucauldian readings become vital in both Menstrual's analysis and consequent significance. Afterall, as Foucault's ruminations on biopolitics in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* assert, the growing importance of understanding sex's role in the "entire political technology of life" is paramount when evaluating how it was tied both to the "disciplines of the body" as well as "the regulation of populations, through all the far-reaching effects of its activity" (145). As an author inspired by Foucault's theorizations, drawing from Torres concurrently facilitates connections this section will weave into Menstrual's work. This is discernible not only in the aforementioned excerpts, but also when one comes across her explicit ruminations on how the biopolitical informs our adherence to civil obedience:

Pero si por curiosidad o aburrimiento abrimos un libro de Foucault, descubrimos con estupefacción que la higiene es una de las prácticas del concepto de biopolítica, especie de política gubernamental sobre el cuerpo que busca “racionalizar” la vida de las personas. Nos damos cuenta entonces de que la biopolítica gestiona nuestros cuerpos, nos dice cuándo morir y cómo vivir, cómo gozar y cómo sufrir, organizando nuestras vidas como valores en bolsa... Pero cuando nos lavamos los dientes, damos la mano, comemos ternera o nos duchamos, no pensamos que estamos practicando obediencia civil ... Lo hacemos sin más, porque «siempre ha sido así» (10).

Torres’ defiance of adhering to social models of obedience and civility—particularly in discussion the sanitization of sexual practices and desire—lays the connective groundwork for how Naty Menstrual mechanizes the *neobarroso* writing style, as well as its consequence in the realm of *travesti* authorship. Furthermore, the value of connecting these works is summarized by theorist Sayak Valencia in her introduction to Torres’ work as she underscores the weight of *pornoterrorismo*’s mission as well as its conjunctive applications in Menstrual’s analysis, saying, “El *pornoterrorismo* no es sólo un arma discursiva, sino una práctica de desobediencia civil y sexual que nos muestra que mientras tengamos cuerpos, perseverar en la sumisión social nunca será una salida” (15). As Valencia’s commentary makes clear, the activism inherent to both of their artistic practices unites them in transfeminist dialogue that bridges their authorship. For this reason, I believe that with the vehicle of *pornoterrorismo* we can go beyond the neoliberal readings of sex and desire in Menstrual’s work through her characters and *neobarroso* writing style, thereby uniting these elements in the narration of livable *travesti* lives.

As both Torres’ activism and Menstrual’s *neobarroso* strategies will demonstrate, one can only understand their works through a discursive reading that passes through the body and

sensualizes its written elements. Palmeiro's analysis of Perlongher's neologistic writing style reminds of this, as we encounter the building blocks of how it presents itself in Menstrual's work, as she states, "Perlongher señala la necesidad de encontrar nuevos lenguajes para expresar la protesta... que es letra en erección o dilatación, revelando las intensidades de la lengua. Pulsión de la letra como puro significante que se vuelve obscena, muestra lo irrepresentable, lo inmostrable, lo que debería estar fuera de escena" ("Desbunde" 28). The central nature of Perlongher's writing style makes the connective fabric between Menstrual's writing and the mission of Perlongher's narrative creation clear. Metaphorically built at the heart of the homosexual liberation movement in 1970s Argentina, his work at the time resisted the many ways in which the body was being subjected to notions of sacrifice for the leftist cause in socialist circles that resisted fascist regimes and suffocating capitalistic structures. Palmeiro makes this clear as she connects his work to María Moreno's prologue to *Fiestas, baños y exilios. Gays, lesbianas y travestis durante la última dictadura* by Flavio Rapisardi and Alejandro Modarelli, in which a more prolific understanding of homosexual public sex in Argentina is divulged (9-19). Palmeiro emphasizes how Perlongher's resistance to that sacrificial notion manifested, saying:

El sacrificio del sujeto a la causa social, objetiva, resulta conocido: es la lógica misma del capitalismo, contraria al concepto de felicidad de la sociedad sin clases. Y es también, según el FLH (Frente de Liberación Homosexual), la lógica del machismo... la propuesta política y erótica del cuerpo deseante de Perlongher resultaba subversiva porque se orientaba hacia los objetivos revolucionarios en tanto potencia del presente, no como postergación o residual postrevolucionario. La revolución no era de los otros, comenzaba en el propio cuerpo del sujeto ("Desbunde" 33).

Running inversely to socialist causes of corporal and mental sacrifice, Perlongher's works frequently engaged with the physical pleasure of the individual as the true source of transformation and liberation. Hence, it is not difficult to discern that his early writings, with homoerotic themes of *maricas* and *chongos* abound, bare much resemblance to what Menstrual's writings accomplish; her narrative works clearly engage with *el neobarroso* as a tool of written eroticization that centers pleasure. Through a deeper analysis of these reverberations, I contend she takes this platform to Perlonghian extremes.

In this sense, reading Menstrual alongside and through *el neobarroso* is fundamental—but in combination with Torres' pleasurable weaponizing of the body against these biopolitical forces, its meaning is fully revealed. Therefore, to further unearth the role of *el neobarroso* specifically in *Continuadísimo*, and how it is employed in rejection of biopolitical machinations of control, I will first decipher how these narratives instrumentalize spaces of public sex by putting marginalized sex acts on display, thereby exhibiting the filthy—and at times violent—nature of sexual acts throughout her work. Menstrual's characters, for example, openly display exhibitionist desires, consume the unconsumable, and delightfully pursue the most carnal, yet “prohibited” pleasures; in doing so, they satiate all fleshly needs through every possible orifice with abandon, shattering rules of civility with complete disregard for social mores.

Thus, the analysis of these acts will demonstrate how her collection of characters in this sense reject the biopolitical defense of a normalized social good, of hygiene and cleanliness, what is appropriate, and what is forbidden. In doing so, Menstrual's explorations concurrently dialogue further with Torres' work by demonstrating the many vehicles through which the hyper-surveillance of sexuality occurs, transpiring mainly through the constant contact with state and social structures that attempt to mechanize and enforce population control through biopower,

thereby resulting in the slow driving of subjects towards unlivable lives and eventual death. This contact manifests in Menstrual's narratives through the recognition and rejection of clean, productive sex that is geared towards reproductive futures; the critical contemplation of cisheternormative, patriarchal structures of partnership and family; and finally, in consideration of how her characters navigate relationships with sexual labor. While mechanizing their own bold defense of their most livable lives, each characters' endeavors reject statuses of indignity, criminality, and reticence in these practices, refusing to adhere to mechanisms of social and state biopower employed under the banner of political sagacity. Broadly, her fictions and protagonists unveil a visceral decentering of structuralized sexualities and permissible pleasures, provoking new decolonized frameworks of sex and desire through *travesti* narrative imagination.

#### PUBLIC SEX, LIQUID LONGINGS: REFUSING THE PRIVATIZATION OF THE OBSCENE

In both its ostensible presence as well as its overarching narrative contents, "Continuadísimooooo," the titular story of Menstrual's narrative collection, sets the stage for this discussion in less than four pages of carefully and intricately worded content. Coming at the tail end of the collection's penultimate section, the first-person narration within the story seems to emanate directly from Menstrual, as the name of the *travesti* protagonist never directly emerges. As the reader pours over the rousing content, it's difficult to not presume that the author's voice itself is central to the plot, particularly given that the vast majority of her various other *travesti* protagonists are named and often discussed through a third-person omniscient narrator. Speaking in first person from the story's onset, a door of intimacy into the narrator's innermost thoughts is immediately unlocked when the reader becomes privy to her personal Sunday evening ritual: to attend a regular showing at the local porno theater in barrio Once. Routinely prepping herself for

an evening that always leaves her “relajada para sobrellevar la semana” (131), our *trava* narrator describes her mentalization process for a night of prospective sexual trysts:

Me puse el uniforme de guerrera sexual, una calza pegada negra, un corpiño con bolsitas de silicona y una camiseta negra, además de la tanga también era negra bien clavada eterna. Ahí adentro no hay que esmerarse mucho, es bastante bajo el nivel estético, pero yo siempre fui bagayera, bah, para mí en la fealdad establecida también está la belleza, hay que saber verla y yo la veía o creía verla cegada por la calentura (131).

The setting of the *Cine plus de Once*, whose dark corners offer fast access to wandering hands, mouths, and pleasure, instantly plants a series of spatial curiosities in considering figurative and physical structures of power, as well as the construction of clandestine scenarios that look to escape them. As a purportedly public cinematic space, the backdrop of a theater to the unknowing reader would feign some degree of simplicity: an interested movie-goer pays for a showing, enters (and watches the film), and then simply departs. For the *cruising*<sup>57</sup> reader, however, this setting plays out in oddly universal ways to those who are familiar with the invisible queer/*cuir/marica/chongo* boundaries and accompanying potentialities that exist in these surreptitious spaces: entering is not for the trepidatious or meek, and upon passing into this anonymized and hyper-sexualized terrain, fortune favors the sexually bold. Discernibly present in the poetry selections of Menstrual’s *Batido de troló*, poems such as “Hoy me vas a coger” offer similar visions of fast, anonymous sex in similar landscapes:

Despertaremos

con el roce de nuestros cuerpos...

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<sup>57</sup> Fundamental to José Esteban Muñoz’s groundbreaking text, *Cruising Utopias*, numerous chapters within his compiled text intricately weave a discourse of anonymous gay public sex and the practice of “cruising”- understood as a deliberate moving through spaces known for these casual encounters, with the intent of scouting out a potential queer sexual partner(s).

Compartiremos la mentira  
 y nos sentiremos felices  
 en ese microinstante.  
  
 Y me vas  
 a coger.  
  
 No vamos a tener  
 nada que ver  
 solo un húmedo intercambio carnal  
 como una cerradura y una llave. (177).

Speaking to the anonymity and haste of the encounter, Menstrual ends the poem with a metaphorical post-climax, as both strangers light up a cigarette and become lost in the smoke. Gesturing us to both the thrill and the solitude of their fleeting engagement, upon their exchange of a goodbye devoid of meaning, she remarks, “y sin saber ni siquiera nuestros respectivos nombres/... Tan vacíos/ como ayer.” (178).

These spaces of public sex are both ubiquitous and fundamental to the creation of encounter within Menstrual’s fictions and poetry; on various occasions throughout her collections, they provide a transformative space through which her characters cross over—understood as a threshold into a space outside “...the crushing presence and always expanding force field that is heteronormativity” (Muñoz 39)—if you will. Their recurring sexual topographies also offer valuable cross-cultural connections that speak to the poststructuralist landscapes these bodies journey into, transporting them into a time and space that exists outside of patriarchal, cisheteronormative restrictions on sex. As they pass over physical and imagined thresholds, whether it be a theater, a public bathroom, or even the nook of a public park, these

erotic topographies repeatedly engender possibilities of profound corporal liberation while resisting surveillance from the outside world. Offering innumerable possibilities of *travesti*, *marica*, and *chongo*<sup>58</sup> sexual encounters where privacy is null, the erotic nature of a group atmosphere in the text is both enticing and even encouraged; defying social codes of acceptable behavior within them, Menstrual embeds this stark openness into various stories and challenges the parameters through which we decipher public space. Analogously, Torres speaks to the importance of challenging when, how, and where these deeds can occur socially, and the value of putting these unconventional acts of sex on public display:

El elemento del sexo en vivo también es un componente esencial de toda perfo pornoterrorista. Me gusta correrme sobre el escenario, para qué engañarnos. Es el sueño de todx exhibicionista: tener público mientras folla y que encima aplaudan cuando tiene un orgasmo... Además, lo bueno del sexo en vivo que ofrezco en escena es que no se trata solo de un impulso de exhibición y de autoplacer, sino que esos actos van más allá del acto en sí, hay una intención por mi parte de visibilizar ciertas prácticas relativamente marginales que considero que tienen que salir hacia afuera porque son de alguna forma subversivas. La eyaculación femenina, el *fisting* y el sadomasoquismo. Así, frente al público, se suceden penetraciones, corridas, latigazos... y muchas veces el propio público es partícipe de las acciones, porque nunca he deseado que el escenario sea una frontera sino un puente... Y tras todos estos años he llegado a la conclusión de que puedo hacer

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<sup>58</sup> As I will come to describe below through Palmeiro's introduction to the English translation of *Prosa plebeya—Plebeian Prose*, *chongo* and *marica* culture is embedded in geopolitical and spatiotemporal interpretations of their clandestine sexual encounters; briefly explained, however, *maricas* are often understood to be the more effeminate male figure and *chongos*, conversely, the more masculine figure that plays a role in homoerotic engagements but doesn't necessarily identify as homosexual. (Palmeiro, "Introduction" vii-xx).

cualquier cosa en una performance, no tengo límites, salvo los de serle infiel a mis propios deseos. Eso nunca lo haría, ni en el escenario ni fuera de él (78-79).

Menstrual's narrative public performances of sex accompany Torres' methodology well, particularly as Torres explicitly names these practices as elements of fulfillment, prioritizing the realization of her own desires over purely artistic performance and theoretical displays of sexuality. As both resist the privatization of sexual engagement and candidly seek out exhibitionism, they enthusiastically challenge what is allowed to be seen and read by the public. Furthermore, both enact distinct methods of visibilizing marginalized sexual practices in an act of direct subversion, simultaneously inviting the audience to witness the gratification that ensues. Menstrual's employment of *el neobarroso* allows us to visualize those hyperbolic and tawdry extremes in the same fashion that Torres enacts them on a public stage and inscribes them into her manifesto, collectively pushing them all into the space of the public imaginary and provoking the reader's sense of respectability in the context of pleasure. The deliberate mixing of sensuality, purported violence, and even humor by both authors in these spaces offers invaluable contemplations that overturn the boundaries of what we believe bodies are allowed to do, how they can do it, when, and why.

This becomes apparent as we traverse the dimly lit cinema of our introductory scene, when our main character puts her physique on display at the edge of the aisle, "parando el culo para que vieran," as an initial offering to a prospective lover(s) (131). Her methodology of finding a partner in the space, however, is nothing new, as she describes her habitual hunt for sexual satisfaction amidst a crowd of familiar faces, narrating, "Llegué y saludé porque conozco a casi todos debido a la promiscua rutina, y empecé la cacería, y cacería digo porque cuando voy me siento como poseída por una actitud vampírica, salgo vestida de negro y a chupar sangre, en

realidad son otros fluidos pero la actitud es esa, la del vampiro en busca de la yugular perfecta que deje saciada su hambre” (131). Carefully construing word selection and tone, the narrator conveys profound sexual excitement, a degree of rapacious, yet exhilarating energy, and an anticipation that is tangibly transferable from the page to the reader’s imagination. This twisting of language in *el neobarroso* context is vital, as Palmeiro signals, saying, “Esa intensificación de la lengua (sexualización de la lengua y, como correlato libidinización de la historia) en favor del significante produce un déficit de significado. Lo cómico es un efecto de las ocurrencias libidinales que se producen con el vaciamiento del significado, yendo de lo kitsch a lo ridículo” (29). Toiling over the ravenous expression of narrator’s hunt, the dizzying effects of the possible entryways into the text produce an experience of ecstasy and disorientation in their humorousness, forcefulness, and sensuality. As readers, we fill in the lines with the endless proliferations of what she intends to imply.

Upon crossing the threshold into a space void of cleanliness and verbal pretenses, her search for a satiation of physical appetites begins without feigned notions of restraint. The rules of courting involved in cisheteropatriarchal pretenses and reproductive futures are metaphorically thrown out the window as participants seek out their unconventional delights. All those who enter the theater understand its explicit purpose and acknowledge these rituals with a certain degree of silence, as well as an acceptance of “un nivel bajo de estético” (131) with little to no objections. As our narrator explores the verbal embodiment of that purposeful *cruising* throughout the cinematic space, it radiates through the selection of electrifying sexual vocabulary that explicitly signifies arousal: sucking, corporal aromas rife with blistering sex, and a sensually pungent description of satisfying one’s hunger through the consumption of a particular variety of bodily fluids. These liquid longings bear a striking resemblance to that of Perlonger’s, in which

“...esta espermatología funciona como una alquimia de los flujos corporales: todos los fluidos se asocian con el cuerpo y lo transitan transformándolo” (Palmeiro 45). Slowly meandering past the seats with a watchful glance, our protagonist finds herself locking eyes with a memorable “pendejo que conocía, lindo blanquito, alto, robustito, de unos veinticinco años” (132), although she is uncertain of when or how they have crossed paths before. After efficiently fighting off a mustachioed, middle-aged man who attempts to encroach on her familiar lover, the two of them waste no time in their bodily give-and-take; before long, she proposes they find a cheap hotel, being that “...se acordaba cómo cogía y que valía la pena” (132).

As the space of the sexual engagement shifts, we as readers are exposed to other profound spatial examinations both within the characters’ internal reflections and how it manifests in their dialogue. Moving to a temporary rentable location, the plot begins to invert the nature of internalized conversations, showing how the narrative publicly sexualizes the forbidden, including their dark, kitschy humor. Eager, impatient, and alacritous, the seedy nature of the cheap hotel immediately materializes as our narrator describes it as “...un hotel uno de esos donde si te matan nadie se da cuenta, pero este pendejo ya era conocido y me iba a matar de otra manera” (133). Although somewhat flippant in nature, Menstrual’s description juxtaposes dark, violent realities with the exhilarating prospect of sexual victory through the vehicle of sordid sexual humor. Reminiscent of Perlonghian erotic wit, the intertwinement of these dark elements enacts a reclaiming of *travesti* pleasure as she delightfully puts it on display, as Palmeiro reminds us that “A pesar de las trágicas circunstancias de esa experiencia, Perlongher insiste en el humor; no se trata de ridiculizar la figura de la marica, lugar común del machismo, sino de revertir la opresión en goce (como guiñarle el ojo al fusilero, o la svástica en las tripas, ya más cerca del masoquismo) en una apropiación crítica del poder disruptivo de la marica” (49). As the scenario

arrives to the reader in the form of gratifying corporal satiation of sexual appetites, it ultimately comes packaged in attendant reminder of physical precarity and plausible *travesti* death.

Descriptions such as these are abundant in the works of Menstrual, as their goal is multifaceted and sensually complex—they seek to provoke, entice, and draw you in closer, and yet, inspire a sense of pause through dark humor. The unambiguous polemic in her description first settles within the reader’s mind through sheer shock at expressing such an intertwining of these elements spatially, syntactically, and metaphorically. The implied push the reader feels, on the other hand, is excitement at this potential prospect of danger and waiting for the narrator’s adventure to ensue. Understood through Perlongher’s very own description of his writing creation, the linguistic and imaginative erosion innately present in Menstrual’s writing becomes clear, which is, “Introducir la perversión a partir de cualquier canto es la experiencia que yo he bautizado, un poco paródicamente, ‘neobarrosa’. Ese trabajo puede empezar sobre una frase común, pero dada vuelta –tanto y tantas veces– que al proliferar produce un delirio” (“*Papeles insumisos*” 317). Nevertheless, the perverse in Menstrual’s excerpts take *el neobarroso* to new extremes. As the words move from the page through the reader’s body, they are compelled by the raw energy pulsating through the narrator’s word selection and tangibly feel the anxiety and anticipation threaded through their own accelerated heartbeat. The reader’s desire for the encounter to develop is not denied, but it is also interlaced with a delirious combination of disquiet, violent perversion by way of sexual excitement.

After a vivid description of spitting, fucking, and general enjoyment flowing naturally between the two lovers, the *pendejo lindo* reveals vital insight into their encounter. Its contents are vital for this argument’s framework of how these acts of sex are hidden by particular players, but subsequently put on display by Menstrual, as she narrates:

Terminamos de charlar y me volvió a decir que se iba tranquilo, que ayer se había echado un polvo y hoy quería más pero distinto. ¿Distinto? Es que cogí con mi novia ayer... tengo novia ahora... por eso. No dije nada, era historia repetida pero él era agradable y sincero. Le pregunté cómo era que hacía todo eso en la cama, que cogía re-bien y que si con su novia también hacía lo mismo. Me dijo que no y que sabía que a mí me gustaba que hiciera eso. Yo lo miré extrañada y me dijo que hacía unos años cuando habíamos cogido yo se lo había dicho y lo había entrenado, él había aprendido y nunca se había olvidado de esa forma de hacerlo. Me reconfortó (134).

The conversation between the two brings numerous elements to light that reoccur across Menstrual's stories. Namely, that her lovers feel that their desires are often unacceptable, unnatural, or perverse; within their socially permissible relationships, both emotional and physical, the exploration of these pleasures is shamed or hidden from the light of day. But reminiscent of *Batido de troló*'s poem, "Te quiero obsceno," it's evident that Menstrual delights in enticing her lovers through pure provocation, as she exudes a desire for filth, "Te quiero obsceno. / De pija grande. / De enormes venas latiendo." (193), and furthermore, that she is always game for excess, adding:

Te quiero sucio  
 después de un picadito con tus amigos  
 que vengan asado mediante al country cogirme todos.  
 Que mamá vea.  
 Que aprenda.  
 Que se dé cuenta que mi vida no es como su vida  
 que la mía va en serio.

Quiero que me penetren sin cesar

por todos los agujeros....

¡Ser arco de tanto macho!

¡Ser chancha! (195).

Whether inscribed in her poetic “yo” or embedded into her short narratives, it’s not difficult to imagine how Menstrual and her characters entice her *chongo* lovers into their titillating webs. In their private delight-seeking, however, they are forced to move through very dark, yet public spaces, procuring their yearnings in the hidden corners and fleeting rendezvouses that Menstrual reproduces very clearly in numerous stories.

This becomes particularly evident as these themes tie into “Sabrina Duncan y su dulce caballera” as well, briefly discussed in this project’s first chapter. Through exceedingly transparent omniscient narration, the story wastes no time in divulging the titular *travesti* character’s nocturnal goals, but through concise language reveals the precarity through which she considers her sexual appetite, “Esa noche no tenía un mango, así que a lo mejor, de paso se hacía un billete matando dos pájaros de un tiro: el hambre del estómago... y el de ese culo caníbal” (21). The perfect destination for satisfying her corporal desires, of course, manifests in the Palermo gardens where “...le traía a sus narinas el aroma joven de la carne pendeja, rebosante de hormonas y ganas de ponerla fuera donde fuera” (21). Entering the municipal garden, she is confronted with a space that is both created and protected by institutional state powers, foregrounding the possibility for discovery and subsequent punishment (arrest, mistreatment, possibly even death). Nevertheless, characters such as Sabrina are acutely aware of the *chongos* that cruise the area, feigning heterosexual pretenses while deliberately looking to abdicate physical dominance and power to *travesti* sex workers. To the characters who know and

enjoy these areas, the lustful reward offered by these public spaces is worth the risk in their stealthy search for anonymous encounters.

The manifestation of Sabrina's relentless desire conveys this clearly, as she patrols the space looking for satiation under the night sky, saying, "Esa noche estaba realmente caliente, quizás fuera la luna llena. Ella quería que le llenaran otra cosa, así que iba a conseguirla de cualquier forma a costa de lo que fuera. La Sabrina era de cuidado, cuando quería pija nada la detenía" (22). The space of the park facilitates these encounters, although there are certainly hiccups along the way. Like many of the rendezvous we are exposed to throughout the collection, Sabrina's plan for physical fulfillment is quickly thwarted when she comes across a 19-year-old man in the park that wants the very same thing. Complacent in the interaction, she participates in a less than titillating game of quid-pro-quo, as the young man disrupts her enjoyment in the very moment he has finished himself. A touch stupefied, he demands that she get out of his car, and "... con la pija todavía al palo, agarró la guita y se bajó acomodándose la pollera" (23). Unimpeded from pursuing her carnal desires, however, the shadowy figures within the garden offer ample opportunities for Sabrina to relentlessly pursue the evening's delights.

Nevertheless, she is thwarted again by two older *travesti* sex workers who threaten her for encroaching on their working territory. As the story winds through a series of comedic and campy dialogue, it culminates in a wigless Sabrina finding refuge just outside of a public restroom. Menstrual's narrative creation, however, doesn't resist the deployment of this public space as the perfect construction of happenstance opportunity, as just outside, a young man is guarding the service station directly next to the bathroom; the mapping of the interaction becomes immediately clear as "Sabrina lo miró haciéndose el sexy y el pendejo se pasó la mano por el bulto que parecía una comadreja" (25). Feigning innocence, the bathroom's threshold

becomes a playful rhetorical inquiry; transcending the need for a prolonged exchange, she enters, and without hesitation he follows her inside. At the story's end, Sabrina's remarks consist of gleeful fantasies marked by the crossing over of these public thresholds. Not only has she been sexually satiated, but she also begins to dream of the possibilities that her unexpectedly newfound money contains. Although not involved in sex work as a trade, her ponderings of this form of labor ultimately culminate in how many more *polvos* it would take to attain them.

Through stories such as these, it's clear that Menstrual's writings refuse the privatization of these gritty matters in myriad ways, alongside the accompanying neoliberal qualities that would attach to their individualization. This rejection certainly dialogues well with Flavio Rapisardi and Alejandro Modarelli's observations of how adapting to gay visibility and homonormativity in post-dictatorship Argentina in fact created more exclusion through the process of sanitizing *chongo y marica* culture (Rapisardi and Modarelli). As the private spaces in which these encounters were limited before the return to democracy in 1983, the circulations of these kinds of sex were often contained to private clandestine parties or public bathrooms; Palmeiro utilizes their analysis to demonstrate that the prototype for these interactions was often the "*marica* (homosexual afeminado)" and "*el chongo* (varón masculino no identificado como homosexual que eventualmente mantiene relaciones homoeróticas)" (40). In her introduction to the English translation of Perlongher's *Prosa Plebeya* (*Plebeian Prose*), Palmeiro discusses how the invisible masculine homosexuality (and accompanying promiscuity) was wildly distinct from the North American understanding of queer integration being fought for at the time until their model of activism, recognition, and integration began to fundamentally shift queer visibility and public politics in Argentina (x-xi).<sup>59</sup> Along with it, Palmeiro demonstrates how this resulted in a

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<sup>59</sup> Palmeiro's elaborates on the distinctions by saying, "The figure of the 'marica' or 'loca' is fundamental to understanding the experience of homosexuality in Latin America, characterized in the 1970s by

“‘privatización del circuito urbano del deseo’, es decir, la permisiva reducción a espacios higiénicamente dispuestos para las prácticas sexuales de los gays, que constituyen a su vez un nicho de mercado (bares, saunas, darkrooms, discotecas, etc.), y que producen, a su vez, nuevos tipos de exclusión” (40). The exclusion referenced here is marking the eventual rejection of *maricas* within these sexual trysts and attendant fixation on the visibility and consumption of *cuerpos gay y híper masculinos*, whose classist connotations translate in Spanish irrespective of region. In conversation with Menstrual’s stories, it’s immediately discernible how she repeatedly engenders an unmitigated defiance to the privatized sex culture of hyperconsumption, hypermasculinity, and niche markets hailing from the Global North; her portrayal of Argentinean *marica y chongo* culture clearly defies these neoliberal navigations of sexual desire, along with its sense of self-importance, cleanliness, and practicality.

Moreover, before sanitized and private sexual practices became a more globalized norm, José Esteban Muñoz reminds us that to a certain degree, there is common ground to be traversed in these global experiences of anonymous, public sex, which is specifically discussed in a chapter entitled “Ghosts of Public Sex: Utopian Longings, Queer Memories” from *Cruising Utopias: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. As a vital connector to this project’s analysis, Muñoz’s critical engagement with John Giorno’s *You Got to Burn to Shine*<sup>60</sup> dialogues with Menstrual’s narrative embedding of these histories and why it is so paramount:

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clandestine encounters and secret sexual orientations in times of intense political and moral repression. Homosexual practices in public spaces were limited, in terms of locus of action as such, to public restrooms, private parties and the urban circulation of desire in the form of casual ‘cruising’. The predominant subjects in this hidden promiscuous practice were the so-called *maricas* or *locas* (effeminate homosexual males) and the *chongos* (masculine male not identified as homosexual who occasionally engages in homoerotic relations) (“Introduction”, xi).

<sup>60</sup> Although not limited to the segment’s explorations, the terrain of anonymous public sex is examined with intricate detail as it centers on an analysis of John Giorno’s text *You Got to Burn to Shine*. Muñoz’s project of identifying a certain “queer world-mapping” is produced through connecting various literary and visual art efforts. Standing as an autobiographical reflection of Giorno’s exuberant life as a queer poet

Giorno's sex narrative begins with his entrance to the Prince Street toilets, a space rife with anonymous public sex... In the passage, Giorno functions as a disseminator of public sex culture. The idealization that his prose enacts is, within the scope of my analysis, an example of the way in which a rich remembrance of sexual utopia feeds a transformative queer politics. The excess that Giorno's text produces is indeed more than (sic) simple sexual bravado. The space of the Prince Street toilets and the practices of public sex that are rendered in his narrative engender a certain transformative possibility... Although Giorno understands this space as being one that is free of ideology, I think we can still read a powerful political impulse in Giorno's texts, an impulse that is detectable in the acts that are being transcribed, the spaces that are being conceptually rendered, and the performance of writing that expresses his public sex history (36-37).

In parallelism with Muñoz's intricate study of Giorno's work, there is much to be connected to the various spaces of Menstrual's very public and very graphic sexual affairs. A distinguishing factor that I contend exists in and through this writing style and Menstrual's work, however, is the lack of idealization of such enactments as described and understood in Muñoz's utopic visions. Embodied through our *travesti* narrator's *neobarroso* collection of verbal detritus, her narrative constructions are dragged over the threshold of the porno theater, the park, or the public bathroom, and pass through a corporal adjectivization; in its sensual beautification, it forever

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and author in Manhattan, Muñoz's deliberations gravitate specifically towards the connections of authors such as Giorno with his gay male contemporaries. Having seemingly explored every possible corner that public, anonymous sex had to offer gay men such as Giorno from the 1960s onward, Muñoz's arguments ultimately center on creating a transformative utopic vision of queer pleasure. Muñoz's theorizing excerpt from above comes from a small subsection entitled "Fucking Keith, Remembering Utopia," in which Giorno is vividly describing both giving and receiving fellatio with famed pop art star and ACTUP activist Keith Haring (35-38).

transcribes an untold *travesti* experience onto Argentina's public sex history without idyllic pretenses. In the same vein, Menstrual's characters resist contemporary neoliberal U.S. ideals of sanitized, privatized *gay* culture that promoted visibility and public ascension through acceptability.<sup>61</sup> Through their protagonism, she inscribes a profound history of *travesti* sex and pleasure in the very public act of disseminating her work, refusing the invisibilization of her gluttonous delight. In centering her perspective through the twisting of *el neobarroso*, her works indisputably place public sexual satiation of her *travesti* characters at the site of exhilarating possibility, and by consequence, makes the sanitization of these acts far less inviting. As a fundamental genre strategy to Menstrual's corporal rebellion, its use in her works mobilize an express rejection of a controlled, clean sexual atmosphere; *it's meant to be filthy*— or *travesti trash* as Menstrual might say—and the dirt and grime is indeed at the heart of the matter.

Undeniably, as one moves through these various short accounts, it's clear that Menstrual emblazons this smut into the narrative record forever as these clandestine, word-of-mouth locations specifically produce novel understandings of sex and desire for the defiant bodies that move through them. In taking Muñoz's reading of Giorno's work into account for her critical analysis, it opens generative pathways for this theorization of spaces of public sex; Menstrual, serving as *la voz de la canaleta* (Baigorria), then turns to demand that we get on all fours and lick the sticky porno theater floor with delight. Torres, of course, shares much of Menstrual's sentiments about sex, saying, "Para mí el sexo siempre ha sido eso, sexo; nunca he necesitado acompañarlo de otras cosas para hacerlo más limpio, más aceptable, más bonito. Me gusta que

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<sup>61</sup> In thinking with the antirelational in U.S. queer studies, there are some productive points of contact in this regard to concepts of gay shame, such as Halperin & Traub's "Beyond Gay Pride," whose work on the compiled anthology *Gay Shame* inquired into the "affirmative uses" of considering what gay shame and other negative affects produced in the era of ubiquitous gay pride, intently asking, "Can we do things with shame that we can't do with pride?" (4).

pueda ser sucio, marginal, impío” (129). Ridding themselves of performative pretenses, both Torres and Menstrual engage with filth on a liberating level; unrestrained by social limits of the permissible, their work collaboratively explores a gambit of corporal fluids, positions, and unseemly longings that destabilize conceptions of pleasure. As their corporal landscapes expand, they reveal numerous methods for how that destabilization engenders deliverance.

The possibilities of biopolitical resistance thus intrinsically grow within these narrative portrayals of *Continuadísimo*'s interactions between johns and lovers. Progressing through Menstrual's collection of sexual trysts, she continues to disrupt these boundaries through the tenets of *el neobarroso*'s corporal freedoms. Unbound by the constraints of cleanliness, her twisting of the genre through her short stories enacts her use of the body as an unequivocal methodology for delight and pleasure as the goal, magnifying its capacity to serve as an emancipatory vehicle of sheer pleasure, satiation, and consumption.

In many ways, the taboo practices of consumption enacted in her stories are transformative, as her characters experience degrees of transcendence and utter physical ecstasy through them. Similar in nature to Perlongher's poetry, Palmeiro writes that, "...el éxtasis sexual aparece como modo de salirse de sí, de confusión, de borramiento de los límites del sujeto en una fusión con otro cuerpo. Esa idea de éxtasis como salida de sí, contra los paradigmas individualistas burgueses de subjetividad, será una constante en la producción de Perlongher y recorrerá el camino desde la abyección corporal hasta la ascesis espiritual" (45). Developing Perlongher's poetic qualities further, Palmeiro even goes as far as to present an element of *espermatología* in *neobarroso* works (19) that contend for a seminal and liquid unification as a requisite catalyst for this out-of-body experience. Reminiscent of qualities discoverable in Menstrual's work, as Peralta notes that "...la lengua «pervertida» de Naty Menstrual nos habla en efecto de sangre,

semen, orina, flatulencias, mucosidades, excrementos” (118), it’s relatively effortless to set these components and authors into dialogue.

These consistent bridges with Menstrual’s liquid inspirations in her short story entitled “Lluvia dorada sobre mí” as well as within the poetics of “La lluviosa” within *Batido de trolo*, for example, serve as fitting metaphor for insatiable sexual thirst, whether quenched by piss or literally bathing in her lover’s semen and drinking it.<sup>62</sup> Similar antics develop in the short account of the first-person *travesti* character in “Lluvia dorada sobre mi,” in which these liquid curiosities immediately immerse the reader in the unorthodox practice of safeguarding an old lover’s urine, as she narrates, “Guardaba el pis de Mauro. No pensaba tirarlo... Una sola gotita de su pis detrás de mis orejas les alcanzaba a mi desesperación y a mi profunda soledad para sentir que él estaba encima de mí acariciándome y besándome, como en los mejores días, cuando el amor me hizo creer que era eterna” (43). The suggestive nature of the story’s opening thus produces an affect that affixes the reader to both lost love and desire, while planting seeds for corporal explorations of implied urophilia presented in its onset and clear titular double entendre (“lluvia dorada”). While the placement of someone else’s urine behind one’s ears is clearly a peculiar practice, it is one that consoles the protagonist in her solitude and concurrently facilitates her transcendence of loneliness by way of physical pleasure. Of course, this corporal ritual of enacting his sexual voracity takes place long after Mauro’s departure, leaving her sullen, destitute, and daydreaming in her state of longing.

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<sup>62</sup> Initially proposed as a torrential bath of rain, Menstrual’s lines in this poem get increasingly suggestive and clearly sexual in nature, replacing the metaphor of water and wetness slowly with the direct implementation of semen, sweat, spit, and more: “Que la lluvia me moje y me salga de adentro un gigante deseo de beberla toda sin ahogarme... Agua para tragarla sin prisa pero sin pausa, bebiéndola y bebiéndola... me haga tragar esta lluvia gota a gota, trago a trago y beso a beso... bañada en una lluvia toda para mí, de saliva y agua tibia y dulce semen... allá... en lo alto... vaporosa, electrizada, dando vueltas” (Batido, 203-204).

Conversely, before having met Mauro, our narrator details a life of austerity, happiness, and little pleasures in San Telmo, saying: “Yo me sentía feliz, o al menos me pasaba la vida cómoda prostituyéndome sin plantearme demasiado...Hacía el peso para los gastos diarios y bastante más. Unos tacos nuevos por acá... un papelito por allá... mucha noche... mucha joda... muchos hombres...” (44). Doing the minimum amount of labor to sustain herself, her contemplations of physical pleasure are not uniquely bound to her vocation as a sex worker and pure material exchange. While entertaining daydreaming on a past life of modest labor and luxuries, its interruption by her prolonged engagement with the unforgettable “...Mauro...único e irrepetible” (44), thrusts her into emotional and physical disarray. As she describes their ongoing commitment, the language used by the narrator to develop their sexual and romantic relationship suggests a great degree of emotional vulnerability that is elevated by their sexual adventurism. Not shying away from raw details, she details their mutual respect and adjoining eagerness saying, “Era muy vicioso... pero muy macho. Jamás me la tocó y para mí eso era como un regalo sagrado. Solo se dejaba pasar la lengua por el culo cuando estaba muy borracho y eso me volvía loca, se le ponía la pija tan dura que después me cabalgaba por horas” (45).

As their regular involvement ensues, an act indicative of interpersonal comfort between them becomes highly eroticized, as Mauro begins to pee in empty beer bottles scattered across the room. Initially innocent in nature, the corporal fluid passing out of his body enacts a transformative desire in our narrator as she describes that “... verlo mear me ponía loca, excitada, frenética. Terminaba de mear y sacudiéndola venía hacia mí a ponérmela en la boca, y no me daba asco, era el sabor de Mauro. Si no, se acercaba con su mirada lasciva y me meaba para después revolcarnos como perros entre las sábanas húmedas... Así nos enredábamos, entre mi amor y el olor de su orina” (46). Virtually transformed by this liquid exchange and complete

immersion in Mauro's corporal essence, the narrator's inability to move on when he disappears from her life without a trace is projected onto her new lover, Aldo. Despite his expressions of unconditional love and desire for the protagonist, her willful desire to hold onto Mauro persists, unbeknownst to her new lover, as she clings to "[el] único trofeo" (46) that remained of Mauro's essence—the bottles of his old urine. Lamentably, as she emerges from the shower one day, she finds Aldo with one of the bottles in his hands and is unable to stop him from taking a sip, despite her expression of deep distress. While the frame of the scene suspends but for a moment, the reader's eyes swell with expectant ensuing rage of her lover. Unable to spit it out, Aldo gazes at her with a strange depth, cleans his mouth, and quickly approaches her, as she narrates an exhilarating response:

Me tiró en la cama con pasión y me besó en la boca y sentí el gusto de Mauro en mis labios. Me hizo el amor como nunca lo había hecho y lo sentí como no había podido hacerlo antes... y ahí entendí... aunque se rieran de mí...ese era el día del regreso tan deseado... Aldo me agarró suavemente del pelo y me miró a los ojos... me dijo te amo... Lo volví a besar y me di cuenta... Por el sabor de sus labios me di cuenta de que Aldo se había ido... y que había vuelto Mauro (47).

Portrayed through central elements of the *neobarroso* technique, Menstrual's equipping of the genre style transforms the consumption of Mauro's urine into a literally transcendent sexual act. Moving beyond the constraints of one's literal physical body, and accessed through an act of sexual taboo, the consumptive encounter engenders an experience of sheer physical ecstasy that transcends the limitations of skin, absence, and physical longing.

By way of conveying these taboo associations with corporal liquids as an affirmation of potent transformational desires, Menstrual's tale portrays a reality where no conceivable pleasure

is out of bounds. In refusing the exclusion of their portrayal, no matter how lewd, Menstrual's work dialogues further with Torres' methodological approach for formulating her acts of *pornoterrorismo*. In detailing her refusal to deny herself liberatory acts of sex due to the discomfort they may cause in others, Torres fittingly expands on these connections throughout her manifesto, stating:

Mi sexo fue fuerte en los momentos vulnerables y permaneció ahí para enseñarme que renunciar a los propios deseos es un suicidio... Y como el sexo fue lo que me salvó de tantas cosas malas, cuando empecé a experimentar con la creación decidí consagrarme a él, dedicarme a quitarle mierdas, a limpiar su nombre sagrado, a restaurarle las alas... Esto es un alegato por nuestra libertad. Aquello de que mi libertad termina cuando otra persona se ve afectada negativamente por ella nunca me pareció justo ni equitativo, siempre me resultó como algo de lo que pueden beneficiarse solo los poderosos, porque ¿qué sucede cuando las libertades de lxs otrxs coartan la nuestra? Aquí reside el germen de mi terrorismo. Mi libertad termina y empieza donde a mí me salga del coño porque a la vista está que si acatara las normas ajenas no podría realizar ni una sola de las cosas que me gusta hacer, estaría atada de pies y manos, sería una esclava de la complacencia social (62).

Excerpts such as these provide further insight into the collaborative readings that transpire between Menstrual and Torres' portrayals of corporal pleasure. Threading their conversations and narrative strategies together undeniably allows us to further contemplate how each author seeks to interrogate the limitations of the body by way of provocation that rattles the senses. While their methods are at times viewed as unorthodox, uncouth, or irrevocably unclean, the act of experiencing them, as Menstrual asserts in their portrayal, can be transcendent.

Fitting into the tenets of Torres' methodology, Menstrual's narrative deeds fall well within the landscape of her goals. With an unrelenting pace and limitless offerings of transformative pleasure, Menstrual provides a variety of perspectives and vehicles for its conquest through her *travesti* narrators. Some of these narratives involve assisting johns with their darkest desires, in which the narrator is both reluctant and disturbed with their pursuits. Whether it's forcefully stuffing a folded towel up one's rectum, assisting with practices of extreme bestiality, or other moments of both implied and explicit violence, it becomes clear that Menstrual is deliberately juxtaposing the pleasure of the johns and how each prioritizes his extreme needs against narratives in which her characters consensually and delightfully pursue their own pleasure.

Many of these narratives offer up fictional gateways emboldened by the *neobarroso* technique that playfully intertwine sexual and "nutritional" satiation through natural physiological elements of the body. Others that prioritize the john's pleasure allows us to discern in greater detail the troubling nature and attitudes of cisgender men in their pursuit of private sex work interactions with *travestis* (particularly when juxtaposed with their treatment in public spaces). Nevertheless, as one moves through *Continuadísimo* in its entirety, it becomes evident that stories in which the pleasure of her *travesti* characters is prioritized over cis men govern the collection, as they simultaneously upend presumed power dynamics between them.

Additionally, as many of these stories demonstrate how the *neobarroso* writing style facilitates this upending, they also showcase a discarding of the interchange of sex as a purely neo-capitalistic exchange. Menstrual's narratives repeatedly decenter the dominant narrative of monetary exchange and *trans\*action* with *travesti/trans\** sex workers, refusing the prominence of capital within her fictional accounts. As this section has come to show, her characters are often just as enmeshed in their own pursuit of physical pleasure as the cisgender men that they

come to encounter. Evident in her short stories, these free, thrilling, and liberating physical engagements are ubiquitous in the world of public sex, as Menstrual repeatedly explores the hidden corners of parks, theaters, bathrooms, and more. Put into contact with Torres' project of free sex work in Spain,<sup>63</sup> Paúl Preciado's encouragement to Torres is politically enlightening, as Torres states that, "...Preciado me señaló que lo que hacíamos lxs Perrxs Horizontales era profundamente artístico, político y necesario: una forma diferente de prostitución que ofreciera cuerpos y prácticas no normativas... aunque el dinero ni olerlo" (133). Coupled with the sheer adventurism that frequently occurs between Menstrual's *travesti* characters and their cisgender lovers, it's clear that their pursuits are rarely portrayed as uniquely motivated by capital. Indeed, the unrelenting pursuit of a satisfying *fuck* by her characters is often portrayed as the reward in and of itself— their partners unmistakably share the sentiment in story after story.

This is evident upon briefly returning to an analysis of "Continuadísimoooooo," in which a centering of the protagonist's final inner monologue bridges a gap of understanding that goes beyond monetary exchange. Having just revealed to her that he can only perform certain passionate sexual acts with her (and not with his girlfriend), our protagonist's final thoughts emerge from the story in its denouement: "Me volví a sentir reconfortada por saber de alguna manera había hecho algo no para ser la cornuda de su novia... pero sí para quedar marcada en su recuerdo" (134). Her ambition in this sense, like many of Menstrual's *travesti* characters, is not to simply use her body as a vehicle for money nor to disrupt her lover's day-to-day existence, but

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<sup>63</sup> Although initially commenced as a project where Torres would elicit queer sex for money, and conceptually enlivened at the prospect of getting paid to have sex with cisgender and queer women, Torres began to publish ads in a local Spanish paper offering sexual encounters and satisfaction to LGBTQ+ folks for free. In an intimate conversation with Virgine Despentès and Paul Preciado, Torres details how they both uniquely encouraged her to engage in a novel approach to prostitution free of monetary exchange (133).

rather than the deep satiation found in her literary physical pleasure is forever emblazoned in our memories—alongside that of her young, clandestine lover.

Albeit true that sex work for survival certainly transpires in some of the stories, even in those occurrences, character after character pursues physical fulfillment for the sheer purpose of experiencing the joy of carnal pursuits. As Torres reminds us through her own work within *pornoterrorismo*, however, we cannot fully separate what sex work signifies in cultural production from the characters' needs to make ends meet, stating: "Soy consciente de que si solo me dedicara a esto viviría siempre en la precariedad, que también tiene su atractivo bohemio pero que no me seduce como plan de vida. Porque la precariedad, aunque haya por ahí imbéciles que digan que es fashion, es un castigo. Es el castigo que nos dan por no adaptarnos al sistema..." (90). Torres' comments thus strike a balance between arguing that while there is certainly sex work that involves pleasure, a certain vigilance must be maintained for arguments devoid of the realities of sex work for survival.

When these stories do transpire out of sheer necessity in Menstrual's work, her narratives deliberately shows us how her cisgender characters take advantage of the *travesti* character in scenarios devoid of choice, provoking discomfort (as well as desperation) in the protagonist rather than pleasure. Nevertheless, by inscribing these interactions into her publications, Menstrual refuses to let them be eaten up by the highest, privatizing bidder. Instead, the readers become public witnesses to those who look to perform these acts clandestinely; as their darkest desires bespatter page after page, the narratives upend discourses of power that attempt to relegate them to obscurity. Of course, I assert that her collective constructions demonstrate the chasms between these clientele and their own. Counteracted through her own narrative voice through a vast ensemble of kitschy characters, Menstrual portrays a radical life that resists

biopolitical constraints by embracing transcendent and liberatory sexual acts. Consensually, and gleefully, those characters provoke not to induce disgust, but rather, as an enterprise that breaks us open.

Embellished in story after story, the author's endeavors indulge in the act of taking the private into the public eye by publishing them collectively. In doing so, not only is Menstrual speaking to public acts of sex and the power these spaces hold, but she also demonstrates how the written element of this storytelling is the ultimate act of its visibilization. Consequently, the written elements that pass through *el neobarroso* technique pile up throughout the collection, providing a sensually corporal experience on the page that is unrestricted and liberatory. United with Torres' intent to put her *pornoterrorista* street activism into written form, its power is apparent in Menstrual's literary endeavors, as she states:

... no persigo algo tan apocalíptico sino solo un humilde intento de carcoma, de ligero sabotaje, algo mínimo que comience sutilmente como una pequeña revolución de papel, el poder de la palabra en las puntas de los dedos golpeando a ritmo de teclado en estas tinieblas donde se esconden agazapados deseos que habrían de ser nuestros, estimulables y perfectos en su forma a pesar de hallarse rodeados de crueles carceleros (16).

Retooling how language can convey these experiences of physical satiation and joy, the commonalities across their work speaks to its vast importance. Thinking through the unorthodox practices that proliferate in both of their artistic expressions, Torres' description of the metaphorical *pornoterrorista* "bomb" further connects to Menstrual's employment of *el neobarroso*, challenging us to reframe the violence and pleasures that we are witness to in their work, and arguing that what we envision as violence is not always an injury or material destruction (54). Rather, Torres provides new readings of Menstrual's writing as an unpleasant

decontextualization of what was previously perceived as violent or unacceptable. Refusing to hide these impermissible pleasures and actively putting them on display, Menstrual's unification with Torres' reconceptualization of violence in this sense inverts what is understood as punishable, sick, or violent.<sup>64</sup> These clear connections across Menstrual's use of the *neobarroso* writing style also prove to be an effective strategy for generating new creative realms for *travesti* lives. Capacitated by this reframing, the characters forcefully reshape the viciousness that has dominated their histories, overturning common tropes that end in their brutal fatalities. Moreover, it concomitantly shifts who holds the power in these conversations, which is manifests most clearly in the final story of this section.

“Medialuna de manteca,” in this sense, manages to succinctly combine and toy with elements of hypermasculine sexuality, toiled interactions with police, and unbridled desire— all coalescing around the very-real constraints of poverty and hunger tied distinctively to *travesti* identity and the discrimination specific to the community's experience under the vigilance of the Argentinean state.<sup>65</sup> The corporal element of physical hunger, in which the protagonist Marlene Brigitte wanders the neighborhood of San Telmo in Buenos Aires after a night of dancing, first manifests in dreaming of medialunas, but quickly progresses into a distinct corporal longing, in which she recalls an orgiastic encounter with five young men, walking and remembering, while “se le caía la baba...”:

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<sup>64</sup> Part of this violence in Torres' work is in direct reference to biomedical discourse that has proliferated throughout the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century as well, particularly the APA's influence seen in the global distribution and employment of the DSM, or the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Disorders. Having violently pathologized the LGBTQ+ community for decades, revisionary editions have slowly attempted to undo harmful discourse, but Torres' work speaks to their legacy of medical and social violence (54). This can also be set into dialogue with critical theoretical perspectives such as Butler's “Undiagnosing Gender,” in *Undoing Gender* and Eli Clare's *Brilliant Imperfections*, both of which speak to the parallelisms in pathologizing queer, trans\*, and disabled identity and embodiment (“Undoing Gender”; Clare).

<sup>65</sup> See footnote 11, pg. 17.

Todo el grupo como loco esperaba el momento en que la Marlene Brigitte abriera los cantos y se la comiera. Ella, obediente como maestra jardinera educando niños, hizo las piruetitas obligadas con semejante anguila bailándole en la cola nada estrecha, de esas colas que hay que lubricarlas con líquido de freno para no perderse adentro, todo el showcito hecho para que quedaran satisfechos. Se pusieron locos. Era mejor que Piñón Fijo, y rió pensando en animar fiestas para pendejos de dieciocho años para arriba haciéndose llamar LA PIJÓN FIJO. Se probó a todos y todas las medidas, uno a uno por la boca y por atrás, porque si había algo que a ella no le gustaba, era discriminar (40).

Menstrual's illustrative juxtapositions become increasingly apparent when Marlene's daydreaming transforms into a physical manifestation, where two young police officers carrying a bag of *medialunas* make obscene gestures at her from the street, subsequently resulting in a descriptive satiation of appetites of all forms as they are invited up to her apartment, "formando una tríada del viejo dicho 'hecha la ley, hecha la trampa', y cada uno sabía el papel que le tocaba. Adentro del cuarto la trataron como reina por la boca y por la cola. Se turnaban con una precisión maravillosa y placentera, el ritmo joven de esos dos canas pendejos la volvió loca de excitación y no podía evitar acabar como una cerda" (42).

Entirely in control of the physical engagement's events, Marlene in fact asks them if they would like to finish, as they both desperately respond that they can't go on for much longer. Nevertheless, she lays down the ground rules with precision while toying with their physical desperation, proclaiming, "LA MÁS GRANDE VA A LA COLA..." (42). Obedient and with deep self-effacement, the two police officers indeed switch positions, abiding by Marlene's

command to fulfill her desires.<sup>66</sup> Having finished the sexual tryst, the final iconic words of the narrative upend the typical dynamics of power amongst the three unlikely lovers:

La ley se levantó y empezó a vestirse, la trampa sonreía contenta y más que satisfecha. Los canas volvieron a ponerse los uniformes impecables tapándose el pecado, y la miraron simpáticamente: ¿te dejamos unas medialunas, bombona?... Ella, sin poder creerlo, les dijo que sí con la cabeza... Nada le quedaba a la Marlene Brigitte por pedirle a la vida, al menos ese día... Lo que ella quería más que nada en este mundo era dormir tranquila la mamá de la noche y llenarse la panza con una rica y enorme MEDIALUNA DE MANTECA (42).

Faced with the erotic description of this fictional scenario, the reader contemplates the implications of this illusory end in which Marlene is not only sexually satiated, but the police officers extend a further kindness and leave her with a few medialunas as well, staving off her hunger.

What is painstakingly clear through Marlene's portrayal, as well as many others within this collection of short stories, is that Menstrual's deliberate sexual longings through her *travesti* characters are not simply a reduction of their physical existence, but rather function as a provocation of the reader's comfort that is often stylistically consistent in *travesti* representation but taken to utmost degree in her narratives and authorship. *Continuadísimo*, in conversation with other *travesti* authorship, is a vision that is uniquely insubordinate to reality in its pursuit of

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<sup>66</sup> A productive interplay could transpire with Leo Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?" whereas Bersani proposes that gay sex is a necessary "self-shattering," an "abdication of power," and perhaps, even a burial for traditional masculinity. Meanwhile Muñoz criticizes the approach by acknowledging that this self-shattering and starting anew fails to see the structures already in place as an opportunity to critique a world that it should, in fact, already be in place ("Cruising Utopias"). I feel this scene dialogues well with this tension between Muñoz and Bersani in this regard, again in facilitating a comparison of the antirelational in U.S. queer studies, while also recognizing a negation of the premise that penetrative sex (i.e., being penetrated) is an abdication of power (Bersani).

exploring what social parameters define as forbidden, impossible, or crossing a line. Using Marlene as a literary vessel, for example, these unchecked expressions of power are often put into direct contrast with those who reject *travesti* existence in the public eye yet use them to pursue the widest horizons of their desires in private. The nature of interactions amongst her cisgender and *travesti* characters is deeply exaggerated in adjectival tone, while also requiring the reader to contemplate how they are radically and uncomfortably opposite of the violent truths we know transpire on the street: unwarranted police arrests, physical and sexual assault, and often vicious death.<sup>67</sup> The juxtaposition of these elements radically inverts positions of power, laying the groundwork for the final section of this chapter's necropolitical contemplations. Within her vivid narrative descriptions, Menstrual places her finger on the erogenous button of social tension regarding the forbidden and the excitement it induces, while she persistently needles our own consideration of both written and unwritten rules in Argentinean society and how her *travesti* characters continually thwart and destroy them— namely within the hushed, private conversations of who you fuck, how you fuck, and why. In many of these accounts, including “Medialuna de manteca,” but not limited to this unique narrative, we are exposed to constructions of a reality that unearths how her characters break these rules and toss toxic presumptions about *travesti* life away. As we continue to contemplate how Menstrual has resisted conventional frameworks of sex and desire, these reflections will carry us into this

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<sup>67</sup> Within Lohana Berkins' text and corresponding survey, *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas: Informe nacional sobre la situación de las travestis, transexuales y transgéneros*, consistent and mounting evidence demonstrated regular police abuse experienced at a nearly unanimous level amongst the *travesti*, *transexual* y *transgénero* respondents. In tandem with this information are heaps of statistical data corroborating that the respondents experienced physical aggression, sexual assault, homelessness, lack of access to education, and homicide at disproportionately high levels in comparison to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts (78, 130-133, 177-180).

chapter's final section, where I will analyze how Menstrual engages the necropolitical within her fictions to reject typical narratives of *travesti* demise.

ENGAGING THE NECROPOLITICAL: SUBVERTING NARRATIVES OF *TRAVESTI* DEATH

—Falta poco para que pongan electricidad.

—Ya no. Don Alejo me vino a decir hoy.

— José Donoso, *El lugar sin límites*

Grita la pregunta sudaca, en medio de la

Nada:

¿CÓMO SE MATA A UNA SOLA DE NOSOTRAS  
SIN MATARNOS A TODAS?

—Susy Shock, *Hojarascas*

Thus far in this study of Naty Menstrual's narrative work, we have discussed the various ways in which her short stories and attendant *neobarroso* techniques challenge increasingly globalized and neoliberal understandings of sex and desire. This final section continues to expound upon her utilization of these strategies through two short narrative works within *Continuadísimo* that examine and resist the biopolitics of disposability, ultimately subverting narratives of *travesti* death through an active engagement with the necropolitical. Throughout these final deliberations, I will commence this scaffolding of argumentation by briefly introducing contemporary struggles of transgender women in Mexico who are resisting these necropolitical forces in revolutionary ways, as presented in Sayak Valencia's *Trans en las Américas* article, "Necropolitics: Postmortem/Transmortem Politics, and Transfeminisms in the Sexual Economies of Death." I will then proceed to link the methodologies of their resistance to my final analysis of the characters in Menstrual's narrative creations. Through dialoguing with Achille Mbembe's groundbreaking conceptualization of necropolitics and proposing radical transfeminist interventions in widespread, vehement transfemicide and femicide in modern-day

Mexico, Valencia's piece allows for a bridging of this collective resistance against the impunity and detachment with which these deaths are treated both socially and by the state.

These fundamental connections will tie into this section's secondary contemplations, in which I explicate a common trope of violent *travesti* death in Latin American cultural representations, which I entitle "*la trayectoria de la Manuela*." In its explanation, I will amplify the significance of its violence inherent to Latin American literary history to proceed. These connective potencies will prove integral in demonstrating how Menstrual's characters weave new political possibilities into her stories, resisting the suffocating forces of cisheteropatriarchal violence that is perpetually pushed upon their bodies through sexual economies of death. Ultimately, I submit that Valencia's theoretical proposal of *postmortem/transmortem politics* and their associated movement towards collective Latin American transfeminisms enlightens our discussion of Menstrual's ruthless narrative acts, thereby allowing us to mobilize her characters' actions as a literary mechanism of resistance that is emboldened by *el neobarroso*'s principal tenets.

Having emerged as a *tour de force* in transfeminist discourse with her publication of *Capitalismo gore*, the continued theoretical offerings of Sayak Valencia's "Necropolitics: *Postmortem/Transmortem* Politics, and Transfeminisms in the Sexual Economies of Death" unsurprisingly brings a great deal to both the discursive table and activist interplays through her deciphering of radical trans\* interventions in the face of quotidian, normalized transfemicidal violence. These discursive elements will greatly shape my analysis of Menstrual's very own literary interventions and how I argue they should be discerned. In Valencia's ongoing contributions towards the expansion of transfeminist discourse and perspectives, her article grounds itself in the perpetual defense of transnational transgender inclusion within the

broadening of feminist perspectives, discerning the incorporation of their epistemologies as an essential process that must be devoid of tokenization (181). Specifically, within this article, the scholar and theorist proposes two distinct categorical interventions in transfeminist discourse within the developmental trajectory of forming global (trans)feminist alliances. These interventions, as Valencia argues, form part and parcel to understanding how “strategies of resistance and social transformation... build communities of emotional support and survival in a necroliberal context...” that is vital for transwomen, ciswomen, and non-binary/gender-variant women alike in the contemporary necropolitical landscape (181).

Valencia’s first intervention takes form in her proposed neologism of *postmortem/transmortem* politics; this concept is principally constructed through a deciphering of the fearless political interventions made by a small group of transgender women in Mexico when their friend, Paola, was brutally murdered by a john that had approached her with the intent of engaging in prostitution. Brought directly to the police by the small group of friends that witnessed her murder, the man was released less than two days later when the presiding judge determined that there was insufficient evidence to prove his guilt. Removing her body from her coffin on the way to her burial, by way of protest, the group instead collectively carried Paola’s body in the street to place it on active public display (187). As Valencia argues, this active use of her body was meant:

...to confront the necropolitics that murders trans and cis women every day, with impunity, and that excludes them from the possibility of being read in a socially dignified way even after their death. In this sense, the process of mobilization that I here call *postmortem/ transmortem* creates bridges of transfeminist alliance while at the same time

reviving the struggles against femicide in communities highly exposed to social and state necropolitics (181).

This political confrontation, as Valencia continues to reason by way of a second intervention, should serve as a “bridge for feminist repolitization and expansion of the subject of feminisms,” thereby uniting their collective struggles “against the neoliberal state” (181). Both employing and expanding upon Achille Mbembe’s definition of *necropolitics*, Valencia connects ongoing global practices of state-sanctioned violence, using it as “...a link between the colonial and the contemporary project of modernity through the systematic and continuous elimination of dissenting populations” (184). Going further, she breaks open the utilization of *necropolitics* beyond Mbembe’s discussion of race and class, employing it to speak to the “...governability of cis and trans women and those others that embody dissenting genders and sexualities, such as trans masculinities, that defy the hetero norm and the binary *cis-tem*, thus being produced in the collective imaginary as aberrant populations that may/must be demarcated as enemies to be brutally and violently destroyed” (184-185).

This expansion is vital, as it determines how Valencia reimagines the sovereign in her scholarship, generally understood in Mbembe’s works as the entity that is allowed to exercise states of exception and states of emergency— put another way, this overseeing entity is thereby allowed to outright identify a purported threat or danger to the public good (a threat that Mbembe identifies as normalized, fictionalized, and ongoing), and thus, eliminate them through the right to exercise violent death in defense of the state—i.e., “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who may die” (Mbembe 11). Valencia’s extension is subsequently explicated on a microlevel in these manifestations of interpersonal violence by weaving it through Mbembe’s construction of the necropolitical, as she explains:

I understand necropatriarchy as the privilege of exercising the techniques of necropolitical violence proffered by the patriarchy to the figure-body of the individual man (as microsovereign of the populations in his charge) ... men have among their gender privileges the knowledge and cultural socialization in the use of the techniques of necropolitics, and legitimacy in the handling and use of violence as a key technique of rule. That is, in case of the Mexican patriarchal pact, as in many similar arrangements, the executors of violence, usually heterosexual cis men, act as armed soldiers of the “sovereign.” Their crimes occur with impunity, and there is a persistent lack of justice for trans and cis women, as well as minority populations. Due to their race/ethnicity, sexuality, and class, they possess a monopoly over the techniques of death, ruling over gender, class, race, sexual dissent, and functional diversity (185).

Brilliantly interwoven, Valencia’s examination of extreme interpersonal gender violence in Mexico through the lens of the necropolitical mobilizes this study’s final examination of Menstrual’s narrative works.<sup>68</sup> These rampant individualized instances of femicide and

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<sup>68</sup> Both Sayak Valencia’s *Capitalismo Gore* and Ileana Rodríguez’s *Liberalism at its Limits* dialogue well with these proposals in Menstrual’s work, as they discuss at length the harm that capitalism has caused and the limitations of neoliberalism in its applications throughout the world, in particular within the context of bordertowns that show the deeply asymmetrical power relations between “first” and “third” world countries. Both authors argue for a departure of the utilization of first world views in order to understand the realities of the third world. Rodríguez in particular maintains that liberalism must be distinguished in its political, philosophical, and common sense value, because its political utilization as the true defender of human rights and democracy in the global south (as well as other hemispheres) has proved to fail time and time again for those who do not belong within the ideology of the conquering elite (I. Rodríguez). A clear example of this is embodied within the bordertown of Ciudad Juárez as both Valencia and Rodríguez point out. But Valencia’s definition of *capitalismo gore* especially helps us explore the dark sides of this global economy in Juárez, where capitalism has malformed so violently that blood, bodies, and mutilation are sold for profit. Heightened by feelings of deep failure to succeed as well as a culture of machismo, Valencia argues that *capitalismo gore* has become the main source of survival; bodies (of vulnerable women) have become the site of expression for these failures and the source of capital, as their blood and humiliation is turned into capital. The *endriago* subject created by Valencia (half man, half monster) moves to accumulate great excess (a desire that is continually stoked by a culture of hyper-consumption) through *necroempoderamiento*, treating the bodies of women as highly disposable

transfemicide that are often perpetrated by cishetero men, as she explains through Paola's death, can be understood as actions of the satellites of sovereign entities that trust them to uphold social values of gender and sexuality; thus, when they are witness to what they believe to be "deviations" or eccentricities from the norm, they then turn to uphold these values; beholden to the power bestowed upon them through cisheteropatriarchal privilege; in moral response to the preservation of these norms, they often violently snuff out those who dare defy them. No less frightening, I would argue, are instances when the microsovereign entity is drawn or attracted to these ostensible outliers. Their reactions in these encounters, often discerned as moments of *trans\* panic*, can be unexpected and explosive, consequently splintering into the exertion of sexual violence as a form of both dominance and punishment. Not immune from further implications of violence, i.e., resultant death, as Valencia attests, their bodies are frequently treated as disposable objects unworthy of any modicum of dignity (186). As a reward for upholding the aforementioned "patriarchal pact," these cis-male microsovereigns are infrequently held to the same standards of punishment as most (if at all), allowing them to emerge from said violence legally unscathed (187).

Distressingly, these contemporary expressions of gender-based violence have already permeated Latin American literary canonical works for decades, conceivably as a reflection of a troubling reality that persists in present day.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, when endeavoring to outline foundational

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and as commodity, selling the violence that is transferred to their bodies at an increasingly alarming level (Valencia, "Capitalismo").

<sup>69</sup> I would be remiss in this assessment of Latin American portrayals of travesti/trans\* violence and resultant death to not address that the canonization of these tropes in U.S. film productions is certainly comparable, if perhaps not more egregious in nature. Well-developed in its far-reaching and impactful scope, the analysis of this trope by the documentary *Disclosure* (2020) is expansive and informative in relationship to primarily U.S. film and television production of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and moving forward (Feder).

tales of *travesti* representation, these narrative imaginings frequently mirror the same vehement tropes that repeatedly transpire in material reality, including the impunity with which they are faced.<sup>70</sup> As one considers these portrayals of both lived and imagined cruelty, perhaps it is even appropriate to wonder which reflections inform which realities and how these indignities became so normalized (and canonized). This is the case, of course, in perhaps what is the most well-known literary representation of a *travesti* character in the Spanish-speaking world, José Donoso's *la Manuela*, featured in the 1966 Chilean novel *El lugar sin límites*.

With thematic content presented well before its time, the narrative—literally translated as *Hell Has No Limits*—is discerned as one of Donoso's most well-known and highly curated works, which secured his legacy firmly within the Latin American literary boom of the 1960s.<sup>71</sup> Prominently featuring *la Manuela*'s inner dialogue, personal conflicts, and accompanying distress, the Southern Cone novel reveals through her experience and environment a Chilean landscape wedged between the trappings of antiquity and the pressures of industrial modernity in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Fittingly portrayed through the small town of El Olivo, the inhabitants of the isolated community long for modernization and its accompanying opportunities as they quite literally wait for the arrival of electricity to rescue them from falling into oblivion. Defining features of the novel, presented through Donoso's use of narrative flashback structure, desolate setting, and dialogistic character development, continually present a distinctive era of desperation in which the survival of feminized characters like *la Manuela*, *la Japonesa*, and *la*

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<sup>70</sup> In alignment with the transfeminist alignment that Valencia calls for that incorporates trans\* voices into the discussion of rampant femicide and transfemicide, I also find it intriguing to propose how this could correspond with a literary alliance, such as in Bolaño's *2666* and *Estrella distante* or Sergio González Rodríguez's *Huesos en el desierto*. Considering that these novels incorporate material archives of femicide, the interdialogue across the texts could prove fruitful with Menstrual's resistance as well.

<sup>71</sup> Although Donoso was categorized as such, he highly resisted being lumped into the group of writers, which has largely been categorized as a global marketing strategy for selling literature—even by its most prominent authors.

Gran Japonesa, depended on the whims of the cisgender men who controlled their town. Centered around the events of its small brothel, where all three of them live and work, the novel's ensuing plot consistently wrestles with the potent dualities of power and impotence, progress and oblivion, and desire and hatred. Toying with the manifold aspects of El Olivo's minimal hopes for progress, key cis male characters like landowner and political tyrant don Alejo, as well as the working class, belligerent brothel-goer Pancho Vega, concomitantly play a role in the development of these dichotomies by way of exercising their desires. Objectifying, exploitative, and cruel in nature, the foundational aspects of control, attraction, objectification, and violent disposal in the novel, most clearly portrayed through the relationship between la Manuela and Pancho Vega, sets the cultural tone for connecting Valencia's neologism to Menstrual's contemporary work.

Being a novel of profound importance in Latin American literary history, I propose that this connection is made through a literary device that I have dubbed *la trayectoria de la Manuela*. Arriving at this particular name is, in essence, an ongoing recognition and reconciliation of difficult truths that shape the lives of *travesti* and trans\* women. Posed through a reflection on la Manuela's experience in the novel, but repeatedly reflected in trans\* and *travesti* material realities, the creation of this device seeks to describe how the representative trajectories of *travesti* characters, transgender women, and transfeminine individuals frequently results in a culmination of abhorrent violence that is often coupled with brutal sexual sadism, but nearly always results in their certain and untimely deaths. As this inhumane trope of vicious literary—and cinematic—imagination is often propagated by cisgender male authors and directors, the intent of this device's employment is not only to name it and describe it, but to also convey how these trajectories can be outright anticipated and consequently thwarted. Discerned

through the subtle development of ominous narrative tone, the communicative nature of this *trayectoria* is nearly always dependent on the distillation of the character's desires, hopes, and fears. Not reliant on any specific narrative format, however, these deductions are uniquely informed by manifold style choices. In the case of its inaugural establishment through la Manuela, the gradual communication of this outcome is maneuvered through a perpetual sense of dread that can simultaneously be understood a technique of slow control; manifested through the expression of the character's growing fears and concerns, which often comes through revelations of consciousness, this enervating sense of terror and tension is ultimately transferred to the reader's imagination and accompanying corporal expression.

In the specific case of Donoso's la Manuela, we as readers are first privy to these necropolitical machinations of domination in the sense of desperation and terror that the character expresses upon learning that Pancho Vega— a man with whom she has had both previous sex work relations as well as ongoing interactions of physical violence— is returning to El Olivo after being away for an extended period. Within *El lugar sin limites* specifically, the reader is first exposed to the seemingly omniscient third-person style narration that weaves the bleak lives of these characters together through capricious dialogue and details of their desolate setting. This style occasionally leads to excerpts taken from the first-person narration of la Manuela's consciousnesses, where we discover not only how la Manuela views herself throughout the novel, but also how Pancho's looming return provokes an entrenched state of terror within her. At the same time, these moments also convey the tepid admittance of her attraction to Pancho, despite her apprehensions; although she is fearful of what may conspire, she outright admits her desire for him on numerous occasions, which is expressed through escapist fantasies of enchanting him and leaving her life at the brothel behind forever. Inverted in

expression towards the end of the novel, Donoso uses this same style to divulge Pancho's suppressed desires to sleep with the *travesti* protagonist; it is crucial to note, however, that Pancho's thoughts are conveyed with a troubling ferocity, in which the violent machinations of his imagination intertwine his sexual control of her with her status as object, resulting in her death even within his daydreams.<sup>72</sup>

Pancho's latent desires, shame, and self-hatred ultimately culminate in the torrentially violent final pages of the novel, when he demands that la Manuela dance for him under the guise of his ennui with the other sex workers. Aroused by her movements, but concealing his desires from his brother-in-law Octavio, the three of them ultimately depart in search for more amusement in the city. But amidst drunken laughter and clumsy physical proximity, la Manuela misreads the moment of *divertissement* and attempts to kiss Pancho in front of Octavio. As the scene escalates in a series of interrogations where Pancho must defend his heterosexual masculinity, the interaction digresses into a toxic demonstration of Pancho and Octavio's physical prowess and la Manuela's corporal punishment. Managing to flee the initial altercation to nearby country roads, the narration suddenly transitions to the mounting panic that pulses through la Manuela's mind and body. In a highly intensified narration of her fear, she takes a brief pause to plan her next move, as the reader experiences her desperate hopes that don Alejo, as he has promised in the past, will finally come and save her. Plainly in the moment where she can no longer hear them chasing her and believes she has secured her escape, we realize that they

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<sup>72</sup> The description from above is an interpretation of the following excerpt from Pancho's consciousness, in which while her dance, he not only expresses his latent desire for her, but also his fears that Octavio, his trusted companion, will realize he is fixated on her and is hiding an erection: "El baile de la Manuela lo soba y él quisiera agarrarla así, así, hasta quebrarla, ese cuerpo olisco agitándose en sus brazos y yo con la Manuela que se agita, apretando para que no se mueva tanto, para que se quede tranquila, apretándola, hasta que me mire con esos ojos de redoma aterrados y hundiendo mis manos en sus vísceras babosas y calientes para jugar con ellas, dejarla allí tendida, inofensiva, muerta: una cosa" (Donoso 121).

have outraced her, as they topple her with physical force. Through the development of la Manuela's internal cries, the reader vicariously experiences her immense dread under the weight of their hatred; unable to fight off their sweltering sexual and physical violence, her last moments narrate how the identity of la Manuela has been stolen from her, as they revert her to her assigned-male-at-birth name, Manuel, through sheer force. Unable to even muster the drive to cry out in the pain, la Manuela's life comes to an immensely violent, indecent end as they leave her motionless body in the open countryside.

The final words of the novel are riddled with painful irony as her daughter, la Japonesita, suggests it's entirely normal for la Manuela to disappear for a few days, especially following a capricious whim to run off with strange men. Simultaneously, it is revealed that don Alejo has ultimately decided that electricity will not arrive to El Olivo after all. In the culmination of these devastating events, the reader's eyes wearily trace over the dialogue between la Japonesita and a town companion, don Céspedes; their last dialogue's dismissal of la Manuela's absence, in tandem with the abandonment of El Olivo's progress, culminates in a devastating state of despair that overcomes the reader and penetrates historical representation. Robbed of the final dignity of a search for her body, *la trayectoria de la Manuela* is an expression of the imposed wretched solitude that is projected onto her literary life and subjecthood. Treated as disposable, the disregard for her basic protections in the novel over the course of a mere 132 pages has managed to enduringly permeate the Latin American literary canon. Alongside it, its haunting and enduring narrative imagery—shaped by the violent throes of cisheteropatriarchal panic and animosity—has enshrined the disdain that is felt for *travesti* lives in cultural representation forever, irrevocably shaping the normalization of these trajectories in the landscape of shared cultural memory.

Unfortunately, this common portrayal has proliferated at a disturbing level, rooted perhaps in both prominent literary examples such as Donoso's novel, as well as disconcerting historical and material truths. One need not look far to see how transfeminine characters manifest this profound distress and terror in the likes of novels such as Mexican author Luis Zapata's *La hermana secreta de Angélica María*, Chilean trans\* actress Daniela Vega's role in the Sebastián Lelio film *Una mujer fantástica*, or even the startling assassination of Molina in Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña*. These tropes repeat and reinforce the normality of the violence exerted upon their bodies, while concurrently exposing readers to a recurring traumatic reality. For this reason, putting a name to its recurrence in both historical framing and cultural production analysis becomes instrumental in contesting its normalization, as well as refusing its trite deployment in artistic production. In doing so, I submit that Menstrual's short narratives resist its hegemonic imagery with unnerving intensity; moreover, mobilized by Valencia's theoretical strategies, I seek to explicate how Menstrual effectively realizes this confrontation.

Undeniably, Valencia's *transmortem/postmortem* politics call for a refusal of the *la trayectoria de la Manuela*'s propagation, blatantly rejecting these visions of trauma that are concretized in cultural productions repeatedly with increasing indignity and shamelessness. In shaping her framework around the direct political action of this small community of trans\* sex workers in Mexico, Valencia argues that they mobilized "...a call for others to empathize with the rage and impotence generated in the Mexican population by the inattention and the lack of follow-up of crimes and all type of offences, especially the ones committed against trans and cis women, which lead to daily transfemicides and femicides..." (187). Furthermore, as Valencia argues, their action of putting their friend's dead body on direct public display created the

potential for the "...production of an alliance, even if it is an (sic) spontaneous one" (187).<sup>73</sup>

Most importantly, in a segment that brings us to the analysis of Menstrual's most provocative narrative events, her breakdown of their actions draws the metaphorical through lines with the *travesti* author's resistance, stating:

This act of displaying a dead body is the inverse of the exhibition and trashification of the bodies of the women killed violently in a femicide done by the media. This dignified act of displaying a dead body nullifies its disappearance, its oblivion; it rebels against the indifference toward another death, prohibits mutism, and forces estrangement, since as B. Ianina Moretti (2017: 26) argues, "the bodily exhibition enables alliances, illuminates an interdependence that allows agencies that challenge this normative violence." This act, organized from worthy rage, can be considered spontaneous, minimum and isolated, but its occurrence in fact moves the structures of Mexican social anesthesia around (trans)femicide, since society has become used to daily counting dead cis and trans women at the hands of necropatriarchal violence (187-188).

With distinctive strides, but a similar tone of vindictive rage, I argue that two short stories that book-end the collection of *Continuadísimo* best exemplify how Menstrual embodies the political strategies that Valencia explicates above. By way of *el neobarroso*'s principal characteristics of

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<sup>73</sup> Framed within the expanding work of care studies, and particularly the labors of care involved in providing a "good death" at the end of life (although not limited to this instance) (Casid, "Handle" 124), I believe this proposal also dialogues well with Jill Casid's "Handle with Care," in which they seek to not frame these concerns around closing "the empathy gap," but rather shapes other methods to enable performance's capacity to provide an intimacy-through-distance. Going further, they say, "I propose a new mode of ethical engagement in which a critical space for recognizing precious differences may help us move beyond the limits of what is considered 'livable life' and 'grievable death' in order to imagine and even enact other scenes of care" (124). This recognition shaped by *transmortem* politics' inherent call for solidarity, in tandem with Casid's proposal, can help us further expand the "...affective and material care for something like the good death, the death for which grief is not the only mode of recognition" (124), which is explored in the political act of these transgender Mexican women and subverted through Menstrual.

working through the body and a corporealization of language, both “26 y ½” and “Negro beso negro” activate these readings, including through a sensuality of “trashified bodies” (Valencia 187) that upends these narrative trajectories of *travesti* death entirely.

Perhaps in a manner that is downright startling to the reader, Menstrual’s *Continuadísimo* opens with the bizarrely intense tale of a downtrodden *travesti* sex worker named Sissy Lobato in “26 y ½.” Commencing with fragmented anecdotes of how Sissy first began to *travestirse*, including how she acquired her first domestic silicone injections and her emergence from poverty to a state of self-sufficiency, the story corroborates a common reality of *travesti* identity in the late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Argentina. Self-made through risky procedures without medical guarantee, Sissy’s identity was built by her and for her, upholding documented realities of how *travesti* individuals have passionately and creatively pursued the manifestation of their most desired corporal selves.<sup>74</sup> While slowly aligning her body with her mental aspirations, Sissy is often unable to meet the financial goals that would enable her to pay for safer medical procedures. Regardless, over the course of twenty years she slowly does so, as the narrator details that “...se inyectó cuanta silicona líquida existía, en cirugía caseras hechas entre amigas sin medidas seguras de higiene y sin ninguna garantía. Primero un poco de TETA, luego un poco de CADERA, más tarde el espejo señalaba la NARIZ, redondeado de FRENTE, relleno de PÓMULOS, silicona en los LABIOS...” (15). Eventually, the outcomes of these long-sought after changes are described as ultimately falling short of her envisioned feminine ideal, inducing

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<sup>74</sup> Well-documented in Berkins’s *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas* in the section entitled, “Nuestros cuerpos, nuestra salud,” of the 86% of *travesti*, trans, & transsexual respondents surveyed that confirmed they had indeed received silicone injections to alter their bodies, 90% of them had received the injections in a domestic setting (as opposed to 9% in a private clinic and 2% in a public hospital). Similarly, regarding the 70% that confirmed receiving hormonal therapy of some form, 80% had done so in a domestic setting as well (with a corresponding 11% in a private clinic, 8% in a specialized consult, and 1% in a public hospital) (109).

personal stressors for her as she ages; inevitably subjected to the financial and discriminatory realities of her situation, sex work for survival becomes her unique means to make ends meet.

Nevertheless, for those who have willfully learned how these subjective trans\* histories traditionally form from subject to subject, it is a nearly universal experience that the eagerness to witness the changes of medical transition, for both real and imagined characters, is frequently met with innumerable obstacles and often exacerbated by the subject's resultant impatience. Yet, in this project's reading of how Menstrual's characters resist common trajectories of objectification, dismissal, and disposal—in particular, Sissy Lobato—it's important to incorporate previous analysis of her character that dismisses the subjective construction of livable lives and their "right to appear" (Butler 24-25). This becomes clear upon briefly revisiting Matthew Edwards' chapter on Menstrual in *Queer Argentina*.

Incorporating a reassessment of Edwards' approach towards Menstrual's narrative is important moving forward, as it in part provides archetypal positionings found in the rationales of how deaths such as la Manuela's are contemplated. While much of his analysis is moving, and I don't reject it wholesale, it is important to acknowledge that many facets of his argument are indicative of viewing trans\*ness and *travesti* subjects through the "legitimizing" lens of passing, thus producing justifications for enacting physical violence onto their bodies for not meeting conventional standards of feminine beauty, thereby reducing the enaction of physical violence by cisgender characters onto their bodies to how these trans\* and travesti individuals are purportedly incapable of producing traditional standards of feminine beauty. In discussing Menstrual's narrative techniques, as well as Sissy's construction of self in "26 y ½," for example, Edwards states:

....Sissy's inability to accurately represent and reproduce female beauty is a direct product of her trans-characterization, and her marginalization is intimately tied to her failure to effectively reflect marketable representations of female attributes. The circle becomes vicious; the achievement of happiness requires the (economic) power to properly form the body, yet it is this properly formed and funded body that is needed to obtain that power. ... For Sissy, beauty is a marketable good that bring both fame and fortune. Yet this capitalist vision falls short of its promised outcome as Sissy *fails* (my emphasis) to attain the physical appearance that would bring her desires to life.... The consequences of incompletely, inaccurately (trans)gendering her body are tragic, countered only by her entrepreneurial vision and remarkable dedication to dominant workforce ethics (138-139).

The problematics of Edwards' reading becomes evident as he applies market logic principles to physical manifestations of the *travesti* and trans\* body. While damning of neoliberal frameworks and capitalistic structures that have placed Sissy's identity and body within a violent sexual marketplace, largely, the axis upon which this argumentation turns is inherently flawed. In this reading, minimalizing Sissy's construction of feminine identity as a means to acquire both social and financial capital is both reductionist and ignorant of the realities of a *travesti* livelihood; regularly unable to acquire other means of financially supporting oneself due to discriminatory practices in the labor sector, sex work was and is often the exclusive method for securing financial independence, albeit precarious.<sup>75</sup> Adding insult to injury, the word selection on

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<sup>75</sup> According to Berkins's *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*, of the cumulative total surveyed across various age groups and levels of education completed, 77.5% of respondents confirmed that they would leave prostitution if they had another means of survival in comparison with a corresponding 17.6% who said they would not, and another 4.9% who were unsure. In any regard, Berkins remarks that the overwhelming response to the question upon first utterance was "And how would I make a living?" (101).

Edwards' part repeatedly indicates that Sissy has "failed" both aesthetically and socially, to the degree of categorizing her body as "self-mutilated" and indeed blaming her for being "relegating to the margins of the sex trade..." (139), thereby transforming his reading of her body into a self-made monstrosity (a topic I will engage with in the third chapter). In this sense, his analysis of her body and identity leans into a brutal fetishization of her (in)ability to pass, simultaneously reducing feminine identity to unrealistic standards of beauty. In doing so, the reading relegates her to a life of sex work as punishment, rather than a holistic engagement with sex work as desirable labor. In the process, he ends up explaining away the violence she experiences through expected tropes of justified panic and revulsion at the sight of the *travesti*/transgender body. While language selection on Edwards' part is useful for criticizing neoliberal interventions into trans\* identity formation, it's also indicative of a scope of argumentation that both affirms binary ideals of transition and (in)advertently damns the trajectory of *travesti* futures.

The foregone conclusion regarding the story's numerical title gives way to anticipated sexual encounters, although Edwards remains committed to socio-capitalistic readings of the story— particularly as Sissy comes across a wealthy john who invites her into his luxury car. To her amusement, the john's directness manifests immediately: "Y sacó su pija del pantalón de vestir... Sissy miró y no lo podía creer, ¡debía tener veintiséis centímetros y medio! Puta vieja tenía una regla en los ojos por haber visto tantas vergas" (17). Through dark sexual satire, Menstrual's narration successfully communicates Sissy's delight, who isn't prone to reject the opportunity, money or otherwise. While Edwards adeptly navigates the class relations between the middle-aged john and Sissy's desires for social ascent, he fails to acknowledge the fundamental realities that inform her circumstances, ultimately creating a somewhat crude

parallelism between her life and an impossible fairytale story.<sup>76</sup> While his reading does address her autonomous sexual agency, and that she desires the john independently of sexual contracts, its almost exclusive focus on the capitalistic frameworks that define their encounter miss important marks (140).

This principally occurs upon entering her apartment where the story goes awry and the john's true intentions are revealed after violently knocking her to the floor. Lifting her from the ground by her hair and spitting at her, he screams in her bloody face, "¿Pensabas que te iba a coger, PUTO SUCIO DEGENERADO? ¡NO COJO MONSTRUITOS... no tendrías que haber nacido... no tenés ni Dios vos, CERDO! (Menstrual 18). Landing an onslaught of blows, the john's aversion to Sissy's *travesti* existence appears to move from body part to body part, as Menstrual narrates "...TETAS-CADERA-NARIZ-FRENTE-PÓMULOS-LABIOS... TETAS-CADERA-NARIZ-FRENTE-PÓMULOS-LABIOS..." (18). Much like Edwards' reading, I argue that the enumeration and fragmentation of Sissy's visibly *travesti/trans\** body by the john in this scene is Menstrual's clear way of mirroring the opening sequence, in which she "...consciously 'puts herself together'" (142). However, by way of reading Sissy through *la trayectoria de la Manuela*, this subversion inherent to her story becomes apparent.

In the connective *trayectoria* elements of fear that manifest in Sissy's desperation, her agency as a character is mobilized by Menstrual's narrative techniques; mechanizing the dread of

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<sup>76</sup> The referenced passage from Edwards is detailed here, as he states, "However, the superimposition of this modernist fairytale is short-lived; as the narrator continues with the story at hand, we are reminded that this is Sissy's story. The reality of Sissy's situation brings with it a very different set of class relations than those reflected in the Cinderella story: here, class difference combined with (possible) monetary exchange redefines correct social behavior according to market logic, allowing sexual desire to be openly expressed and releasing the social filters that necessitate politeness. Yet, while her prince proves to be less than "charming," Sissy remains true to traditional social narratives, her hope for love running parallel to her desire for class assent... But Sissy is not Cinderella" (140).

impending death and the direct threat of becoming *transmortem*, her body moves to reject the premise of her inevitable demise and a future that relegates her to necropolitical fetishisms of value extraction. Moving beyond a reading of the *travesti/trans\** body and identity as more than a mere sum of their constructed parts (i.e., read as object), and the dead and “tragic” (Edwards 139) analytical consumption of their pain, Sissy’s response calls for ruthless political resistance. Employing her character as a form of necropolitical protest *pre-transmortem*, Menstrual’s narrative bridges with Valencia’s call to expand transfeminist “...agendas of insurrection [that] do not put identitarian or national limits... [which] make us share practices of dissent, survival, and interdependence in the face of the unrestrained massacre of necroliberalism” (186). As Sissy refuses a fate parallel to that of la Manuela’s, she enacts this protest in protection of her very own life; turning to literally bite off a portion of the john’s nose to disarm him, she then brutalizes him with a kitchen pan to the point of utter exhaustion. Laying lifeless on the floor in front of her, Menstrual highlights her exasperated defense of her *right to appear* despite his efforts to “act as armed ‘soldier’ of the sovereign” (Valencia 185), as she narrates, “Cayó el tipo... Cayó la sartén... Cayó Sissy” (18).

In a moment of assumed reprieve after this physically demanding feat, Sissy’s mental and physical exhaustion—derived from sustained, repeated violence—moves into overdrive. Her work is not finished. Staring at his bloody body and recalling every landed blow, Sissy “... supo que todavía no se había vengado” (18). Implementing *el neobarroso*’s aesthetic interplay with and through the body, Menstrual engenders an erotic corporal strategy of retaliation against the john that is entirely unhinged and replete with vindication, but reveals a sinister discomfort with the reader’s grappling of the events. Using Sissy to deploy this methodology, she climbs on top of his dead body, as Menstrual narrates:

Sissy le sacó la pija del pantalón, se sentó arriba enceguecida, se la metió hasta el fondo. Acabó. La sacó. Lo empezó a besar, a morder, hasta llegar a los veintiséis centímetros y medio, los miró llorando, se los puso en la boca, y con todas las fuerzas que le quedaban TIRONEÓ y TIRONEÓ hasta arrancarlo entero...-¡Es míooo!... ¡Todo míooo! (18-19).

By way of political protest to death and enacting Sissy's revenge, Menstrual's writing with and through the body results in a disquieting scene of sexual gratification. While her retaliation disrupts the reader's comfort, however, it also entirely upends Sissy's anticipated literary trajectory of presumed *travesti* death— but to uncharted and grotesque extremes. What is more, the trope is transformed so devastatingly so through Menstrual's *neobarroso* twists and turns— which actively center an angry, trashified, and grotesque sexual interplay—that the dead, cisgender microsovereign becomes the necropolitical focal point of fascination.

But as numerous days pass by, and Sissy fails to leave her apartment, her landlord's forced entry pushes these morbid revelations even further, as he discovers “Sissy desnuda, morada, babeante y barbuda con la mirada ida, con un enorme pene en la boca y un muerto en sus brazos, con el rostro irreconocible, hinchado y negro como una enorme morcilla, se mecía y canturreaba” (19). Arriving at wildly polarized rejection of *la trayectoria de la Manuela*, Menstrual's narrative strategies in this sense gesture us back not only to Donoso's novel, but a dialogue with this chapter's epigraph that marks such deliberations. Proposed by C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn in “Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife,” their scholarship opens with an interrogation into the theorization of a trans\* politics that seeks to refuse this value extraction from their expired lives, as they ask, “What would a trans politics look like that refuses such murderous inclusion?”

(Snorton & Haritaworn 74). Through *Sissy*, we encounter a narrative vision of trans\* and *travesti* necropolitics that is just that, albeit molded through its total subversion.

Put another way, Menstrual's literary mechanisms toy with a morbid curiosity that centers on the destruction of the cisgender male body instead; in quite literally taking him apart in the violation of his corporal personhood, he is consequently stripped of any modicum of dignity and power. Responding to the "...massacre that minoritarian populations experience," and "appalling privatization" of trans\* death and erasure" as understood by Valencia (185), Menstrual's narrative proposes a troubling, inverted inquiry— why not fathom an outcome where the *travesti* character leaves unscathed? Sitting with its predicaments and remaining profoundly troubled by this nameless man's violent end, we are quickly reminded that our repeated exposure to *travesti*/trans\* death has indeed robbed us of the capacity to inscribe that complete sense of injustice and pain onto their lives and bodies altogether.

While perhaps to some degree less sinister, but no less shocking, the final story of Menstrual's collection, "Nego beso negro," brings this section's deliberations on the necropolitical to an uncertain end. As these two stories are not the unique tales within *Continuadísimo* where the johns die in some bizarre or perverse turn of events, there is certainly more to contemplate. As the collection ends, Menstrual's final short tale commences with a *travesti* narrator divulging the details of a young sexual adventure that haunts her desires for years to come. Having arrived at his grandmother's house for their regular Sunday dinner gathering, 11-year-old Iván (the narrator's childhood name) is introduced to his aunt Silvia's boyfriend for the first time. Narrating their inner child's attraction, our protagonist also reveals their innocent adoration of him, as she states, "...nunca había visto un hombre más lindo... como un príncipe de los cuentos, alto, rubio, de ojos profundos y negros... Y si bien yo no tenía claro

todavía lo que era el sexo, tenía ganas de besarlo como en las películas que le gustaban a mi hermana Elena” (145).

Conveniently sent away by Iván’s grandmother to get salt, Silvia’s boyfriend intuitively senses his adoration and tags along. Whisking him away to a private street corner, the unnamed boyfriend takes advantage of his naïve excitement and performs somewhat forceful anilingus on the young protagonist, amongst other sexual exchanges. Detailed through an almost exclusively physiological sexual response, the corporal happenings of the story reveal Ivan’s profound innocence, although cloaked in a recounting of sexual awakening. Ending their encounter by pulling up his pants and grabbing his hand to return home, the boyfriend then turns and simply states to Iván, “...No le digas nada a nadie. Viste cómo es la gente grande” (146-147). While the clandestine sexual relationship between the two ensues for some time, Iván is ultimately crushed when he moves to Spain with Silvia. Marking his young sexual imagination forever, the protagonist’s ongoing toiling over the moment catalyzes clear inquiries into issues of consent.

As the story develops, the narrator reveals not only how they have transitioned, but also how their distress regarding their young love affair manifests in an insatiable hunger for anilingus. Succinctly, the *travesti* protagonist’s desires are revealed through an occasional stream of consciousness. Interlaced in the story’s remaining pages, the narrator’s methodical and deliberate hunt is a clear obsession, as “...beso negro beso negro beso negro beso negro...” (149), is interspersed throughout the story’s events with a whispering ominousness. Wandering the streets in constant pursuit of its fulfillment, she is approached by a man who bears a striking resemblance to her childhood lover. Offering her a considerable sum of money to do whatever she likes, they immediately seclude themselves in a private hotel room, where she wastes no time in pursuing her fantasy. Climbing on top of his face to prioritize her own pleasure, her immersion

in the fantasy momentarily erases the other subject. Upon climaxing, “enloquecida y envuelta por el orgasmo final...” she looks down to realize her reincarnated prince has lost his erection, only to make more disconcerting discoveries, as she narrates, “...blando y caído, reposando hacia un costado sobre su pierna... Su cara ya no era de color blanco como la luna, sus ojos profundos y negros estaban entrecerrados, de su boca salía una baba espesa y blanca que se esparcía sobre su piel amoratada... Desesperada, le tomé los signos vitales. No cabía duda: estaba muerto muerto” (152).

Conscious of the probable outcome of contact with police authorities, the protagonist leaves her beau’s body behind with great haste. While lamenting his accidental death, however, Menstrual doesn’t shy away from injecting a final dark, albeit humoristic reading of how he met his end. While listening to boleros in the darkness of her bedroom, she whispers along with the lyrics and muses, “Cómo mata el amor...” (153). But in an additional morbid fusing of pleasure and death, the story’s final words intertwine taboo and dark fantasy with the song lyrics, as she repeats them, but throttles the reader’s expectations with an improvised refrain, “Cómo mata el amor ...CÓMO MATA EL BESO NEGRO...” (153).

In this final radical inversion of another John’s fate, *Continunadísimo*’s narrative strategies interweave a different degree of literary terror that is indeed rooted in a fictional, albeit powerful, corporal retaliation. In response to repeated depictions of the cisgender male microsovereign entity that has the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die (Mbembe 27), Menstrual’s narratives instead vigorously challenge their often-championed representation. Moving away from depictions of rampant *travesti* and trans\* murder that is met with total impunity, Menstrual’s mobilization of *transmortem/postmortem* politics and attendant

*neobarroso* strategies not only disrupts how these stories are told but wildly subverts pervasive tropes such as *la trayectoria de la Manuela* altogether.

#### CONCLUSION

In closing, in the chasm that exists between the fictional ends of these stories and their accompanying violent realities that Menstrual explores within the collection, she signals us back to the many seductive literary examples that were historically viewed as impossible, forbidden, or silenced—crossing boundaries into the unknown literary territory of allowing these realities to exist, and by consequence, making the reader tangibly feel the rift of that stark contrast of truths. Simultaneously, her portrayal of consensual physical engagements between *travesti* characters and improbable players (i.e., police officers) speaks volumes to the geopolitical signification of these encounters and gestures us towards a consideration of stories of similar content in the Southern Cone where these pursuits result in necropolitical extractive fetishisms. Book-ended with two different tales that result in the death of her cisgender sexual partners, rather than that of the *travesti* character, Menstrual's narrative trajectory flirts—and fucks—with an upending of common narrative tropes such as what I have dubbed *la trayectoria de la Manuela*. As such, Menstrual solidly places a final grotesque inquiry in relationship to the reader and the ultimate evocation of their affective disgust: why are you comfortable with my death, but not theirs? Refusing censure of any kind and pursuing an eroticization of the reader's own discomfort in this ultimate taboo, the tales that open and close her narrative collection, amongst many others, leave us contemplating how not a single rock is left unturned in the illimitable imagination of *travesti* authorship.

### Chapter 3: Of *Travestis* and Monsters: Speculative Fiction and *Monstering* as Decolonizing Strategies in Camila Sosa Villada's *Las malas*

#### Introduction

Nearly ten years after the publication of both *La virgen cabeza* and *Continuadísimo*, the international glowing response to Camila Sosa Villada's 2019 novel *Las malas* speaks volumes on how *travesti* authorship and representation is being received in the contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Unsurprisingly, social shifts in the Argentinean cultural and political landscape have created a distinct reception for Sosa Villada amongst the three authors; having been born in 1982 in the small town of La Falda she is nearly ten years younger than Naty Menstrual (b. 1975) and almost fifteen years younger than Gabriela Cabezón Cámara (b. 1968). Considering numerous legislative achievements that transpired in the world of LGBTQ+ rights in Argentina between the debut of these extraordinarily diverse narratives, grasping why contemporary authors such as Sosa Villada may have experienced more immediate success in the literary publication circuit is not an arduous task.<sup>77</sup> Over the course of the next ten years Sosa Villada committed her talent to various artistic crafts, earning international accolades and praise, and showing her aptitude in numerous arenas of cultural production.<sup>78</sup> Showing accomplishment not only in the world of narrative, Sosa Villada has also shown prowess as a dynamic actress, singer, playwright, and poet. Having produced and performed in her own biodrama, *Carnes tolendas, retrato escénico de*

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<sup>77</sup> During the ten-year publication gap between these publications, the bill for same-sex marriage (2010) was passed with largely positive reception (Edwards, "Introduction"), soon to be followed by the internationally recognized Gender Identity Bill of Argentina (2012) (National Center for Transgender Equality).

<sup>78</sup> Sosa Villada has accumulated numerous critical accolades such as the prestigious Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in 2020, which she won for *Las malas* (Centenera).

*un travesti* in 2009,<sup>79</sup> her writing and performance talent began to catch the attention of talented young directors such as Javier van de Couter, who eventually cast her for the principal role in the short movie *Mía* (2011). These positive receptions only continued to amass with her debut novel publication *Las malas* (2019).

Subverting the traditions of the classic autobiography, the thematic of *Las malas* centers the experiences of Camila, its first-person narrator and protagonist of the author's namesake. As a semi-autobiographical ode to the lived experiences of the author and her chosen *travesti* family in Córdoba in the early 2000s, the narrative bears much comparison to Lohana Berkins' descriptions of being housed and cared for within the family network of Escobar in the prologue to *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*.<sup>80</sup> While filled with similar affective portrayals found in both Cleopatra's unruly first-person voice in *La virgen cabeza* and the styled erotic musings of Menstrual in *Continuadísimo*, Sosa Villada builds on an expanding framework of *travesti* authorship and aesthetics by reshaping conceptions of beauty, life, poverty, and promise that are born out of their deliberate subjugation. This is apparent from the novel's opening scene, when a cold night of sex work in Parque Sarmiento is interrupted by a baby's distressed cries; with

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<sup>79</sup> The significance of Sosa Villada's presence within the theatrical landscape of *Biodramas*, an ongoing theatrical project directed by Vivi Tellas in Buenos Aires between 2002-2009, is underscored both by the project's critical acclaim and its connections to Sosa Villada's literary analysis. As described by scholar Paola Hernández in "Biografías escénicas: *Mi vida después* de Lola Arias," the premise of the theatrical endeavor was to put the biographical accounts of everyday humans with real lives on stage, thereby exposing "la relación inestable que existe entre el archivo y los documentos verídicos de historias personales con la forma de percibir y corporalizar estos archivos desde lo efímero del teatro..." while noting at the same time that "al traer a escena una variedad de biografías personales se crea una conexión con la presencia corporal" (118-119).

<sup>80</sup> As referenced in the first chapter, Berkins takes great care and time to speak of new homes and kinship created by *travesti* mothers of sorts such as Pocha Escobar in *Cumbia, copeteo y lágrimas*, who created a refuge for *travestis* such as Berkins in Buenos Aires during the 1980s (13-15). Spaces that normative, homogenous society would outright reject as undesirable or of poor circumstance become beautiful, shining examples of the safety net created for non-normative individuals who gathered under their roof. Berkins directly attributes her survival to Escobar and spaces such as these.

urgency, Camila and her *travesti* sisterhood—under the house and guidance of *La Tía Encarna*—don't hesitate to bring the abandoned child under the protective wing of their unconventional family. But chapter after chapter the novel intimately reveals how *El Brillo de los Ojos* (the baby's newly adorned name) is but a small fixture of how the fierce, determined love that they have for each other creates a formidable bastion of protection for their kin.

As the novel unfolds, the reader follows young Camila as she learns the metaphorical ropes of *travesti* survival and community alongside somewhat unbelievable, if not fantastical events that I will come to discuss later on, including a deaf *travesti* sister who begins to transform into a bird, another who must be tenderly caged when she becomes a werewolf under the full moon, and a faction of headless soldiers who journey from Africa, only to become the most formidable lovers of their small *travesti* community. These lessons, however, are periodically intertwined with the very real, turbulent, and frequently violent flashbacks of coming-of-age moments throughout her childhood and adolescence. In doing so, Sosa Villada juxtaposes childhood memories that convey the fear, rejection, and abuse of a father that dreads a *travesti* or *maricón* child with unabated portrayals of love and acceptance amongst the *Encarna* household—even in their most vulnerable conditions. Coupled with moments that depict the precarious nature of a life dependent on sex work, Sosa Villada uncompromisingly portrays the violent persecution of the *travesti* community by innumerable patriarchal entities (johns, fathers, the law). As such, *Las malas* brilliantly captures aspects of the very real and cruel nature of her world with overpowering anguish, while concomitantly challenging the traditional methodologies of how her story must be told. Through the employment of the speculative fiction genre—which is at the heart of this chapter's explications and analyses—Sosa Villada's writing

techniques and strategies within her semi-autobiographical work have exponentially mesmerized an unprecedented global audience.

When the publication of *Las malas* emerged from Tusquets Editores in 2019, not only was it met with critical acclaim in the literary world by and large, but it was also noted on the back cover of the text by both the publisher, *travesti* activists, and artists as a literary work that captured the essence of “*la furia travesti y la fiesta de ser travesti*” (Cover Copy). Perhaps most notably in its endorsement, both Susy Shock and Marlene Wayar publicly lauded Sosa Villada’s work for its ability to capture the historical challenges faced by the *travesti* community as well as for its aptitude for portraying their audacious spirit (Shock and Wayar). It comes as no surprise then, that Kit Maude—a mere three years later— expertly translated the work into *Bad Girls* with the unflinching support of Other Press in New York (2022). Moreover, the translation included an unapologetic author’s note on the word *travesti* from Sosa Villada herself, which will prove to be a useful instrument in the practices of investigating and elucidating globally diverse gender identities and sexualities. Maude as a translator not only maintained the integrity of leaving *travesti* intact throughout the English translation (a missed mark on works as recent as *Slum Virgin- La virgen cabeza*), but also grasped the interchanging tones of tenderness and brutal *travesti* realities that Sosa Villada originally conveys in Spanish.<sup>81</sup>

#### UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL RECEPTION: LAS MALAS’ MONSTROUS SUCCESS STORY

In tandem with an increasingly emergent globalized audience in both the Spanish and English-speaking world, critical interpretation of *Las malas* has proliferated and continues to

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<sup>81</sup> The merits of such a work when put into comparison with various other literary translations portraying the *travesti*-trans\* community in the Global South simply cannot be praised enough. Translations of foundational works such as *Hell Has No Limits*, *Beauty Salon*, *Slum Virgin*, and *Sirena Selena* all continue to employ translations of *travesti* rather than using the term itself; this is particularly true with the utilization of the word transvestite in its place, failing to capture *travesti*’s essence and continuing to perpetuate false equivalents of the terminologies.

grow. Agustina Gállico Wetzel in their article “Formas de la aparición en *Las malas* de Camila Sosa Villada” (2020), makes notable commentary with intriguing interpretations of kinship within the novel, in addition to engaging with the increasing visibility of the *travesti/trans\** community in Argentina in the early 1990s. Focusing on the liminal aspects of Sosa Villada’s various *travesti* characters, Gállico Wetzel bifurcates the discussion into a development of both their spectral and animal nature. Initially, the ethereal nature of the scholar’s argument theoretically follows suit with Butler’s *Precarious Life* and the fundamental inquiry of how one determines and evaluates what is indeed a livable (and mournable) life, as well as what communities possess the privilege of the right to appear (i.e., exist). Through and with these philosophical deliberations, Gállico Wetzel presents a theory of an “*espectrología travesti*” (67), in which the afterlives of *travestis*, viciously lost, continually echo within collective *gritazos* (public demonstrations and vigils, as well as within murals and monuments honoring those who were brutally murdered with impunity) (67). Leaning on Derrida’s ontological ponderings, the scholar uses *espectrología travesti* (66) to read propose that we understand their lost lives as the “...1\*s espectros [que] ‘siempre están ahí, aunque no existan, aunque ya no estén, aunque todavía no estén’...” (66).

Ultimately focusing on the politicization of time, space, and daylight in the formation of these socio-political communities (62), Gállico Wetzel develops succinct examination of the textual figures presented as animal hybrids; this critique comes hand in hand with a general presentation of *travestis* metaphorically understood as nocturnal animals who survive under cover of darkness and flee the light of day to survive. Engaging with Giorgi’s *Formas comunes: animalidad, cultura, biopolítica*, the scholar argues that Sosa Villada in fact uses the animal to destabilize oppositions between man/animal, human/not human, exclusion/inclusion (69).

Speaking to the pack-like mentality of the *travestis* that form community within the novel, Gállico Wetzel argues that the hybrid animal-human nature of those who come to live under the refuge of Tía Encarna is representative of a requisite adaptation to a progressive understanding of their lived identities—in doing so, they fiercely protect both themselves and each other (70). According to their considerations, this is most evident when the household adapts to the needs of Natalí, whose routine conversion into a werewolf follows the calendar progressions associated with the full moon. Rather than violently shunning her or forcefully subjecting her to painful isolation, her community instead turns to protect her and adapt to her cycle. The scholar thus reasons that examples such as these within the novel put into tension a singular cisheterosexual understanding of the necessary time and care implicated in comprehending diverse sexual and gender identities (73).

Both Katarzyna Moszczyńska-Durst's "Entre la crisis de lo humano, la autoficción trans(fuga) y el 'arte queer del fracaso': *Las malas* de Camila Sosa Villada" (2021) and Ignacio Sánchez Osos's "Descantos y maravillas: comunidad, fracaso y utopía queer en *Las malas* de Camila Sosa Villada" (2021), follow similar theoretical frameworks, although both scholars heavily anchor themselves in Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*. Moszczyńska-Durst looks to interpret Sosa Villada's work, in part, as a critique of *autoficción*, as she maintains an autobiographical aspect in the narrative that can be affirmed by corresponding experiences that Sosa Villada describes in her very own Tedx Talk (310). The scholar indeed reasons that this "auto-fictional" (314) strategy dares to challenge the canonical, classic autobiography that privileges the stories of white, cisheterosexual men; consequently, they defend that Sosa Villada employs a rhetorical strategy that not only keeps her community from falling into oblivion, but indeed, converts her into a literary figure of mythical proportions (320). This becomes most clear, as the

scholar argues, when the magical, monstrous elements of the characters are understood as manifestations of “*la infelicidad queer*” (318) that are purposefully sprinkled throughout the narrative. Employing Halberstam’s conceptualization of *queer failure*, Moszczyńska-Durtst’s synthesis of the text appears to revolve around what kind of happiness the author indeed attempts to inscribe into the narrative, rejecting holistically what is traditionally constitutive of success and happiness by heteronormative (and homonormative) standards (319). As the principal character of her own novel, Moszczyńska-Durtst’s analysis of Sosa Villada’s authentic existence within the novel indeed gears towards an interpretation of her literary presence as a living, enduring critique of life within cisheteronormative ideals. The scholar contends this is most apparent when she engages with her status as a survivor, her ability to acquire happiness beyond cisheteronormative standards, and most effusively, when negating the premonitions of her abusive and transphobic father—which uniquely take shape in her vicious and premature death.

In a similar fashion, Sánchez Osos gravitates towards Halberstam’s queer resignification of failure, arguing that *Las malas* engenders a “failed *travesti* life” (134) vision of *la comunidad trava* that is based distinctively on their tumultuous first-hand accounts, the wisdom that comes with those experiences, and the unique affect that results from their hardships (134). In this sense, they contend that Sosa Villada as an author imposes a new imagination of trans-*travesti* subjectivities within heteropatriarchal literary traditions that defies the fates of those portrayed before her. Using la Manuela’s vicious death from *El lugar sin límites* as a point of contrast for *travesti* futures, Sánchez Osos argues that *Las malas* instead gives us “un nuevo locus enunciativo que ofrece caminos desviados, posibilidades y experiencias otras” (134). Perhaps most fundamental to their argumentation, and the facet with which I will contend with most deeply throughout my own analysis of the novel, is Sánchez Osos’ assertion that Sosa

Villada uses *lo real maravilloso* and *realismo mágico* as ontological takeoff points for her aesthetic, both rhetorically and politically. Most importantly in their line of argumentation, the scholar reasons that “...*Las malas* podría considerarse un real maravilloso *queerizado*” (137). While in part I do fundamentally agree that one could discern the *elementos maravillosos* of the novel as hailing from these distinctly Latin American writing traditions, I believe this exploration of *Las malas* to be limited in nature—in fact, I would defend that Sánchez Osoreo’s assertions are indeed *adhering* (my emphasis) to cisheteropatriarchal literary tradition and positioning her work to be read exclusively through the lens of her marginalized status. Consequently, I will demonstrate throughout this chapter’s endeavors that I believe there are more precise, contemporary methodologies to be used to critically examine the magnitude of Sosa Villada’s inventive novel.

Given the previous explications of how human-animal hybridity and fantastical elements appear within *Las malas*, perhaps it seems a given to conceptualize Sosa Villada’s work exclusively under the light of rich 20<sup>th</sup> Century Latin American literary traditions such as *el realismo mágico* and *lo real maravilloso*. Undeniably, the intent of this chapter will prove to be an onerous task as I argue the contrary—but one that merits contemplation. As previous chapters have made undeniably clear, *travesti* as a category fervently eludes precise definition. Furthermore, one need only read Sosa Villada’s author’s note in *Bad Girls* to further concretize the community’s oppositions to being conveniently translated and taxonomically understood.<sup>82</sup> As such, this dissertation project’s aspirations to speak to the gravity of the relationship between *travesti* identity, subjectivity, and their chosen genre strategies as authors continues to aggregate.

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<sup>82</sup> Presented exclusively in the English translation of *Las malas (Bad Girls)* (2022), Sosa Villada’s author’s note takes deliberate time to articulate the politics of not translating *travesti* (Sosa Villada, “Author’s note”), a practice not often utilized thus far in other texts featuring travesti characters.

This final chapter's inquiries transport us to the most contemporary moment imaginable amongst this selection of works, providing us with an unharvested landscape of literary stratagem sewn by Sosa Villada herself.

Fundamental to this chapter's deliberations on the author's rhetorical strategies is the inquiry that sparked its ruminations: what frameworks of analysis are appropriate in the study of the ostensibly *monstrous* entities that recurrently appear throughout the novel—or posed in another way—through what mechanisms and to what end should we conceive of the *monstrous*? Reactionary responses have the propensity to lean into canonical habits, especially as the intense depiction and deciphering of monstrosity has been woven into Latin American literary tradition—fictional or otherwise—since the dawn of settler colonial contact with Indigenous peoples, cultures, and the lands they occupy. Nevertheless, when considering the increasingly pressing inquiry as to how we can further unearth and understand new pathways of queer decolonization within this contemporary moment of transnational neoliberalism, I argue that *Las malas* insists on an exploration of its literary monstrosities through the *género*-bending and taxonomically resistant category of speculative fiction.

Thus, in this chapter's explications, I will first discuss how the cornerstone elements of speculative fiction must be prioritized over canonical tendencies in our analysis of Sosa Villada's work. To begin, this section will address how the increasingly globalized genre posits new imaginative futures through a transnational humanity that urgently centers the needs, hopes, and desires of the marginalized and destitute. By foregrounding an understanding of the intrinsically dissident, expansive, and indefinable nature of the speculative fiction genre (including the widespread global resistance to accepting it as a discernible and respectful literary field altogether), we can detect how it supports the proliferation of a Latin American *travesti and*

(dis)abled politic and analytic, including how Sosa Villada's instrumentalization of the genre activates dynamic interdisciplinary readings of her work.

Second, by explicating how these genre strategies are reliant on an exploration and reclamation of the concept of monstrosity, in which fear of the unknown is not merely rejected—but instead nurtured and declared—I argue that Sosa Villada inscribes an imaginative literary vision and decolonized praxis of *travesti* identity and kinship that simultaneously commences an articulation of a novel Latin American *travesti* (dis)ability politics. Throughout this reading, I dialogue with *travesti* activist Susy Shock's poetic demand to reclaim "...mi derecho de ser un monstruo" (11) in her poem "Yo, monstruo mío," and its corresponding analysis by Joseph Pierce in, "I Monster: Embodying Trans and *Travesti* Resistance in Latin America." In its explication, I incorporate Pierce's scholarship on *travesti* activists Susy Shock and Claudia Rodríguez to mobilize a close reading of the novel's engagement with a legacy of forcibly correcting, assimilating, or annihilating "threatening" social monsters—i.e., sexual, gendered, and Indigenous "deviants"—under settler colonial order. As such, Pierce's concept of *monstering* (308) will be a core strategy for deciphering the portrayal of *Las malas*' seemingly supernatural and metamorphosed characters. As her work mobilizes a radical acceptance of the protagonists who are portrayed as social ills to be feared, her work simultaneously generates a conceptual reclamation of the monstrous through gendered and sexual dissidence through concomitant retrieval of Indigenous systems of knowledge, while mobilizing novel explorations of (dis)abled resistance.

Finally, this conversation will effusively connect to the use of speculative fiction in transnational American works that highlight the imaginative landscapes and experiences of BIPOC, trans\*/queer, and (dis)abled folks. Crucially, and perhaps obviously, insisting on the

implementation of speculative fiction in this analysis is compounded by this chapter's direct imperative to incorporate a reading of *Las malas* through the lens of (Dis)ability Studies and politics. This indispensable assessment will become more evident as I demonstrate how the stratagem within *Las malas* vigorously aligns with fictional portrayals of (dis)ability, gender, and Blackness as analyzed by scholar Sami Schalk in *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*. As various characters within the novel—*travesti* or otherwise—are portrayed as mythical characters with disabilities, at times metamorphosing into human/animal hybrids or gaining heightened abilities due to a perceived chronic illness, “lack,” or “missing” corporeal component, Sosa Villada's work joins a chorus of literary treatises on marginalized identity that reject the portrayal of their incessant dehumanization, monsterhood, and subsequent disposal. Instead, this reading of her work highlights the sewing of affective imaginations and networks of care in which their liberation is exclusively understood as an interdependent and collective undertaking that aligns itself with transfeminist principles emergent in third world and Women of Color feminisms. In forging this literary alliance across Trans\*/*Travesti* Studies and Queer and Trans\* Crip of Color Critiques, Sosa Villada's eccentric characters, penurious settings, and folkloric reimaginings unveil unique disidentifications not only with canonical legacies that have restricted the deciphering of her brilliance, but also with the neocolonial impositions of queer and trans\* frameworks that limit interpretations of her work.

#### ILLIMITABLE POSSIBILITIES: *TRAVESTI*, (DIS)ABILITY, AND SPECULATIVE FICTION'S UNDENIABLE COMPATIBILITY

The imprecise definitions that are often associated with both *travesti* identity and manifestations of (dis)ability facilitate a logical comparison within the nature of the speculative fiction genre in

literary analysis endeavors. Indeed, the inability to irrefutably describe the defining elements of speculative fiction is paramount to connecting these ontological and taxonomical examinations, as the genre has eluded conclusive, popular understanding insofar as a singular classification does not suffice in explicating its wide-reaching and imaginative landscapes, futures, and pasts. And while its contemporary popularity seems to have somewhat collapsed some of these arguments into each other, Marek Oziewicz's explanations of the fraught attempts to claim what works were permitted within the genre in their article, "Speculative Fiction," elucidates the stubborn persistence of these confusions; in turn, they also provide guidance for how we might approach its future directions.

In explicating the history of its use, for example, Oziewicz does due diligence in expounding upon past attempts to bifurcate science fiction and speculative fiction, although many initial definitions of speculative fiction attempted to position it as a subdivision of the former (3-4). Coined by Robert Heinlein in 1941, the term was originally deployed within the framework of narratives that were less concerned with science or technology, and more so with human response to new situations produced by said scientific and technological innovation. Thus, under the parameters of Heinlein, the genre's explorations as defined within the article looked to underscore its anthropocentric nature rather than deliberate on the dilemma posed by the new scientific wonder (3-4). As Oziewicz explains, Heinlein's definition falls into disuse around the late 1960s, specifically as feminist domains of the speculative fiction genre began to resist the emergent belief that it must for all intents and purposes be synonymous with science fiction (4). Perceptively less controversial in its core concepts, some of speculative fiction's most notable authors (e.g., Margaret Atwood) indeed attempted to position themselves in stark opposition to science fiction's staple elements. In Atwood's effort to contrast the two, for

example, she outright demarcates science fiction as "...stories about events that cannot possibly happen, such as the Martian Invasion and similar scenarios in the tradition of H.G. Wells.

Speculative fiction, instead, refers to narratives about things that can potentially take place, even though they have not happened at the time of the writing" (Oziewicz 5).

For anyone familiar with Atwood's work, this response in delineating the distinctions between the two might appear curious, especially as Oziewicz notes that her "...restrictive strategy, then, appears to be the anchoring of the definition of 'speculative fiction' in the story's predictive value" (5-6). The scholar goes on to mention that this was also an initial strategy used to discuss purported impossibilities in early science fiction novels, only to be debunked by the advent of technologies such as space travel. Increasingly peculiar, considering the events of narratives such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), is the utmost certainty of events from which Atwood draws her inspiration. As an author who has implemented "potential" outcomes that are inspired by atrocities of the past (e.g., the 1976-1983 dictatorial regime of Argentina, female genital-mutilation in Africa, and more) (Atwood), it seems particularly limiting for an author to discuss the fundamental elements of the genre being rooted in potential horrific scenarios that have *yet to transpire but could*, with an element of *certainty* that must be preordained from the present (my emphasis). Moving away from the innumerable hindrances that emerge upon bidding to separate the two, Oziewicz instead patently highlights how it evades such precise categorization, and as a result, continues to draw a growing heterogenous audience through narratives that proliferate in "... their evocation of wonder," (5) whether "...supernatural, technological, bone chilling..." or "...texts that are speculative socially, politically, [and] philosophically," (5-6) all while typically having an orientation towards the future. Crucially, I would add to this consideration the inventive, fictional reimaginations of the past in the genre's

ongoing expansion. This becomes paramount in consideration of works of historical fiction such as *The Man in the High Castle* by Philip K. Dick, for example, which constructs a world in which the Third Reich prevails post-WWII, effectively fortifying their Axis alliance with Japan in the coastal domination of the U.S. and other Allied powers.

Nevertheless, what I argue emerges overall within this assessment is perchance a rhetorical inquiry—one that at first glance aims itself at one author’s claims, but holds taxing truths and larger implications in past assessments of the genre, and it is this—who is given the authority to establish and define what is indeed *possible* to begin with? In consideration of Atwood’s claims, this mapping out of certainties informs their clear desire to outline standards of respectability, thereby earning more recognition as a reputable literary category. Pointing to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (2011), Oziewicz outright accounts for this prevailing viewpoint on speculative fiction that Atwood resists, which gestures towards its “... lack of taxonomic clarity,” making it “... too nebulous a tool for literary analyses based on close reading” (6-7). It’s unsurprising in alignment with the inherent privilege of reformist feminist principles that many of the genre’s prevailing white, cisgender, feminist authors would look to make themselves stand apart,<sup>83</sup> *perhaps* unaware of the how establishing such a standard predilects imperialist impositions of what is real, what is possible, and what a reflection of reality *must* consist of.

Nevertheless, in moving beyond the discussion of these strict frameworks, Oziewicz mobilizes the undeniable popularity of the narratives that fall within its umbrella category through their true common thread—the rejection of traditional Western cultural biases in creating literary worlds that exclusively and directly reflect “reality,” and an instead, an overwhelming

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<sup>83</sup> Within the text *Feminism is For Everybody* (2000) by bell hooks, they provide a brief definition and corresponding critique of reformist feminism—whose focus is almost exclusively on women gaining equality with men by exploiting existing structures for class mobility and self-determination while others, inherently unable to access such structures, remain left behind (hooks 24).

acceptance that “reality” exists in multitudinous, subjective states (3). As such, the scholar notes the critical roots of the genre itself, including the core multicultural and global elements that carve out its distinctive non-mimetic functions:

The rise of speculative fiction is a historically situated process. While there are rich traditions of non-Western speculative fiction, the current use of the term emerged within the Western literary-critical discourse, albeit from a convergence of oppositional strands including feminist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial thought. The understanding of speculative fiction as a label for a large cultural field began to take shape at the time of the first multicultural turn of the 1970s and in resistance to the specifically Western, post-Enlightenment, androcentric, and colonialist mindset that had long excluded from ‘Literature’ stories that failed to imitate reality or embraced a different version of the real (2-3).

In addition to speaking to its inherently anti-establishment roots, the scholar notes that ongoing expansion and potential of the genre category exists in its capacity to represent a “global reaction of human creative imaginations struggling to envision a possible future at the time of a major transition from local to global humanity” (Oziewicz 2). This is key, as the author in this sense identifies that the genre has become a tool for dismantling literary traditions that demand constructions and reflections of a purported singular reality. Instead, speculative fiction, as Oziewicz argues, “draws its creative sap from the non-mimetic impulse” (2), and simultaneously celebrates the absolute freedom and power of its authors in creating these imaginative worlds (3). Whether in the form of dystopian hellscape, post-apocalyptic zombie takeovers, magical fantasy worlds, or the robust reimaginations of historical fiction, Oziewicz indisputably contends that the nature of the category is unequivocally and inherently plural in nature (2); as such, this mode of

experimental writing lends itself not only to a diverse set of authors, but also to the growing variety of audiences that crave distinct imaginations of both our futures and our pasts.

Undoubtedly, the multitudinous nature of the genre in this sense certainly lends itself to the proliferation of (dis)abled and gender-expansive representation, accompanied by diverse manifestations of their corporeal, emotional, and psychological embodiments. The undeniable compatibility across speculative fiction's categorical elasticity, the accrescent inquiries into gender's ambiguous and socially constructed nature, and the innumerable entry points for defining (dis)ability within both social and medical models is increasingly palpable as the proliferation of myriad narrative and cinematic worlds continue to push the boundaries of what is chronicled as real, authentic, and true. Consequently, the genre has developed a penchant for gender-bending and (dis)ability-informed aesthetics that often directly pose curiosities about what is (and *counts* as) human—in turn, it gestures us towards both the ramifications and vantages for defying such limitations and ableist, cishetero-centric standards of normalization.

Naturally, these cornerstone elements often shine a unique light on how humans have been treated when they fail to meet these criteria; often parallelly juxtaposed with trajectories of the nonhuman (animals, beasts, mythical creatures, extraterrestrials), speculative fiction's storylines recurrently offer direct reflections on how its characters and environments interact with, mistreat, or embrace encounters with the unbelievable and miraculous "other." Whether the unfamiliar creature or landscape is feared, marveled at, contained, or simply removed, speculative fiction imaginations emulate both the horrors and marvels of the past and present, while simultaneously proffering lessons for improved futures. While some of its authors inadvertently suggest dichotomous futures in which these conceptions of the subhuman or nonhuman are either strategically eradicated through both literal and figurative eugenics—say,

scientific advancement that eliminates the presence of undesirable physiological divergence (although not terribly outlandish in contemporary medical advances)<sup>84</sup>—others, conversely, offer the radical recognition and acceptance of said differences that ultimately facilitate human survival. While some narratives inch towards the trappings of techno-ableism,<sup>85</sup> and others meanwhile explore (dis)ability as a mere metaphor for overcoming strife or blatantly fixate on ideologies of cure, the literary strategies that resonate with this chapter’s aims demonstrate the prevailing vantages of speculative fiction when grasped through the lens of queer, trans\*/travesti, and crip theory’s manifold materializations.

In harmony with these objectives, as well as Oziewicz’s resistance to the succinct categorization of speculative fiction, scholar and activist Sami Schalk’s work *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction* skillfully speaks to the appeal of the genre’s innately multifarious nature while also laying new methodological frameworks for its reinvigorated examination within (dis)ability Studies. Through her work, it is now clearer than ever that many of the preeminent creators of speculative fiction in the United States were not only female-identifying, but also frequently BIPOC, queer, and/or (dis)abled. It likely comes as no surprise upon evaluation of historical disputes and efforts to advance the genre’s respectability, that only in contemporary popular culture and scholarship

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<sup>84</sup> Universal screening and pre-natal testing increasingly is being offered to pregnant people to detect early chromosomal variations in their offspring; of note is the positive correlation between Down Syndrome diagnosis and abortion in countries like Denmark, where the pregnant individual has the full freedom to opt in for either procedure. In 2019, for example, throughout the entire country only 18 babies with Down Syndrome were born (Zhang).

<sup>85</sup> Defined by Ashley Shew, *technoableism* is a “subtype of ableism... but it is set within the context of a belief in the good power of technology and ideas about progress and who is fit for life. We see, in praise and promise of bodies in technology, the idea that disabled is a bad thing to be, that one must be altered to be worthy” (Shew 22).

are these authors receiving the critical engagement they deserve.<sup>86</sup> Vital to Schalk's scholarship, for example, are the works of Octavia Butler dating back to the 1970s that are currently experiencing a cultural renaissance—a fact which offers both invaluable insight and stark contrasts into the early successes of Butler's white feminist contemporaries as well as the popular attention they receive(d). Bearing in mind their somewhat clearer adherence to these alleged rules for fictional mimesis, these considerations lend further coherence to this chapter's final ruminations on the transnational alliance-building across American narratives that dared to imagine otherwise.

For this reason, and as the title of her publication makes clear, Schalk's focus on the creative *reimaginings* of the oppressed in this conceptualization of the speculative fiction genre is crucial, especially concerning how I will argue that Sosa Villada instrumentalizes it in alignment with Schalk's scholarship. But especially key to Schalk's examinations of Black women's speculative fiction are its theoretical groundings in crip theory and intersectionality, thus helping readers and academics alike to “reimagine the possibilities and meanings of bodyminds and thereby [changing] the rules of interpretation in regard to (dis)ability, race, and gender” (28).<sup>87</sup> Elaborating on its manifold nature, Schalk's introduction alone manifests irrefutable explications for the genre's imaginative advantages (and conversely, horrifying alternatives) in the portrayal of the marginalized, stating:

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<sup>86</sup> Important to note is that Butler was a MacArthur Genius Grant winner for her science fiction works, amongst other accolades, but certainly not in a manner that was timely aligned with her financial and creative needs for support. Her works began to earn more attention as she was approaching the end of her life and receiving more critical acclaim (Octavia E. Butler Estate).

<sup>87</sup> In Schalk's paraphrased and expanded explanation of the Disability Studies concept from Margaret Price's work, she states that, “The term *bodymind* insists on the inextricability of mind and body and highlights how processes within our being impact one another in such a way that the notion of a physical versus mental process is difficult, if not impossible to clearly discern in most cases (269)” (5).

Speculative fiction allows us to imagine otherwise, to envision an alternative world of future in which what exists now has changed or disappeared and what does not exist now, like the ability to live on the moon or interact with the gods, is suddenly real. For marginalized people, this can mean imagining a future or alternative space away from oppression or in which relations between currently empowered and disempowered groups are altered or improved. Speculative fiction can also be a space to imagine the worst, to think about what could be if current inequalities and injustices are allowed to continue. Marie Jakober writes that “the great gift of speculative fiction [is that] it makes us think, and specifically, it makes us think *differently*. It makes us examine things we have never examined. Even better, it makes us *re-imagine* things we thought we knew” (30: original emphasis) (2).

In critical dialogue with Schalk’s reframing of what we believe to be consistent of the real—i.e., real monsters, real (dis)ability, real race, real gender and sexuality—in these narrative portrayals, I will demonstrate in the following section how *Las malas* continues to mobilize speculative fiction’s generative possibilities through its powerful strategies to reconceptualize the monstrous.

#### REIMAGINING THE POWER OF LITERARY MONSTROSITIES: DECOLONIZING *TRAVESTI* AND (DIS)ABILITY

Monsters reflect cultural anxieties and serve to define the normal and the deviant, the self and the other, at once intensely desirable and horrific, uncanny yet material; monsters are symptomatic of the way a culture sees itself, its history, its future, and, often, its end.

—Joseph Pierce,  
“I Monster: Embodying Trans and Travesti Resistance in Latin America”

Soy género colibrí porque es mi idea de proyectarme hacia el infinito.

—Susy Shock

The complex interworkings of this section's reframing of monstrosity within *Las malas* is generated through an analysis of its innate relationship between the nature of its characters' roots in pre-Columbian tradition, as well as its ongoing associations and deployments with speculative fiction's expansive frameworks. Not alone in these contemplations, *Paradoxa's* 2018 anthology entitled *Latin American Speculative Fiction*, edited by Debra A. Castillo and Liliana Colanzi, provides a rich overview of the genre's expressions that go beyond the typical interplays of technology and digital realities and how it enraptures us in considerations of past, present, and future. In considering their introduction alone, entitled "Animals that from a long way off look like flies," there is a rich premise of the "role of speculative fiction in conversations about possible presents and futures in Latin America...[and] how authors reach into the deep past and explore imaginary futures to reflect upon the challenges of the present" (Castillo & Colanzi 8). While attributing a great deal of these metaphysical and meditative questions to the contemplative legacies of Borges—which have defined multi-generational approaches to philosophical and literary scholarship and provoked decades of epistemological inquiry in the Americas and beyond—most important to this section's ruminations is the introduction's acknowledgement of a common thread that runs through the volume of essays, specifically noting "...how coloniality frames worldviews, theoretical interventions, and artistic production" (12).

Steadfast in this conceptual framing, Castillo and Colanzi thus move to quote Walter D. Mignolo's *The Idea of Latin America* in identifying settler colonial mindsets as "the hegemonic discourse that questions the humanity of all those who do not belong to the locus of enunciation (and the geopolitics of knowledge) of those who assign the standards of classification and assign to themselves the right to classify" (Mignolo 8). As the editors draw their introduction to a close,

the ambitions of the anthology become evident as they consider the limitless explorations of the speculative fiction genre, which they identify as "...working from the periphery of the West, [where]...Latin American speculative fiction genre writers are using genre to challenge not only traditional realism, but more ambitiously, the limits of Western systems of thought as well" (Castillo & Colanzi 13). Inclusive of scholarly work that engages the mythical fable, the anthology dialogues well with the incorporation of Sosa Villada's folkloric characters into the genre's expansive resistance of hegemonic discourses of power that have and continue to forcefully exert their purported right to categorize the unknown and/or eradicate it from the plain of knowable existence altogether.

In a subsection of *Latin American Speculative Fiction* fittingly entitled *Monstrous Bodies*, for example, Justin Read's article "Speculative Non-Fiction and Post-Factual Latin America: The Non-Anthropomorphic and Non-Identitarian World of Vilém Flusser," provides ample critical inquiry into the genre's analysis and application of fables in Latin American contexts.<sup>88</sup> Most provoking from its onset, however, is how Read holistically negotiates the genre's capacity for *worlding* through a fundamental inquiry, as he conjectures,

If the purpose of speculative literature is the creation of a 'new world,' how does this fact relate to the "New World," i.e., to a specifically Latin American mode of speculation? ... At stake here is not merely how speculative fiction represents reality, but how it mediates that reality, filters it, perhaps even cannibalizes it. At stake here is not merely a question of literary discourse versus material world, but the capacity for discourse to intercede in the material realm in a way that renders a "post factual" world in which distinctions

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<sup>88</sup> Reed contemplates the complex nature of identifying an original version of Flusser's *Vampyrotheuthis Infernalis*, a so-called vampire squid with purported folkloric origins (Read 126).

between fact and fiction are not totally relevant. To what extent is Latin America already this “post factual” new world? (Read 121).

Pointing to the shaping of Latin America as a recent historical process, Read identifies these contemplations of world-making as specifically situated in Latin American metaphysical dilemmas, which are inextricably posed through inaugural colonial visions that unduly defined real, fact, and fiction. Using the imperialistic perceptions of Juan Batista Alberdi’s encounters with Indigenous populations in Argentina, the scholar translates excerpts from *Bases y puntos* (1852) that outright negate their incorporation into 19<sup>th</sup> century world-making as Alberdi outright states that they “do not figure *nor do they compose world* in our political and civil society” (their emphasis, Read 122). Identifying these all-encompassing attitudes of invaders and cultural elites who perceived that the “new American landscape was a desert that lacked ‘world’” (122), Read’s interrogations into how worlding’s speculative nature takes irreplicable form in Latin American narrative in an already questionable backdrop of “reality.” Resisting these colonial perspectives of active denial pre-Columbian worlds and mobilized through applications of mythological figures rooted in Indigenous systems of knowledge, I vociferously contend that their use by Sosa Villada, as Read identifies, perhaps not only mediates reality and filters it, but indeed, as he poses “perhaps even cannibalizes it” (121) in their active retrieval and deployment.

To those unfamiliar with Argentinean folklore, including that which has predominantly passed through practices of Indigenous oral tradition, the presentation of specific fabled characters in *Las malas* could be easily misaligned and solely interpreted through European mythology and fable. In coalition with this section’s objectives of exploring these folkloric representations are the introductory comments to Elena Bossi’s 1995 *Escritos* article, “Seres mágicos de la Argentina,” in which they prompt us to consider that “...(e)stos seres comparten

muchas de sus características con los del resto del mundo, de modo que mi intención no es encontrar sus rasgos generales, sino por el contrario presentar los que parecen más propios de nuestra cultura” (Bossi 88). This section commences with the assertion that the cunning concurrence of two *travesti* characters within Sosa Villada’s masterful work—María la Muda (María the Mute) who eventually transforms into a bird/human hybrid, and Natalí, who cyclically shifts into a werewolf-like creature during full moons—make her incorporation of folklore autochthonous to Argentina irrefutable, grounding the origins of their portrayal in pre-settler contact. By specifically focusing on her employment of *el lobisón* and its feminized and hechizada counterpart, *la mujer pájaro*, as initial catalyzing forces of a decolonial praxis that present themselves within these characters, I move to demonstrate how she reframes notions of what is *real* in the novel as these portrayals reverberate into additional folkloric figures and marginalized identities, as well as identify how these strategies are best served within her mobilization of speculative fiction’s landscape and rejection of exclusively Western traditions.

Perhaps masterfully suggested even through the title of Bossi’s text itself, this section’s aims endeavor to move beyond the limitations of previous canonical readings that treat these folkloric characters and their manifestations as magical or fantastical, vigorously aligning with cisheteropatriarchal traditions that have perpetually relegated feminine and transfeminine authors to the margins or comprehensively limited their successes. Moving away from the tenets of magical realism as the definitive genre through which *Las malas* must be read, speculative fiction instead inquires—what if the monsters are entirely real? And in tandem—what if the framing and identifying of the truly monstrous is, in fact, a matter of improper socialization? In witnessing these literary visions unfold within Sosa Villada’s genre strategies, and discerning these distinct iterations of the monstrous, I argue that we must not resist their eccentric truths and

*accept them as real on their terms*, no matter how disjointed they are from our personal, subjective realities—a mandate that Schalk similarly puts forth in evaluation of Black women’s speculative fiction. As I will come to show, in taking these worlds as truths and accepting the potency of their auto-inscriptions within speculative fiction’s instrumentalized value, therein lies the powerful decolonizing stratagem that manifests in Sosa Villada’s narrative work at the intersections of (dis)ability, race, and *travesti* identity. *Las malas*, thus, is not exclusively limited to an analysis of remarkable mythological creatures, but also extends to the fear-inducing cisheteropatriarchal socio-political forces that have labeled gendered and disabled “deviance” as aberrations to be purged. Nevertheless, as I survey divergent “monstrous” iterations expressed within the narrative and conceptualize how their theoretical reclamations are bound to its portrayal within speculative fiction, I must first take into account the specific social, historical, and cultural contexts of these folkloric figures.

#### FOLKLORIC FIGURES, MYTHOLOGICAL ROOTS

When commencing an initial study of the origins of mythical figures represented in Sosa Villada’s text, regional adaptations of these South American tales proliferate; Bossi, however, adeptly reminds us of the objectively operative aims in understanding their meaning, particularly that folklore studies, “...nos advierten sobre la imposibilidad de hallar una primera versión original...” and that specifically, “...no es la originalidad de los temas lo que debe interesarnos, sino cómo los elabora cada país o región” (87). Concerning the case of *el lobisón* and *la mujer pájaro*, while versional deviations are minimal, they also speak to common concerns regarding the trajectories of oral history that simultaneously reshape them in their passage and likewise put them at risk. Enlightening our scope of Bossi’s ambitions in advocating for their transcription, they thus acknowledge such precarities, saying:

Somos lectores-escritores de literatura ‘oral’. Trabajamos con textos escuchados, grabados y desgravados, y debemos optar por una interpretación cuando pasamos de lo oral a lo escrito... Somos conscientes de que lo oral sigue su camino; pero también de que en este camino es mucho lo que pierde, diluye, muere o desaparece. Es sin duda la escritura la que puede realizar de algún modo un rescate (90-91).

Illustrating the essence of this acknowledgment in Bossi’s work, this section’s aims do not endeavor to qualify these versions as their official or “correct” aboriginal version, but rather serve as verification of the persistent mission inherent to Sosa Villada’s work—to recognize the import of actively working against the erasure of said accounts pre-settler impact, while providing seminal pathways that decolonize and upend conceptions of their monstrous portrayal and existence through innovative methodologies within Latin American narrative.

To begin, the principal characteristics of the mythical character of *el lobisón* can be understood through Bossi’s descriptions, gravitating around the defining traits of birth order, and assigned male at birth status, in which “Si una familia tiene siete hijos varones, sobre el séptimo caerá la maldición” (Bossi 92). According to Bossi’s transcription of its oral history, having befallen said curse, the seventh son transforms into a distressing black dog-like creature at midnight on Tuesdays and Fridays, although it can take on the form of nearly any animal it desires that is abundantly covered in fur.<sup>89</sup> Traveling through cemeteries after transformation, the demonized dog-like figure is doomed to feed on the flesh of the recently deceased, unbaptized babies, and other unpleasantries such as excrement, particularly *estiércol de gallinas*, until

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<sup>89</sup> Accounts of *el lobison*’s afflictions and rituals vary across transcribed oral histories and synopses, some of which will come to be discussed further. But many variations clearly showcase how the myth has been likely tainted by European folklore, such as its onset after one’s 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, that the transformation only occurs during full moons, or that a blessed bullet can bring him to his demise (Miceli 40; Colombes 113-114). Furthermore, Bossi attests to a particularity that speaks to a transculturation of sorts regarding the origins of wolves, “En Argentina no hay lobos, asi que el séptimo hijo varón se encarna en perro” (87).

returned to his human form (93). Very few tactics can bring the creature to his demise (a bullet blessed by three to seven churches aimed solely at his shadow, a consecrated knife in the form of a cross), while conversely, *el lobisón* can enact various strategies to save himself—if able to bite a passerby or, oddly, pass between their legs, the unwitting human is ill-fated to take his place (94). Resembling numerous descriptive traits in folkloric tradition from its South American neighbors in Brazil (*lobisomem* from *lobis-homen*) and Paraguay (*luisón*), the Argentinean name purportedly stems from its Brazilian counterpart (92-93). All in all, Bossi's endeavors to forever inscribe these fascinating details are certainly of merit and manifest in capturing a particular essence of traditional oral history; nevertheless, an explication of one of its most integral components is left out in its description within *los seres mágicos* altogether—its ties to Guaraní mythology.

Located historically across the regions of Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, and Bolivia, the perseverance of the Guaraní people is recognized as one of the most enduring legacies of Indigenous communities in South America (Miceli 31-32). The landscape of their mythology and history, however, was largely oral and further confirms the compulsion behind Bossi's ambitions, especially upon inferring the foregone conclusion that the numerous romance language titles of *el lobisón* are a clear testament to what has already been eclipsed—its original Guaraní name. While mourning this epistemic loss, all regional expressions have maintained vital components of Guaraní history, namely, that he is understood to be the seventh son of Tau, the personification of the spirit of evil, and Kerana, the striking descendent and only daughter of one of their first human beings, Marangatú (Montesino 13). Varying in their relational capacity, in some versions Kerana willingly escapes with Tau and they marry, while the predominant narrative frames Tau as enchanting her with a magical flute, forcibly capturing, raping, and

impregnating her with seven sons (13-15). Brutal relations set aside, in all accounts they are cursed by Arasy as retribution for Tau's abduction of Kerana, who destines all seven of their sons to be monsters— "Todos sietemesinos. Todos fenómenos deformes. Todos malvados" (16), preserving them as powerful and eternalized entities within Guaraní mythology.<sup>90</sup> *El lobisón's* place as the seventh child, however, fated him to be the most monstrous and hideous of them all, as Angatupry willed him to not only be physically repulsive in his half-dog, half-human-like appearance, and long, scraggly, and dirty hair, but also nauseating in an olfactory presence that presaged death (Anconatani 229). Akin to Bossi's descriptions, this displeasing aroma principally emanated from his nighttime cemetery habits of feasting on rotten human remains (Anconatani 229).

Confronted with such explanations, *el lobisón* as a referent becomes unmistakably entwined with Sosa Villada's portrayal of Natalí, an acutely afflicted secondary character who resides within Tía Encarna's metaphorical *travesti* boarding home. Camila, in her capacity as the novel's protagonist, presents Natalí's physiological and emotional burdens in a manner that intricately lays the groundwork for folkloric comparison, narrating that:

Cada mes, Natalí se encerraba en un cuarto al fondo de la casa, vigilada por La Tía Encarna, con el niño en un brazo y la escopeta en el otro, la puerta asegurada con una cadena gruesa y un candado enorme... Sucedió que Natalí era la séptima hija varón en su familia y las noches de luna llena se convertía en lobizona. Si no la cuidábamos así,

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<sup>90</sup> Every seventh moon, Kerana gave birth to another monstrous child, each of them distinctly cursed by Angatupry. The first a giant lizard creature with seven dog heads and eyes that spit fire—Teju Jagua, who only eats fruit and honey; Mbói Tui—a large serpent with a parrot head and terrifying glance and squawk; Moñái, an enormous serpent-like creature with powerful antennae on its head; Jasy Jatere—a childlike, blonde-haired figure who is known to protect the yerba mate plant of the forest; Kurupi—short, ugly and hairy, with a purportedly large penis wrapped around his waist, effectively making him the symbol of fertility; Ao Ao—who can reproduce on their own, often conveyed as a fanged, sheeplike character; and finally, Luisõ—*el lobisón* (Montesino 16-17).

después se hacía daño a sí misma, se convertía en alucinación de borrachos y pasto de noticieros y despertaba bajo los árboles con la ropa hecha jirones. Por haber nacido séptima hija varón, Natalí era ahijada del presidente Alfonsín, que había estado presente en su bautismo, y desde entonces toda su familia y la gente cercana eran radicales en lugar de peronistas, aunque hasta entonces les hubiera interesado un bleo la política (103).

Intermixed with referents particular to Argentinean history, Camila's narration of Natalí's lineage also speaks to a degree of *sincretismo* that is at hand in her portrayal. While numerous facets of her *lobisona* status align with the traditional depiction of *el lobisón*, interwoven are additional details that, according to Argentinean historians, have little to do with the folkloric tale. Specifically, the tradition of the seventh son or daughter being adopted as a godson of the Argentinean president is one that has been erroneously incorporated into *el lobisón*'s cultural perception, even though it actually began as a separate Russian-Catholic tradition near the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in which a Russian immigrant requested that his seventh son be blessed in the same fashion in which the czar would have done in Russia.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Natalí's transformations only occur during the full moon, which is more closely associated with the European werewolf, whereas Bossi's description has made clear that it regularly occurs irrespective of lunar phases (albeit a common association regardless). In any case, her

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<sup>91</sup> Mistakenly circulated in media as an element of *lobisón* tradition, the story of a young Jewish boy who was adopted as the national godson by President Kirchner first portrayed this seventh son as being saved from the curse of becoming a werewolf. *The Guardian* amongst other news syndicates then published the correct information on the tradition, stating, "But according to Argentine historian Daniel Balmaceda, there is no link between the two traditions. 'The local myth of the *lobisón* is not in any way connected to the custom that began over 100 years ago by which every seventh son (or seventh daughter) born in Argentina becomes godchild to the president,' he said... That custom began in 1907, when Enrique Brost and Apolonia Holmann, Volga German emigrés from south-eastern Russia asked then-president José Figueroa Alcorta to become godfather to their seventh son, said the historian" (Goñi).

*lobisón/lobisona* status within the novel clearly speaks to how the folkloric tradition has sufficiently instilled fear in Argentinean populations for decades, to the extent that families and villages would rather murder their seventh son or stone them to death than confront his altered form and consequent violence and suffering.

Corresponding with these anxieties, Natalí recognizes her own limitations as the seventh assigned male at birth child, acknowledging that "... era capaz de cometer crímenes espantosos cada noche de luna llena si no se encerraba en aquel cuarto...(Sosa Villada 103); meanwhile, Camila demonstrates the multitude of protections she receives from this micro-community in her persistent state of psychological and physical warfare, stating "...Por eso se había mudado a lo de La Tía Encarna y por eso le pedía por favor cada mes que se encargara de encadenarla, doparla o desmayarla de un golpe en la frente si ella se ponía brava, porque bestializarse tiene consecuencias irreversibles para el cuerpo" (103). Most captivating in Camila's narration, however, is the unabated acceptance she receives in their routine collective care, as she describes that:

Decíamos que era como la menstruación de nuestra manada. Nos regíamos por el ciclo de la luna, sabiendo que no podíamos distraernos, porque no podíamos fallarle a Natalí. Cada mes la veíamos morir cuando retornaba de su forma lobuna, cada mes salía más deteriorada de su encierro. No podíamos hacer nada por ella, aunque era la más valiente de todas las travestis que he conocido, porque era dos veces loba, dos veces bestia (104).

Evident in this passage is Sosa Villada's explicit language choice and deliberate selection of metaphor. Equating her cyclic physiological needs to the processes of menstruation, Camila's narrative description as the novel's protagonist harkens a transformative sense of community in

their protective pack-like mentality, as the group bonds and functions in response to the fierce uplifting of her needs in a period of deep agony and vulnerability.

Despite her circumstances and fatalist, snarling disposition, their persistent efforts to comfort her remain, as they perform simple, but meaningful deeds of companionship such as singing to her outside the door before a long night of work in Parque Sarmiento (103). Rather than excise her and subject her to the status of spectacle, Natalí's ongoing residence in the household masterfully suggests a methodical nurturing of the most stigmatized societal ills. Furthermore, she is not understood to be an inherently vicious figure, as Camila narrates that "...Lo más triste era que el resto de los días Natalí se portaba como un sol con El Brillo de los Ojos, le soplaban la panza, jugaba con él a aparecer y desaparecer. Era tan buena Natalí que se nos hacía imposible asociar a aquella bestia que mostraba los dientes y rugía desde la oscuridad del cuarto con la mujercita de rasgos mulatos que era la preferida de la pensión el resto del mes" (104). Coinciding with most early portrayals of *el lobisón* in Argentinean folkloric tradition, while her frightening visual presence is emphasized through "... una dentadura que podía masticar huesos humanos como si fueran fruta madura" (104), she nevertheless maintains her tender and generally harmless status. Mirroring the dominant cultural narrative of *el lobisón*, who largely subsisted on the consumption of animal manure and human remains<sup>92</sup> rather than the active exertion of violence, Sosa Villada's portrayal of Natalí advances rhetorical inquiry regarding how European influence actively distorted perceptions of mythological figures indigenous to South America through advocacy for their violent conquest and removal.

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<sup>92</sup> Although generally perceived to be harmless across numerous folkloric accounts and regional interviews, *el lobisón* was also occasionally noted to have subsisted on unbaptized babies, although this was often discerned and portrayed as a rarity (Anconatani 229).

Thus, unnegotiable in the reclamations of their reality, as exemplified through Natalí's care, is a resolute commitment to engaging with the ongoing nurturing of such systems of knowledge, particularly under elevated uncertainties of how the outside world will attempt to assertively correct or crush expressions of difference. Intertwining the purportedly fearsome and entirely loathsome entities of folkloric and contemporary social outcasts, the author thus combines our contemplations of *bestia*, *loba*, and *travesti* in skillful manners profoundly dissident with compulsorily cultural standards of the norm. Concomitantly, she initiates a cascade of reflections that beg the question—who, indeed, is the *real monster*?

Affirmed through the presentation of additional characters, Sosa Villada's portrayal of María la Muda, who slowly transforms into "...una pájara de plumaje plata oscuro" (158), presents comparable assessments to Natalí while generating additional critical criteria posed through her (dis)abled embodiment. Again presented through Camila's perspective, María at first locks herself in a room upon discovery of her transformative state. Refusing to abandon her cries, Camila narrates that:

María finalmente cedió y me llamó a su lado, y se levantó la blusa toda bañada en lágrimas, como debe haber estado el manto de la Virgen María cuando vio morir a su hijo en la cruz, y me mostró todo su costillar izquierdo, del que brotaban unas plumas minúsculas de color gris, como de gallina bataraza... Lloraba desconsoladamente y a mí lo único que se me ocurrió fue pasarle la mano por las plumas, pensando que se las había pegado con fana. Pero no. Para probarme que las plumas salían de ella, se arrancó una y me la puso frente a los ojos, y del hueco en la piel le había brotado una lágrima de sangre (86).

This initial scene of crisis faced by María la Muda in her metamorphosis commences an analytical cascade ripe for narrative examination in three main ways moving forward. Firstly, Maria's transformation stimulates ensuing folkloric ties to Argentina that irrevocably spread to the perception of numerous other characters that would perhaps otherwise go unperceived. Second, as the rest of the scene unfolds and fastens itself to others, its core imagery portrays an unabashed and radical embrace of the very real and manifest experiences of travesti, (dis)abled, and monstrous embodiment, directly mechanizing a methodology of *monstering* that is undeniably rooted in a decolonized praxis of travesti and (dis)abled embodiment. Finally, functioning as an explicit methodology of Sosa Villada's speculative fiction strategies, *monstering* thus enacts an active cultivation of a sacred adoration and blossoming spiritual network of these groups, thereby intensifying their protection through community engagement and non-normative kinship.

Acknowledging the expansion of these Argentinean folkloric monsters and their ongoing ties with Guaraní mythology is paramount as they materialize through María la Muda's portrayal, most significantly as it begins to provoke further interrogation and an unearthing of the origins of various other characters. This becomes unmistakable upon returning to myriad collections of tales pervasive in the region, particularly Adolfo Colombres' *Seres sobrenaturales de la cultura popular Argentina*, as well as the prolific contributions of linguist, folklorist, and scholar Berta Elena Vidal de Battini in the ten-volume publication series *Cuentos y leyendas populares de la Argentina* (with particular attention given to *Tomos IV* and *VIII*).

Fascinatingly, the ability to discern how María's transformation serves as a direct counterpart to Natali's non-normative, animalized status as *el lobisón* is not immediately accessible to the hasty reader, as numerous entries are painfully deficient in detail. For example,

Colombres' succinct account of "42. *El Lobisón*," alludes to this furtive, gendered connection between the figures of *el lobisón* and *la bruja* while not immediately facilitating a cathartic reveal, stating: "El Lobisón es siempre el séptimo hijo varón seguido de una pareja, así como la séptima hija mujer seguida será bruja" (113-114). Combing across the entries, and but a few pages later, curiosity is logically piqued when entry number "48. *Las Brujas*," describes them as women, "...por lo común viejas y feas, que parten a la medianoche del sábado hacia las salamancas, convertidas en *búhos, pájaros u otros seres alados*, o volando en una escoto sí" (my emphasis, Colombres 131). Yet, the clinching element of the entry arrives at its very end—compensating for *el lobisón*'s lack of nuance—as it divulges that, "...Se dice en el Noreste que la séptima hija seguida de una pareja será bruja, así como resultará Lobisón el séptimo hijo varón seguido. En la noche de los viernes saldrá convertida en un ave misteriosa a recorrer el vecindario provocando así reyertas y rupturas" (131-132), conclusively binding the two together.

Intricately concise in their synopses, the descriptive components from Colombres' illustrative text are invaluable and visually intriguing, but pale in comparison in many respects to the brilliant conception of Vidal de Battini's *Cuentos y leyendas populares de la Argentina*. Perhaps an unjust comparison by any standards of measurement, the publication is indispensable to Argentinean culture, as Vidal de Battini is recognized as one of the most foundational contributors to linguistic and folkloric study within the region. Comparison is fruitful, however, in the sense that *Seres sobrenaturales* corresponds with decades of transcribed oral history interviews of townsfolk from various provinces (performed by Vidal de Battini herself). Showcasing in tandem their contrasting inconsistencies and commonalities across regions and orators, the fascinating capture of oral history tradition that she achieved throughout the 1950s-

1970s lives forever archived for ongoing reference, while the dissemination of these tales continually shifts in an ever-globalizing world.

But demonstrably paramount in their study is the nature of the narrators themselves, who offer profound insight into how one understands, experiences, and relates to their culture through these tales, which in nearly all instances, the storytellers discern as real events that form a verifiable part of their communities and corresponding histories. In *Tomo IV*, for instance, a 1953 entry no. 901 is labeled “La muchacha que se transformó en pájaro,” in which 30-year-old Guillermina Fernández of Chaco speaks specifically of a story her mother shared with her that is also widely accepted in the province of Corrientes. Recounting the tale of a young woman newly engaged, it was well-known information that she forced her fiancé to agree to not seeing her on Tuesdays and Fridays. His burgeoning curiosity, of course, leads him to eventually spy on her through the window, as he witnesses that the girl “...trajo una cosa que parece harina y la redamó en el suelo, y comenzó a revolcarse en esa harina. Y conmenzó [*sic*] a dar plumas. Las manos volvió de alas. Al ver eso, el mozo se dio güelta [*sic*] y se jue [*sic*] muy asustado de lo que era la novia. Ella se volvió de un pájaro blanco y salió por las rejas de la ventana” (Vidal de Battini 381). Intentionally capturing the philological origins of the narrator’s account, the accompanying footnotes provide further insights regarding Guillermina’s perspective, as they clarify that:

Según la narradora, esta muchacha era la última de siete hermanas seguidas. Esta condición le confiere la virtud de transformarse en ave, después de realizar ciertas prácticas secretas. Puede así traer a la madre, como producto de sus andanzas, todo el dinero que necesite...La creencia de que la séptima hija mujer de un matrimonio es bruja y de que el séptimo hijo varón es lobizón es general en toda la región guaraníca y parte de la del Litoral (381).

Varying across these copious accounts and storytellers of *la bruja*, *la mujer pájaro*, *el lobisón* or *la lobisona*, we are faced with a concomitant richness and predicament of interpretation. While some identify *la lobisona* as sheerly the feminized “dog-like” counterpart of *el lobisón*, others specifically categorize her as *la bruja* in a transformed avian state—whether cursed or conjured of her own volition. Others still portray her as a demonic figure that “...también pueden convertirse en asquerosos animales” (Colombres 131). What is more, even in the cumulative notes taken by Vidal de Battini, her conclusions make deliberate mention of the wealth of accounts and general widespread belief in *el lobisón* without providing further critical input on the feminized *lobisona/bruja* counterpart. All of this is not to say that María la Muda must be contained to a particularly neat reading or a perfectly complementary comparison with Natalí’s evident *lobisón* status, but rather to gesture towards the manifold interpretations at our disposal that inescapably ground us in their provincial appraisals, while also—and perchance most notably—offering us expanding opportunities to critically reframe the monstrous.

Deeply resonant of the strategies outlined in Joseph Pierce’s exceptional analysis of the work of *travesti* activists and artists Susy Shock (Argentina) and Claudia Rodríguez (Chile) in “I, Monster: Embodying Trans and Travesti Resistance in Latin America,” Sosa Villada’s persistent questioning of the social implications of how the monstrous is portrayed and defined through the use of these figures and histories can be further examined in cross-dialogue with Pierce’s analysis of how both Shock and Rodríguez “utilize monstrosity as a project of aesthetic and epistemological dissidence...[engaging] the signifying position of the monster as a form of oppositional praxis, as an insurrectional force that expands beyond the limits of embodied recognition” (Pierce 306). More specifically, the piece fervently centers on the political and

poetic claim made by Shock, in which she unreservedly asserts that she “claims her right to be a monster” (“Yo reivindico mi derecho de ser un monstruo”) (Shock, *Poemario trans pirado* 10).

Made expressly in response to the increasing legal legibility of transgender identity as authorized by the Argentinean state, Pierce examines their rejection of the supposed agency and autonomy proffered by government recognition of “stable”—i.e., surveilled—gender identity categories (306). Demonstrating their keen disinterest in being made legitimate under such gendered matrices (308), Pierce expertly delineates monstering as a methodology of political resistance rooted in “an outlet to question how the body is understood in relation to mechanisms of biopolitical control....” using Shock’s claim to mark how the artists mechanize *monstering* “(i)n contrast with those who seek legal recognition for ‘abnormal’ bodies...” (308). Pushing directly against the “drive toward taxonomic classification,” the article concisely assesses Shock and Rodríguez’s artistic oeuvre as a means to challenge, if not destroy altogether, the troubling desire to participate in being made legible by state-funded bureaucratic measurements of gender-cataloguing and attendant normalcy (308).

Crucial to these examinations is how Pierce brilliantly interweaves these 21<sup>st</sup> Century contexts of the “monstrous body” with their irrefutable foundations in the violent legacies of Latin American settler colonial conquest, understood through assorted archival documents that sought to narrate their expeditions to the “New World.” Briefly introducing the landscape of the colonial canon, varying from *diarios*, *relaciones*, *cartas*, *crónicas*, and more, Pierce concisely hails us back to the ontological history of monstrosity in the Americas as established by settler colonial imaginations, stating:

In these early chronicles and proto-ethnographic texts, monsters were central to the epistemological imaginary of Spanish and Portuguese colonization. The space of the

Americas as well as its inhabitants became knowable in the European mind according to mythological tropes of war and conquest, myth, and monstrosity. The tropic imaginary of the monstrous was crucial to understanding the natural world and thus how nature itself entered into new taxonomical orders. The meaning of the natural was from the very outset of the colonial enterprise an effort to comprehend and transform the sexual, racial, geographic, and economic realities of the Americas (309).

Indeed, the amazement and apprehension that Pierce refers to in relationship to the “New World,” emerges immediately in but a brief study of its preeminent settler texts. One need only stumble through the first few pages of Christopher Columbus’ diaries to understand the trite deployment of *lo maravilloso* in the narration on his journey—whether mistaking manatees for ugly mermaids, being astounded by colorful birds, plants, and leaping sea life, or even believing to have seen cyclops himself—entire academic careers have been dedicated to the analysis of his purported wonderment (and lacking Spanish lexicon) with the Americas’ natural environment.<sup>93</sup>

The evaluation of this amazement proliferates within a disciplined study of the functionality of texts similar to his *diarios*, which were written with the express purpose of both impressing and justifying their journey to those who funded their transatlantic exploration—namely, royalty and quite often the king and queen themselves. Whether exploring Fray Ramón Pané’s brutalizing accounts of Taíno mythology and culture in *Relación de las antigüedades los indios*, Álvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca’s varied “discoveries” of shamanic and medicinal strategies within Indigenous communities within *Naufragios*, or the legal implications of Hernán Cortés’ *Segunda Carta* in defense of his disobedience to military hierarchy and desires to “liberate” the

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<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt’s *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, in which his chapter “Kidnapping Language,” examines the linguistic and visual gaps between how Columbus repeatedly conveyed what he was seeing as “marvelous” within his voyage diaries (Greenblatt).

Indigenous people from the “tyrannical” oversight of Montezuma (fashioning himself as a New World mythical Cid in pursuit of epic evangelization), the portrayal of sexual excess and gendered deviance (i.e., homosexuality, third gender), cannibalistic encounters, and triumphant defeat of Indigenous populations are commonly understood to be wildly superfluous portrayals that were instrumentalized to justify the narrator’s return, payment, and supplementary voyages when no material wealth was discovered. Adding to this impetus for expedition under the Catholic evangelist banner, these tales of “fleshly abundance” quickly metamorphosed into a “...harbinger of future evils yet to come... represent(ing) sensuous examples of deviance, material evidence of the limits of nature’s perfection that simultaneously reference a spiritual or metaphysical imbalance...” (Pierce 309). As such, after moving past central initiatory experiences of awe, wonderment, and excitement, the settler colonial mindset swiftly mobilized to establish cultural dominance, as well as territorial and spiritual order, in their newly claimed colonies, which as Pierce maintains, “is restored when the monster is seen and managed by the law; balance restored through the incorporation of monstrosity into the field of culture, that is, by defeating the monster in battle or discovering its secrets” (309).

Moving into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the ramifications of assimilating and defeating the monsters of the Americas continue to manifest in diverse ways, particularly as Latin American nation states establish independence from Spain, while simultaneously experiencing the burdens of modernization in widely variable political, social, and economic landscapes. In critical introspective moments of statehood formation, the common framework of *civilización vs. barbarie* emerges as the semantic mantra *par excellence* for conceptualizing national imagery of what it means to be Bolivian, Argentinean, Uruguayan, and more. Premised through a fixated, perpetual glance towards European culture as the “ideal” model for civilization, the barbarism

associated with the uncontrolled and wild landscapes of the Americas was critically juxtaposed against it through deviations in the model that were either aggressively assimilated or eradicated altogether. Thus, while conceptualizations of the monster commenced through the mythological, further advancements in law, science, and technology gradually began to fixate on the “outlaws and social deviants: bandits, pirates, and gauchos, but also *uranistas*, *invertidos*, and *maricas*, and later, *travestis*” (Pierce 310).

Comparable to eugenicist trends emerging within the landscape of the United States moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, scientific technology was increasingly instrumentalized to establish definitions of the ideal citizen of the Americas by expunging any expression that diverged from compulsory able-bodied and cisheteronormative standards through “the domain of biopolitical control by which hygienists, psychologists, and phrenologists catalogued, diagnosed, and attempted to ‘cure’ these aberrations and thus excise them from the national body” (Pierce 310). In the ongoing combination of Pierce’s philosophical and material considerations of monstrosity with Sosa Villada’s narrative strategies, I assert that she unveils new readings of the monstrous through the robust validation of her characters’ realities and manifold expressions, much like provincial orators of these fables would actively attest to. In part gesturing us back to Read’s considerations, we might even allege her work to be a piece of “speculative non-fiction...” as it decidedly demonstrates how “categorical differences between metaphysics and history, real and fiction, human and non-human, begin to fray” (Read 123).

But this literal and figurative “becoming monster,” as posed by Pierce and embodied by the various characters of *Las malas*, is insistently expressed through a deliberate unlearning of what it means to be human through their portrayal, resolutely embracing a desire to become monstrous and mobilizing the power of its epistemological origins (308). Naturally, I contend

that Sosa Villada is indeed *monstering* these characters and patently reclaiming their right to exist as *travesti*, (dis)abled, and literal monsters—corresponding directly with the active deployment of Pierce’s proposed enumerations of the transitive verb<sup>94</sup> and its corresponding mechanizations. In combining these folkloric monsters, myths, and miracles with *travesti* personhood, Sosa Villada is not only manifestly accepting and incorporating their monstrous knowledge into the deliberate rejection of how bodies must live and operate under normative standards of classification but is also ardently “undermining the structural divide between human and nature; between human and the divine....” (Pierce 308) through their deliberate elevation to sacred and divine status.

While many divine interventions, if you will, may at first be puzzling to the unknowing reader, various peculiar scenes featuring la Tía Encarna only further oblige us to confront these seemingly latent, yet powerful challenges to the *real* made by Sosa Villada through her characters. Although her folkloric presence nearly eludes interpretation, Encarna’s presence from the onset of the novel already incites assorted inquiries, as she is reputedly 178 years old, is covered in scars, and experiences massive, continuous bruising whose rationale spans across diverse explanations, such as the physical abuse she experienced in military dictatorship and

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<sup>94</sup> Pierce outright provides a definition of “to monster” in the piece stating, “If neoliberal social and economic policies dominate the current landscape, then to monster is to defy the global circulation of capital and its concomitant bodily configurations. To monster (as a verb) represents a crucially queer mode of resistance to epistemological normativity. Thus, a working definition:

monster (transitive verb)

a: to become monstrous

b: to take on the characteristics of a monster (esp. in conduct, disposition, or appearance)

c: to think, act, and sense as a monster (i.e., to see as a monster would see)

to possess, cultivate, or seek bodily excess (esp. regarding the sexual and alimentary appetites)

to effect in others a sense of wonder, fright, or revulsion

to enact through the body monstrous knowledge, feeling, politics, or art” (Pierce 308).

from miserable johns, and the literal “aceite de avión con el que había moldeado su cuerpo...” (Sosa Villada 28). Exaggerated, controlling, and sometimes demanding as a matriarchal leader, “su instinto materno era teatral, pero dominaba su carácter como si fuera auténtico” (29). In this sense, her capacity as a mother and role as a caregiver in the household unveils itself most principally through the maternal traits she expresses not only to the *travestis* who reside in her home for protection, but also to their newly adopted baby boy, *El Brillo de los Ojos*. Her fierce protection of him is intricately portrayed in the scene where he is brought home for the first time, in which:

María, una sordomuda muy joven... abre la puerta de Encarna sin preguntar, pero con muchísima delicadeza, y se encuentra con aquel cuadro. La Tía Encarna amamantando con su pecho relleno de aceite de avión a un recién nacido. La Tía Encarna está como a diez centímetros del suelo de la paz que siente en todo el cuerpo en aquel momento, con ese niño que drena el dolor histórico que la habita. El secreto mejor guardado de las nodrizas, el placer y el dolor de ser drenadas por un cachorro. Una dolorosa inyección de paz. La Tía Encarna tiene los ojos derribados hacia atrás, un éxtasis absoluto. Susurra, bañada en lágrimas que resbalan por sus tetas y caen sobre la ropa del niño.

Con los dedos unidos en montoncito, María le pregunta qué hace. Encarna contesta que no sabe qué es lo que está haciendo, que el niño se le ha prendido a la teta y ella no tuvo el coraje para quitársela de la boca. María, la Muda, se cruza los dedos sobre el pecho, le da a entender que no puede amamantar, que no tiene leche.

—No importa —responde La Tía Encarna—. Es un gesto nada más —le dice (25-26).

This delicate dedication to attaining mother-like status is perhaps discerned as more secular in nature at first, simply read as a metaphorical portrait of the capacity for care that Encarna

possesses for El Brillo and her *travesti* children, while ever-so-neatly packaged in socially constructed, iconographic imagery that is well-associated with maternal care and a sense of feminized responsibility.

Increasingly distributed with an enthralling religiosity, however, the interpretation shifts as Camila plants contextual clues stating that “La Tía Encarna, que es devota de la Difunta Correa, dice que el niño es en realidad el hijo de la Difunta. Que la gente no se preocupa por esa parte de la historia porque al niño lo criaron un grupo de travestis que trabajaban en el Parque Sarmiento” (111). To the indifferent reader, the quasi-saintlike ambitions expressed in Encarna’s previous sentiment would clearly be read as unadulterated Catholic fervor, directly relatable to the hagiography of Deolinda Correa, provincially known as la Difunta Correa and pertinent dominantly to Argentina (and to a lesser extent Chile).<sup>95</sup> Deolinda’s tale, accounted for numerous times within *Cuentos y leyendas: Tomo VIII* and widespread in her cultural dissemination, tells of a mother that journeys to San Juan with her newborn child in order to be reunited with her husband, who according to variation has either been taken prisoner or mandated to serve for the military forces of Facundo Quiroga in the 1840s. Desperate in any variation of her cause, she begins her treacherous journey to San Juan on foot and has no access to water, ultimately resulting in her tragic death. Days later when her body is discovered by mule drivers, the

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<sup>95</sup> As described in Frank Graziano’s iconic religious scholarship *Cultures of Devotion: Folk Saints of Spanish America*, la Difunta Correa’s origins are usually described by the following historical account: “Deolinda Correa was born in La Majadita, in San Juan province, in the early years of the nineteenth century. She was married to Baudilio Bustos in her early twenties and the couple had a son. Around 1841, Bustos was conscripted into the troops of Facundo Quiroga, despite his resistance due to illness, perhaps pneumonia. Some say instead that Bustos was imprisoned by enemy forces, and taken away in chains toward La Rioja...Deolinda could not bear the thought that her husband—sick or captive—was suffering without her care. She entered the desert with her infant son in her arms, following behind the troops on foot. The trail was soon lost, however, and Deolinda wandered under the merciless sun. She eventually ran out of water, collapsed in exhaustion, and died of thirst and exposure. Some livestock drivers found her shortly after and buried her body at the site, in Vallecito. Her son survived by nursing at the breast of his dead mother” (Graziano 167).

miraculous element of the encounter unfolds when the infant is found alive, suckling desperately at his mother's breast, and effectively enacting his own survival (Vidal de Battini, "Tomo VIII" 219-222).

By any standard of measurement across its variations, the tale largely stays the same,<sup>96</sup> and her devotees have been inspired for centuries by this "hito post mórtem [que] sugiere una maternidad eterna, un amor más allá de la muerte que la Difunta Correa extiende ahora hacia sus devotos" (Graziano 57). Furthermore, the direct application of such iconography onto Encarna as she attempts to comfort El Brillo in this interpretation makes utter sense. However, mere pages before the devotion that Encarna possesses for la Difunta is even mentioned, we are privy to a peculiar sequence of sentences that generate intrigue, as Sosa Villada retroactively gestures us towards a deeper dive, narrating: "Deolinda Correa, santa popular, milagrosa, mito indio robado por los cristianos y conocido como la Difunta Correa, tiene diez años. Es huérfana de madre. Está sola en su casa en medio del campo, se acuesta a dormir, la vida es inmensa y ajena" (109).

Information on this mysterious mention of a "mito indio robado por los cristianos" as posed by the narrator is spectacularly and frustratingly sparse. Published in the form of an elusive, but explosively informative paragraph in *Revistas San Soleil—Estudios de la Imagen*, Spanish American religious iconography scholar Frank Graziano's 2013 translated scholarship on "La Difunta Correa" attempts to effusively connect it all, stating:

Es precisamente esta crianza sobrenatural del cuerpo y del alma, lo que hace a la Difunta Correa (y a la Virgen María) una añadidura atractiva e incluso necesaria a la religión

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<sup>96</sup> In distinct provincial scholarship on la Difunta's motivation for traveling in the desert, some early reports declare she has fled her home life out of shame due to a sexual transgression, while others state she didn't die from thirst, but rather as a sacrificial plea made to God so her son might live, as well as the aforementioned descriptor that she simply died of heat exhaustion and thirst (Graziano, "La Difunta Correa" 60-61).

patriarcal. El acto más básico del sostenimiento materno, dar el pecho, mantiene la atención mientras que al mismo tiempo es transcendentalizado y convertido en milagroso. Los dioses masculinos, carentes de la capacidad de nutrición maternal, son complementados y hasta cierto punto desplazados parcialmente por estas mujeres casi divinas... Un mito indígena del siglo XVI de la misma región de la Difunta Correa desvía el tema de la maternidad sobrenatural al dotar a un padre con leche materna. La esposa del señor se había muerto durante el parto en el desierto, así que colocó al bebé en su propio pecho desesperadamente. El bebé mamó en vano de su primer pezón, pero el otro dio leche en abundancia (Graziano 59).

Corresponding with an annotation referencing the 1983 archeological work entitled *Los Huarpes protohistóricos*, Graziano briefly (and maddeningly) references the scholarship of Catalina Teresa Michieli, which expands on the inscription of Catholic tradition and Deolinda's miracle. Wildly similar to the account of the miraculous lactating father-figure in aforementioned segment, Michieli does her due diligence to certify its origins in the Indigenous community of the Huarpes people, a cultural group noted to be highly influenced by its proximity to the Incan empire. Occupying northwestern provinces of Argentina such as San Juan and sharing a border with present-day Chile, the geographical import of the Huarpes comes into play specifically when the scholar understands that both Deolinda's tale and that of the Indigenous couple transpire in the same surrounding areas of present-day San Juan.

Recognizing their identical geographical origins, Michieli notes and mobilizes the legend's first Indigenous emergence as documented in the *Crónicas del Reino del Chile*, authored by soldier and *cronista* Pedro Mariño de Lobera in the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Explicitly referencing the year 1572 in relationship to the founding moments of la ciudad de San Juan de la

Frontera in chapter 15 of the second book, his personal excerpt describes his experiences with the Huarpes' account in detail, stating:

No dejaré de referir en este lugar un caso digno de admiración y memoria, y fue que un indio de esta ciudad que tenía un algarrobal cinco leguas ella, salió un día con su mujer a beneficiar su hacendilla. Pero como la mujer fuese mui preñada, vino a parir en el camino quedando la criatura viva y ella muerta, y a su hijo padeciendo por no haber quien le amamantase en aquel campo. Y fue tanta su simplicidad por una parte, y por otro el paternal amor y natural afecto, que puso la criatura a sus pechos probando a darle el derecho a ver si mamaria. Mas como el amor cuando es de veras no deja experiencia que no intente, volvió la criatura al otro lado poniéndole a la boca el pezón izquierdo a ver si aquel por ser lado del corazón supliría la esterilidad del primero... este señor que a ninguno olvida ni desampara, acudió al padre de aquel niño con consuelo, y al hijo con alimento haciendo que de aquel pecho izquierdo manase leche en tanta abundancia, que no solamente satisfizo a la necesidad instante, pero continuó la maravilla hasta que el indio puso a su chicuelo en estado en que había ya menester ama. Y aunque don Pedro de Lovera de cuyos originales me aprovecho en lo que escribo acumula grande almacén de palabras para persuadir al lector la credulidad deste caso diciendo ser muchos y todos verídicos sus testigos y sobre todo el pezón del indio que le quedó hasta la muerte tan grande como de mujer que ha criado; pero para mí bástame por argumento más eficaz y urgente que todos los humanos, el conocer la condición benignísima de nuestro Dios... (265-66).

Categorized under Michieli's work under a section labeled, "H. Leyendas," the enumeration of the *crónica* excerpt and analysis is scarcely two pages, although densely populated with the scholar's certainties about Deolinda's true Indigenous origins. Making direct commentary on the likelihood of the tale having been passed through oral tradition until the arrival of Mariño de Lobera, she comments decisively in her own work that "(s)i bien en la crónica no se hace referencia en ningún momento a que el relato tuviera su origen en la cultura huarpe, el hecho de que los protagonistas del mismo sean indígenas y que la referencia sea de gran antigüedad (segunda mitad del siglo XVI) hace muy improbable que la misma se haya originado en la población hispana" (208).

What is more, not only does she reference the common knowledge that Mariño de Lobera's writings directly manipulated and edited by Jesuit priest Bartolomé de Escobar, who deliberately inserted biblical imagery and interpretation into its transcription (a common occurrence with which I have already engaged), but furthermore, makes it clear that other well-known scholarship on *La Difunta* generally places her in imprecise colonial eras (209).<sup>97</sup> With ample scholarship citing her legend within the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Michieli asserts that we are effectively empowered and compelled to consider "este último como un posible antecedente más antiguo y de innegable raíz indígena de la actual leyenda de la Difunta Correa, habiendo ésta última modernizado su época y cambiado sus protagonistas de indígenas a integrantes de la población criolla local" (209). As Michieli explicates the connections between the two and rather

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<sup>97</sup> As Michieli states in 1983, Chertudi and Newman place *la Difunta Correa* within the 1800s definitively, and with vaguely colonial references, as she notes that "(l)as versiones de la leyenda de la Difunta correa recopiladas por Chertudi y Newbery que ubican los hechos en tiempos más antiguos no van más allá de referencias imprecisas a la época colonial...y las más frecuentes las ubican a principios del siglo XIX vinculados con la época de actuación de los caudillos regionales" (209).

unwaveringly advocates for its pre-Columbian reading, her analysis meritoriously realizes an intellectual and moral duty to its origins, an endeavor previously unfulfilled by academic exploration.

Sosa Villada's utilization of such a ubiquitous iconographic religious figure thus provides us with the impetus to reconsider its imposed Catholic framing and unreviewed roots in Indigenous tradition that are directly posed by the purportedly "unnatural" or "unsavory" experiences propelled through Encarna's *travesti* embodiment. Retaliating against the settler colonial spiritual mindset that re-inscribed virginal Catholic attributes onto the tale, effectively erasing the dissemination of vital Indigenous knowledge regarding its miraculous origins and gender-defiant readings, Sosa Villada subtly recuperates its epistemological power. By placing the mythical *travesti* figure at the center of unadulterated adoration, this etching of sacred reverence onto her non-normative body consequently resituates our reading both through the legend's relational physiological status and historically monstrous renderings of the miraculous event, thereby enacting "through the body monstrous knowledge, feeling, politics, or art..." while concomitantly working "to effect in others a sense of wonder, fright, or revulsion" (Pierce 308). Moving away from the supposedly plausible myth of la Difunta Correa and reorienting our belief in what was previously deemed too far-fetched through the imperialistic lens, la Tía Encarna thus provokes a proverbial becoming of monster that acts "as a mode of political resistance... [engaging] the monstrous body to question the legal power of the state to recognize and regulate flesh..." (310), while also elevating the gender deviant spirit associated with its origins.

This enduring uplifting of Sosa Villada's spiritually and physically monstrous characters continues to be portrayed in the relations of care expressed not only through "la bien querida, la inolvidable Tía Encarna, madre de todos los monstruos..." (47), but also in the ongoing protection of Natalí and María's sacred monstrous status. Best exemplified upon briefly returning to the scene in which Camila discovers María la Muda transformed for the first time, the protagonist is both enraptured and supportive of her newfound state, as she narrates her thoughts regarding the encounter, stating:

Yo pensé que iba a convertirse en santa ahí mismo, que ese era su destino. ¿Cómo podía ser que no nos hubiéramos dado cuenta de que teníamos a una santa frente a nuestros ojos? María, la prostituta sordomuda, enclenque, de lenguaje de quejidos, la bella María que babeaba y nos pedía que la afeitáramos nosotras porque ella siempre se cortaba, era la santa de nuestra iglesia...El problema fue que María no creía lo mismo. Estaba aterrada. En la pizarra mágica que usaba para comunicarse con nosotras, escribió: KIEN ME BA QUERER ASI. Qué podía responderle. El hombre que no quisiera a una mujer que prometía ser pájaro era un hombre estúpido y olvidable. Ella borró en la pizarra y escribió: KOMO BOY ATRABAJAR...SOI UN MOSTRO, escribió casi sin mirar la pizarra. Yo le saqué la pizarra de la mano y me quedé a su lado acariciándole el pelo... (86)

Distressed by her own presentation, and indeed declaring herself to be a monster, María's concern points decisively to the pervasive settler colonial mindsets that still dominate contemporary social landscapes of banishing variant bodies (*travestis*), while gesturing us towards monsters that loom(ed) large in the colonial anxieties of the past (la mujer pájaro). Nevertheless, in expressing unflinching support for her *travesti* monster comrade, of note is the

credulity with which Camila both confirms and unreservedly accepts the reality of María's circumstances, as the validation of their experiences extends to Natalí, Encarna, and many more. The fierce protection of deviant status in *Las malas*, clearly framed as hybridization of human/animal/*travesti* monsterhood, thus emerges as a critical intersection that beckons us to promote ongoing engagement with both the roots of these imperialistic impositions and how their contemporary enforcement takes shape.

Furthermore, while monstrosity up until this juncture has effectively led to myriad discursive strategies that subvert the framing of nonnormative expressions of gender, sexuality, and the “nonhuman” Indigenous figures as viewed through a colonizing lens, María la Muda's identity as a deaf and non-speaking character provides further amplification of another community that has historically been framed as monstrous—those that fall outside of the standards of compulsory able-bodiedness. Hence, I draw this section's assertions to an end by specifically moving to evaluate how the acceptance of María's newfound hybrid status broadens insights into Sosa Villada's core application of monsterring when notions of what is real are placed into a dynamic transnational conversation that incorporates literary analysis of (dis)ability and (dis)abled embodiment.

While María's portrayal as a deaf character appears innumerable times throughout the narrative, the strongest correlations that are made in relationship with her (dis)abled identity manifest most vociferously when they are specifically entwined with both her *travesti* and folkloric corporal embodiment. The implications of her experience and Camila's unadulterated acceptance of her reality (alongside the others) beckon us to consider what might be unearthed at the basis of their commonalities, and what that comes to signify as they are explored through the

tenets of speculative fiction. As such, moving into this chapter's final considerations, I seek to methodologically unite this categorical refusal to be incorporated that transpires in *Las malas* not just across discussions of myth, genre, and gender, but also through the rejection of (dis)ability's precise literary portrayal. Effusively connecting to radical practices of auto-inscription foundational to the works of Women of Color feminisms such as Lorde, Moraga, and Anzaldúa, I contend that *Las malas* unites common contexts of struggle in third world feminisms that bridge the experiences of the oppressed in an interdependent and collective undertaking by linking literary expressions that subvert and decolonize standards of the "real" in their non-mimetic forms. In exploring the core strategies of radical inclusion inherent to transfeminist principles, my final section contends that Sosa Villada's unique disidentifications with the portrayals of (dis)ability and canonical legacies forge transnational (trans)feminist literary alliances through the explorations of speculative fiction's most vital component—its outright inherently pluralized nature and refusal to be defined.

TRANSNATIONAL (TRANS)FEMINISMS AND LITERARY ALLIANCES OF THE OPPRESSED: BUILDING BRIDGES ON SPECULATIVE FICTION'S MONSTROUS BACK

Why should I try to justify why I write? Do I need to justify being Chicana, being woman? You might as well ask me to try to justify why I'm alive.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*

Ableism is connected to all of our struggles because it undergirds notions of whose bodies are considered valuable, desirable, and disposable.

—Mia Mingus

For these very clear reasons outlined in speculative fiction's innumerable traits—such as its commitment to radical inclusion and vigorously centering portrayals of the marginalized—it

is crucial to insist on the genre's increasingly expansive and transnational use, rather than subsist on the legacy of canonical frameworks that have relied on the incessant, violent dehumanization, and frequent disposal, of *travesti*, disabled, and Indigenous lives as mere literary fodder within cisheteropatriarchal tradition. As such, pertinent to this chapter's closing analysis is an emergent critical contemplation that has intensely arisen within discussions of popular 21<sup>st</sup> Century Latin American literature, speculative or otherwise, that ground us in their comprehensive rejections—“¿*existe un nuevo boom femenino de la literatura?*” (Scherer). Explored by Fabiana Scherer in a piece entitled “El nuevo boom latinoamericano: las escritoras marcan el rumbo” within *La Nación*, the journalist meticulously scrutinizes the nature of this particularly gendered inquiry, which posits that feminine-identifying writers of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century are experiencing popular literary recognition that is directly comparable to the 1960s-70s literary boom that visibilized some of Latin America's most world-renown male authors (Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, etc.). Interviewing a wide swath of both authors and directors of international publishing houses, the remarks of Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, Mariana Enríquez, Fernanda Melchor, Guadalupe Nettel, or even Camila Sosa Villada herself seem to unanimously agree—this classification of their literary works and accompanying success as “un boom femenino” (2) is categorically unwelcome.

Speaking to the vast array of rationale for rejecting its use, Cabezón Cámara's interviewed excerpts speak volumes regarding the curious thematic inquiry, given that “las mujeres escribimos siempre” (4). Speaking to past invisibilizations of female writers discussed in the article such as Clarice Lispector, Elena Garro, and many more, *La virgen cabeza*'s author notes that there is a clear surge in popularity of feminine authors, but that this is more so indicative of a disparity of the past, rather than a resituating of their writing within masculinist

canonical presents and futures (4). Speaking to the capitalistic marketing strategies that were also integral to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century boom, she states that:

Respecto de si es un boom, sería cauta: el boom fue un fenómeno de mercado, creado por una agente de mente brillante que supo encontrar y juntar a algunos de los muchos escritores sobresalientes de su época. Y dejar a otros, tan o más sobresalientes, como Reinaldo Arenas y Elena Garro, por nombrar apenas dos, afuera. Ahora no hay una agencia o una editorial que esté armando de un modo u otro el fenómeno (4).

Echoed across numerous other interviews, authors, and publishing house directors alike, including Penguin Random House's Glenda Vietites, discuss how this shifting paradigm is not necessarily phenomenal at all, but rather a reflection of injustices that demand to be discussed, and therefore are naturally doing so through both the fictional and hybrid genres mechanized by contemporary female authors (6). Given their innate understanding of the quotidian realities of these injustices, to Vietites, it's inevitable that these themes surge and are met with popular reception, stating that "...en un territorio donde hay pobreza, narcotráfico, femicidios, contaminación por el agronegocio y todavía se discute el aborto como si no fuera cuestión de salud pública, a la literatura como arte no le queda otra alternativa que reflejarlo" (6).

Wildly recuperative in nature, each author's reflections respective to this boom comparison repeatedly point to an objective truth highlighted by journalist and writer Gabriela Saido, who simply posits the fact that "Siempre estuvimos, ahora nos ven...Creo que no hay día en el que no salga a la luz una autora del pasado que no conocíamos" (7). Or as María Fernando Ampuero so aptly interrogates within the piece, "Lo que se debería hacer más bien es autpreguntarse por qué durante años y años no generamos ningún interés, por qué ningún periodista cultural—¿tal vez porque todos eran hombres? —pensó jamás en hacer una reseña

sobre, qué se yo, la obra de María Luisa Bombal, Armonía Somers, Amparo Dávila, Elena Garro o Ileana Espinel” (7). Holistically recognizing this as a revisionary moment in literature’s approaches to gender, Saido also radically incorporates the inclusion of lesbian, queer, and transfeminine joy in the necessary reception of their collective successes while acknowledging the future progress yet to be made. Resonant of these thoughts and moving away from past canonical comparisons, Vietites nearly singularly pinpoints the genre strategies required to achieve such endeavors, stating, “La literatura hoy no es nada tradicional ni convencional, por suerte. Está en plena transformación, de la mano de la diversidad y de los multiformatos que nos obligan a ser cada vez más creativos” (6).

In the conclusive paragraph of Scherer’s piece, the final commentaries made by the interviewees highlight the limiting aspect of lumping together a wide range of feminine-identifying authors that write within myriad literary genres and experience wildly distinct literary career trajectories. Ariana Harwicz, for example, notes that “Hablar de boom latinoamericano femenino tiene el peso de ser una etiqueta, encerrada en una entidad que termina limitándola. Y con eso hay que tener cuidado” (10). Gesturing us back to this chapter’s initial ruminations on speculative fiction’s expansive approach and genre-bending characteristics, the rhetorical strategies within *Las malas* point not only to its requisite use within the narrative’s analysis, but also definitively demonstrate the power of auto-inscription that is mobilized by the genre’s manifold capacity to build transnational, (trans)feminist literary alliances.

Segueing into this pluralization of gender, genre, and (dis)ability is a brief foregrounding connection into Alison Kafer’s crucial rhetorical inquiries in the foundational Disabilities Studies text *Feminist, Queer Crip*. Here Kafer challenges a strict distinction between the social and medical models of (dis)ability initially introduced by (dis)ability activists in the 1970s—which is

first elaborated upon by theorist Susan Wendell’s “The Social Construction of (dis)ability,” from *The Rejected Body* (1996). Building on the legacies enacted by Wendell, Robert McRuer, and Tobin Siebers, Kafer grapples with and defies the notion that the distinction between impairment and (dis)ability rests on the understanding that exclusively the latter is socially produced.<sup>98</sup> Within *Feminist, Queer Crip*, Kafer demonstrates how the binary divisions between impairment and (dis)ability both limit the disabled community’s push in promoting access needs, while also unintentionally producing additional barriers, exclusion, and isolation for those who do not neatly fall within its taxonomical frameworks. Ultimately proposing a political relational model for understanding how (dis)ability is produced, Kafer’s work pushes towards the pluralization of bodily instability by challenging the manners in which (dis)ability has been historically understood (11).<sup>99</sup>

All in all, Kafer’s assertion that “the very fact that so much energy is funneled into defining (dis)ability and impairment suggests the fundamental instability of the terms...” (11),

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<sup>98</sup>Kafer in the introductory chapter delineates the at times unhelpful binary distinctions between the social and medical model of (dis)ability when directly opposed, stating, “The social model often relies on a distinction between impairment and (dis)ability that I don’t find useful. In that framework, impairment refers to any physical or mental limitation, while (dis)ability signals the social exclusions based on, and social meanings attributed to, that impairment. People with impairments are disabled by their environments; or, to put it differently impairments aren’t disabling, social and architectural barriers are. Although I agree that we need to attend to the social, asserting a sharp divide between impairment and (dis)ability fails to recognize that both impairment and (dis)ability are social; simply trying to determine what constitutes impairment makes clear that impairment doesn’t exist apart from social meanings and understandings” (7).

<sup>99</sup> Forever expanding the landscape of (dis)ability politics and studies, Kafer’s rhetorical inquiries catalyzed a series of expansive works that shifted the field away from the presumptive visible manifestations of (dis)ability to a more comprehensive incorporation of its undefinable, (in)visible, and misunderstood elements, generating productive modes for deconstructing its often pathologizing status altogether. This is definitively asserted as they ask if the following can be included in definitions of (dis)ability: “Can it encompass all kinds of impairments—cognitive, psychiatric, sensory, and physical? Do people with chronic illnesses fit under the rubric of (dis)ability? Is someone who had cancer years ago but is now in remission disabled?... What about people with large birthmarks or other visible differences that have no bearing on their physical capabilities, but that often prompt discriminatory treatment?” (11).

firmly signals us towards (dis)ability's inherent resistance to the definable, while simultaneously forging political alliances across a queer, crip, and trans\*/travesti analytic.<sup>100</sup> I argue that Kafer's reflections on the difficult nature of defining (dis)ability irrevocably point towards speculative fiction's promise in identifying a travesti/trans\* & (dis)abled politic that materializes in Sosa Villa's *Las malas*. In absconding precise categorization and defying classification altogether, *Las malas* holds key revelations in that it mobilizes a shift in power by unifying decolonized systems, frameworks, and structures at the cross-sections of *travesti*, (dis)abled *bodyminds*, race, and speculative fiction's indefinable nature. The distinctive coalition that is formed through *Las malas* is thus better deciphered through the lenses of how defamiliarization, as defined by scholar Sami Schalk, plays a nuclear role in the portrayal of disabled and monstrous humans, thereby establishing speculative fiction as both the genre of the oppressed and concomitantly as a decolonized literary space of alliance among third world feminisms.

*Defamiliarization*,<sup>101</sup> as reframed by Sami Schalk for its application within speculative fiction, is defined as a tool used "to refer to the way speculative fiction texts make the familiar social concepts of (dis)ability, race, gender, and sexuality unfamiliar in order to encourage readers to question the meanings and boundaries of these categories" (Schalk 114). Pushing these

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<sup>100</sup> In these fundamental assertions that come from "attending to the promises and dangers of the category's flexibility..." Kafer also insists that it can indeed facilitate more critical reflection while posing some issues in its ever-expansive nature (13). This chapter also recognizes their call for care in methodologically exercising such a framework, noting that "to claim crip is to recognize the ethical, epistemic, and political responsibilities behind such claims... [and that] deconstructing the binary between disabled and able-bodied/able-minded requires more attention to how different bodies/minds are treated differently, not less" (13).

<sup>101</sup> As explicated by Schalk in *Bodyminds Reimagined*, "Defamiliarization is a term used by many scholars of science fiction and speculative fiction. It is a translation of the Russian formalist word *ostranenie*... Defamiliarization is related to Darko Suvin's more genre-specific term cognitive estrangement, which refers to the way science fiction estranges or distances readers from their knowledge and assumptions about what constitutes reality in order to move them to question those various assumptions" (Schalk 114).

notions further, Schalk vitally engages with the nonhuman nature of many of the literary characters she explores in her analysis through her dialogue with the concept of *interspecies*<sup>102</sup> as posed through scholarship by Jasbir K. Puar and Julie Livingston, although she admittedly doubts that it was their intention to use it for “werewolves, demons, and half-mortals” (115). Using their scholarship to foreground the inherent instability of categorizations such as humans, animals, and plant life, Schalk underscores the dynamics of power at hand in their taxonomical administration. Acknowledging their deep dependence on geopolitical and socio-temporal contexts, she maintains the scholars’ premise that the prioritization of certain humans—and the question of what is and counts as human—reveals itself as contestable in perpetuity (115). Through her specific repurposing of the applications of *defamiliarization* in speculative fiction, Schalk moves in part to flip the script on these ponderings by deliberately decrypting the amalgamated portrayal of animality, race, sexuality, and (dis)ability as a means to challenge “not only what is recognizable as human, but also what is recognizable as belonging within the human based categories of (dis)ability, race, gender, and sexuality...” (115) by passionately centering the analysis of (dis)ability within their intersections.

Informed and mobilized by Schalk’s analysis of nonhuman characters in Black Women’s speculative fiction under the intersectional lens of (dis)ability, sexuality, gender, and race, clear and fascinating symmetries reveal themselves among the characters of *Las malas*. I contend that

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<sup>102</sup> In an issue of Duke University Press’ *Social Text* entitled “Interspecies,” special issue editors Jasbir K. Puar and Julie Livingston describe these objectives as determined by “... the radical implications of questioning the exceptional status of humans among the planet’s species.” Thus in “(r)esponding to growing interest in animal studies and posthumanism...” those who contributed to the volume’s interrogations looked specifically to “...racial, feminist, queer, postcolonial, and disability theories to probe the diversity of human relationships with other forms of biosocial life. ‘Interspecies’ [thus] queries the politics of traditional species taxonomy and examines the ways humans use the material characteristics of other species to pursue their economic, political, and social aims” (Puar and Livingston).

María's portrayal as a deaf and non-speaking<sup>103</sup> character makes abundantly clear these applications of speculative fiction's power as employed by Sosa Villada. As María is increasingly excluded from social spaces, for example, the reader is often left to interrogate why, as Camila narrates that:

María la Muda estaba prohibida en todas partes. No la dejaban entrar ni en bares ni en restaurantes ni en iglesias ni en los inmundos despachos de los ministerios. Si iba a un supermercado le pedían que se retirara, si iba a la verdulería la echaban con sus burlas. La pobre María, la más golpeada de todas nosotras, la más querida por El Brillo de los Ojos, era incapaz de quejarse por su exilio, pero también era incapaz de someterse a la asimilación en ese mundo gris que había que sobrellevar antes de alcanzar la tierra prometida... (157).

María's increasing isolation, purportedly due to her animalized difference, is compounded by the rejection she receives in relationship to other intersections of her marginalized status. Crucial in this analysis, however, is the decoding of how her nonhuman experience is set into dialogue with her (dis)abled and gendered embodiment, particularly as she refuses to assimilate to "a world of grey" (158) that seeks to constantly absorb or excise her. In agreement with Schalk's assertions of the function of the nonhuman in a speculative fiction context, I contend that Sosa Villada uses María's mythological animalized status to represent the realities of (dis)abled existence, while challenging the boundaries of the real, in order to "push readers to understand (dis)ability from

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<sup>103</sup>Perpetuating falsehoods of the deaf community and paradigms of power that determine what is indeed understood to be acceptable forms of auditory communication, U.S. (dis)ability studies and activism advocates for the use of non-speaking in lieu of the antiquated "mute," which indicates that the deaf individual does not communicate in any way or privileges one form over another (orally or otherwise). While María la Muda directly translates to "María the Mute," and she is also referred to as sordomuda numerous times, her vocal cords are clearly not damaged as she produces sound in various forms—both human and animal—throughout the novel and is also capable of communicating through the written word.

the perspective of the main character, not from our preconceived notions and stereotypes” (Schalk 119). Indeed, portrayals such as María’s help us engage with how “representations of realist disabilities in nonrealist and nonhuman contexts play with reader expectations and twist them” (119). What is more, while accentuating how this interrogation into what being (dis)abled comes to denote, as Schalk writes, is “a key part of the important political potential of these texts,” the most significant part of the process is the resultant outcome of the confrontation that transpires between the reader’s expectations and their upending (119). Ultimately reliant on their willingness to engage with the *reimaginative* labor architected in *Bodyminds* (119), these meanings and processes are engaged exclusively through the tenets of speculative fiction.

Indubitably, I believe this is a commitment that Sosa Villada is asking the reader to make, which becomes unmistakable when María’s experiences are put into contrast with those of a pair of wealthy cisgender men who regularly cross-dress and befriend the *travesti* characters of the novel, postulating widening fissures that expose the generative dynamics of their compared experiences. Ominously dubbed *las Cuervas* (a fitting avian descriptor for their thinly veiled appropriation), Camila notes the privilege of their gendered journeyings specifically through the dynamics of disclosure that they refuse to partake in “...por mera comodidad. Su comodidad dejaba en evidencia nuestra incomodidad: nosotras no habíamos tenido nunca la oportunidad de escondernos en el armario. Nosotras habíamos nacido ya expulsadas del armario, esclavas de nuestra apariencia” (106). As *las Cuervas* attempt to appropriate the core pleasurable facets of their material world, Camila also narrates their mimetic behavior and candidly points to their fabricated personae, stating that “eran incapaces de superar los obstáculos de clase. Hablaban nuestra lengua, porque por supuesto hablaban varios idiomas, imitaban nuestro andar y cogían

con nuestros clientes, pero no les cobraban: lo hacían porque podían darse el gusto, porque no necesitaban ser mercancía. Simplemente jugaban a vivir una vida que no les era propia” (107).

The reverting of these characters to the comfort afforded them by cisheteropatriarchal paradigms of power whenever possible—or desired—informs invaluable details of *defamiliarization* criteria when the inverse transpires and pushes the reader to examine what indeed is taken as truth. Attempting to approximate the privileged experiences of las Cuervas by simply buying a dress or two in a high-fashion boutique downtown, María is faced with a brutalizing experience as the female employees—scandalized, hostile, and cruel—wholly reject her presence:

Flaca, negra, con los brazos cubiertos de esos canutillos de plumas y su lenguaje de mugidos... era una escena de pesadilla para esas empleaduchas tilingas de tres por cuatro. La pobre María sólo estaba tratando de entrar en otro mundo tal como Las Cuervas entraban en el nuestro cada vez que querían. Pero esa operación al revés era inaceptable... llamaron al guardia de seguridad y echaron a los empujones a María, que nunca más, hasta que fue pájaro, intentó cagar más alto que el culo (107).

Compounded with other moments that decisively intertwine the numerous facets of her marginalized identity, Schalk’s use of defamiliarization rings true as we contemplate María’s nonhuman status and what it is exactly that places her into the status of nonhuman to begin with. As Schalk reminds us, Sosa Villada is indeed “forcing readers to reconsider what they know or they think they know about what it means to be disabled...” but is doing so very specifically through “the defamiliarization of realist disabilities and these fantasy texts [that] challenge reader’s assumptions about the meaning, manifestations, and effects of a particular (dis)ability on physical, mental, social, and environmental levels” (Schalk 119).

Effectively combining the myriad, intersectional experiences of her marginalized characters, Sosa Villada effectuates a desire in her readers to question what historically monstrous identity is directly indicative of María's ostracism in this moment as the reader is asked to do the "imaginative labor" (Schalk 114). Is it her arms, covered in abundant feathers? Her "incomprehensible" muffled, bellowing dialect due to her status as deaf, non-speaking individual? Or perhaps just her *travesti* identity in and of itself? Contrasted with the alleged acceptance of *las Cuervas* in a similar environment, María's (dis)abled and *travesti* identity, embedded in the nonrealist status of *la mujer pájaro* interrogates how we can "read and understand (dis)ability, race, gender, and sexuality differently through *defamiliarization...*" by specifically interjecting queries into perceptions of authenticity, ultimately allowing "for new understandings and experiences of these categories to emerge" (Schalk 114-115).

Put another way, in an ever-globalizing landscape increasingly obsessed with being able to prove the verifiably real (i.e., what is real gender?...whose (dis)ability counts as visible and real?...whose histories, fables, knowledge are not called into question?), Sosa Villada equalizes the manners through which we engage with categorizations that have always had their realities questioned or put into social landscapes of isolation—*travesti*, (dis)ability, and Indigenous systems of knowledge and history—and sets them into dialogue through a vigorous acceptance of their monstrous pasts, presents, and futures. Unconcerned with trivial deliberations on whether her characters seem fantastic, magical, or otherwise, her namesake character instead presses forth another assertion entirely—what powerful decolonizing strategies are implicated in radically accepting their peculiar realities simply as they are? Dependent on deciphering methodologies that have been decisively claimed by the genre, they further capacitate our discerning of how Sosa Villada continues to deploy them.

Increasing the manifold interpretations of these assertions within *Las malas*, one begins to understand how the defamiliarization that initially transpires within María la Muda's portrayal concretizes effective pathways for a specifically *travesti*, (dis)abled analytic and politic that emerges from the narrative. Often transpiring at a central conflict posed within (dis)ability studies, justice, and politics, descriptive impairments of Natalí and the headless soldiers that come to adore the *travesti* community are clear referents not only for (dis)ability's deliberate resistance to precise definitions as discussed by Kafer, but also serve as express examples of the often (in)visibilized elements of (dis)ability that are frequently presumed to be false, go unacknowledged when not immediately discernible to the naked eye, or are pinned against examples of (dis)abled embodiment that are ostensibly more demonstrable.

In narrating Natalí's death, for example, Camila's description of her aging process is exponential and devastating, stating: "Pero no había paz para Natalí, ancestral de todas las travestis en la mutación de personalidad y responsabilidad de contagiar de animalismos a María la Muda. Pobre Natalí, murió joven, devastada por su particularidad, luego de envejecer aceleradamente, tal como envejecen las perras, las lobas y las travestis: un año nuestro equivale a siete años humanos" (104). Posed as a portrayal that simulates the invisible elements of chronic illness, Natalí's rapid aging process due to her *lobisona* status can be understood in direct resistance to delineating a manifestation of (dis)ability that must be immediately obvious to the reader. Moving to again equalize these various figures that appear to fall out of taxonomical status even within the landscape of (dis)ability, Sosa Villada gravitates towards portrayals that actively interrogate the social and material causes of their impairments, as the quality of their lives is drastically diminished by the disabling elements of their lived social environments. Assertively, Sosa Villada moves away from common portrayals of disabled characters as

“dependent, morally depraved, superhumanly heroic, asexual, and/or pitiful” (Wendell 61). Rather than leaning on notions of their lives as an inconceivable burden or an existence to be loathed or feared, she instead activates speculative fiction’s capacity to vociferously declare a passionate interdependent need for each other and a kinship of care. Expressed in the most minute details, even María la Muda’s directive to keep Natalí company during her voluntary confinement speaks volumes, as “las dos bestias se hacían compañía mutua, en un lenguaje incomprensible, suntuoso, amargo, lleno de expresividad, a escondidas del mundo” (158).

Furthering this dynamic of fierce networks of care, Sosa Villada offers another peculiar entity to dialogue with *travesti* household dynamics of (dis)ability and monstrosity—a group of nameless, headless soldiers (referred to only as *Los Hombres Sin Cabeza*) that suddenly arrive in their city after being liberated from war in Africa “con la arena del desierto todavía pegada a sus zapatos y se decía que habían perdido la cabeza en combate” (37). Unaware of the origin of the bloody conflicts that ordained their exodus to Argentina, the *travesti* characters are collectively unbothered by their enigmatic histories. Possibly a reference to the emergence of various mythological headless figures in distinct European travel narratives of “discovery” in both Africa (the Blemmyes) and South American Guiana (the Ewaipanoma),<sup>104</sup> Camila suggests at one

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<sup>104</sup> As discussed by Scott Oldenburg in “Headless in America,” the descriptions of these headless figures vary across regions and descriptions of exploration narratives. Further study of their commonalities unites accounts such as Mandeville’s 14<sup>th</sup> century journeys into wide landscapes of Asian territories in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (although largely understood to be an invented author) and Sir Walter Raleigh’s accounts of Ewaipanoma in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century work *The Discovery of Guiana*, with productive connections with references as far back as Herodotus’ description of African Blemmyes in the Greek 430 B.C. work *Histories*, as well as Pliny’s descriptions of the same in the 77 A.D. encyclopedic work *Natural History*. Across of these works, they are described as headless figures that have their eyes set in their shoulders and mouths in their breasts; various studies have looked to discern the origins of such visual deductions regarding their appearance, whether explaining it through way of specific cranial deformations, unique attire associated with war, profound physical flexibility of the shoulders, or simply rumors initiated by locals in translation efforts that looked to frighten the invaders (Oldenburg 43). Oldenburg makes discernible through lines in their accounts, as he states “Whether one looks to Herodotus, Pliny, Mandeville, or Raleigh, the monstrous figures appear in largely unknown areas outside of Europe, always on the horizon of ‘discovery’...” specifically noting in addition that, “Raleigh’s

juncture that the two groups perhaps feel particularly drawn to each other due to their shared disabling experiences of volatile trauma—one inflicted by war, another exacted by violence on the streets. Becoming their most vigorous lovers and trusted confidants, Sosa Villada’s introduction of the headless soldiers demonstrates an ongoing propensity to upend our perceptions of (dis)abled embodiment entirely, as they “hicieron cursos acelerados de castellano para poder hablar nuestra lengua, y fue así como supimos que habían perdido la cabeza y ahora pensaban con todo el cuerpo y sólo recordaban las cosas que habían sentido con la piel” (37). Rarely making direct reference to their entirely visible impairment (i.e., living without a literal head), this passage and others featuring *Los Hombres Sin Cabeza* instead seek to convey what I discern to be clear portrayals of *Deaf Gain*<sup>105</sup> as well as conceptual *access intimacy*.<sup>106</sup> Moving to develop their exceeding capacity as talented listeners, engrossing musicians, and exceptional lovers and partners, Sosa Villada’s instrumentalization of the speculative fiction’s limitless landscape permits the reader to engage with these disabled and monstrous embodiments and creatively reimagine what was only previously framed as limitation.

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description of the Ewaipanoma discourages readers from understanding the New World encounter on its own terms, that is, as simply new, and instead compels readers to think of the Ewaipanoma (and by extension all encounters in the narrative) in terms of European traditions of monstrosity” (45).

<sup>105</sup>As discussed in the anthology *Deaf Gain: Raising the Stakes of Human Diversity*, “Deaf Gain” is an emergent framework to see the specific benefits that accompany deaf existence, as the introduction states: “Whereas popular constructions of deafness are defined exclusively by the negative effects—problems with literacy development and social and cognitive development—a Deaf Gain perspective brings forth a number of social, psychological, and cognitive benefits. In calling attention to Deaf Gain benefits, we are not claiming that it is necessarily better to be deaf than to be hearing, but we are saying that it is not necessarily better to be hearing than deaf. Often-cited benefits experienced by deaf individuals are those in the realm of visual processing and visual attentiveness” (Bauman and Murray xxiv).

<sup>106</sup>As defined by (dis)ability justice activist and scholar Mia Mingus, *access intimacy* can be understood descriptively as “that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level. Sometimes it can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over years. It could also be the way your body relaxes and opens up with someone when all your access needs are being met” (Mingus).

Therefore, in the dissident portrayal of (dis)ability, gender, and Indigenous systems of knowledge—in generative intersections with the world bending strategies of speculative fiction—I close this section with the assertion that Sosa Villada thus establishes a transnational alliance through the framework of third world feminisms that bonds her work not only to Schalk’s analysis and her explicit subject of study (Black women’s speculative fiction in the U.S.), but also alongside discourses of Women of Color and third world feminisms such as that of Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and many more.<sup>107</sup> As the literary worlds and practices of auto-inscription inherent in such works unite common contexts of struggle in third world feminisms, I contend that they do so by bridging the experiences of the oppressed while also subverting standards of the real in their non-mimetic forms. Incontrovertibly, in employing speculative fiction, *Las malas* establishes an intimate dialogue with a lineage of third world feminist authors and thinkers that is transnational in nature in that their explorations, while also remaining regionally singular,<sup>108</sup> expressing similar concerns through the employment of the

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<sup>107</sup> Foundational expressions of Women of Color and third world feminisms and their dissent in the United States, for example, emerged in critical publications such as *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by queer and Chicana writers, scholars, and activists Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Successfully compiling works from the likes of Audre Lorde, Jo Carillo, Barbara Smith, the Combahee River Collective, Mitsuye Yamada and many more, the anthology’s assemblage of sundry voices spoke to the deep well of critical thought that resisted white feminisms’ attempts to universally homogenize women’s experiences and speak on their behalf. Published in 1981, *This Bridge Called My Back*’s coalitional strategies across Chicana and Latinx, Black, Asian American, and Indigenous feminist thinkers forever shifted discourse on the formation of feminist theoretical practice, as the authors sourced their epistemological inquiries in the cultures and accompanying struggles associated with their very own embodiment. Fundamental to its coalition-building essence was the radical notion that these emergent feminisms—both within the U.S. and what was operatively referred to at the time as third world nations—developed apart from and outside of the colonial mindset inherently present in white second-wave feminisms and struggles. Its essence can thus be understood conceptually as originating outside of—and liberated from—the ideologies of the first world and its corresponding white feminisms altogether.

<sup>108</sup> Indeed, often deliberately referred to by its authors, editors, and readers as a key emergent moment of third world feminist radical thought, the entire fifth segment from Anzaldúa herself is entitled “Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Women Writer.” Nevertheless, grappling with the employment of third world itself is often passionately contested as contemporary language and geopolitical revisions suggest

unstable and undefinable nature of the speculative fiction genre. As contended previously, given that the literary genealogies of feminine authors such as Sosa Villada escape the limitations of cisheteropatriarchal editorial strategies and traditions that marginalized the written works of anyone outside of the privileged status of straight, cis-male embodiment, it is not conceivable to frame their work as “un nuevo boom femenino.” Undeniably, in moving away from categorization of el boom and canonical framing altogether, and in establishing a clear third world feminist genealogy in transnational conversation, the value of speculative fiction clearly materializes in conjunction with portrayals of (dis)ability expansiveness, generating thought and written works that exist apart from the white colonizer’s imposing gaze. In incorporation of *travesti*, Indigenous, and (dis)ability narratives that defy historical, cultural, literary, and material definition and tradition, *Las malas* employs the strategies inherent to speculative fiction’s decolonizing nature, thereby existing independently of this imperialist perspective.

Deciphering the rhetorical (trans)feminist strategies of auto-inscription in *Las malas* thus opens a door towards an analytical view of how a third world feminisms framework plays a vital role in understanding late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century literary and artistic works within the Global South in connection to (trans)national feminist cultural production. Simultaneously crucial to deciphering these vantages, however, is comprehending that although the concepts of third world feminisms and (trans)national feminism are often used synonymously and interchangeably, the subtle, yet dynamic distinctions between the two comprise vital details in the evaluation of gender-based oppression that cannot be neatly merged into purely global—local dynamics.

Relevantly, feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty’s explication of third world feminisms was specifically expanded upon in the mid-1980s in her noteworthy rebuttal to universalizing

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*developing nations* or *newly industrialized countries* in lieu of third world due to its hierarchal and prejudiced global connotations.

gender-related oppression in “Under Western Eyes” within the anthology *Third World Feminism and the Politics of Feminism*. Framed within the goal of building “noncolonizing feminist solidarity across borders” (Mohanty 503) that incorporated a deeper critique of global capitalism, its core tenets explored its impacts on local and regional economies, which deeply contributed to the unique oppressions experienced by third world women on a local level (503). Incorporating transnational considerations and the growing influence of global capitalism’s far-reaching unguets, Mohanty’s work also set the tone for “critiquing Western feminist scholarship on Third World women via the discursive colonization of Third World women’s lives and struggles... [and to] expose the power-knowledge nexus of feminist cross-cultural scholarship expressed through Eurocentric, falsely universalizing methodologies that serve the narrow self-interest of Western feminism” (Mohanty 501). According to Mohanty, white feminisms in this sense applied a colonialist approach to the analysis of the lives of third world women, indiscriminately generalizing their circumstances as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition- bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc....” (56). Revisiting their most renowned piece approximately a decade later, and slowly moving away from the employment of marginalized categories such as third world, even Mohanty (as well as others), began to incrementally use transnational feminisms in lieu of the historically useful, but problematized term.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Afterall, these designations of first, second, and third world as they were formally politically imbued were explicitly established to distinguish capitalist (1st) and communist (2nd) states, with the third world referencing former colonies in diverse stages of economic development, a notion that lost its analytical and geographical precision post-Cold War and incremental collapse of the USSR. As Mohanty reflects on past and present language in their original publication through the piece ““Under Western Eyes” Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles,” she states, “As the above terminological discussion serves to illustrate, we are still working with a very imprecise and inadequate analytical language. All we can have access to at given moments is the analytical language that most clearly approximates the features of the world as we understand it. This distinction between One-Third/Two-Thirds World and, at times, First World/North and Third World/South is the language I choose to use now. Because in fact our language is imprecise, I hesitate to have any language become static. My own language in 1986 needs to be open to refinement and inquiry—but not to institutionalization” (506).

Setting herself apart from those prevalent tendencies that err towards the employment of transnational feminisms, however, scholar Ranjoo S. Herr speaks to the ongoing necessity for recognizing the use of both frameworks by addressing the clear commonalities that result in their frequent conflation, namely that both critically arose “in opposition to mainstream second-wave feminism, which subscribed to the idea that all women everywhere face exactly the same oppression merely by virtue of their sex/gender” (Herr 2). Deeply critical of white second-wave feminism’s singular exploration of oppression on the axis of gender, both conduits of critical feminist thought, as the scholar points out, were calls to action that acknowledge how these traditions “elided Third World women’s multiple and complex oppressions in their various national contexts, whether in the Third World or the West, which are compounded not only by race and class but also by imperialism and colonialism” (2).

Following Herr, I argue that we should pay special attention to specific movements within Latin America that are recuperating the status of third world feminism’s importance within transnational feminist frameworks, most specifically *la literatura sudaca*. While predominantly white global feminist movements namesake implies feigned international alliances against gender-based oppression that moved beyond imagined borders of nation-states, both third world feminisms and (trans)national feminism exist in contrast to false premise. However, the deployment of third world feminisms acknowledges the regional and intersectional specificity of oppression that cannot be elided in our comprehension of transnational feminism’s deployment.

Specific to the Latin American context, for example, is a growing movement toward the reclamation and recuperation of the term *sudaca* in the context of artistic production. Having originated within the Spanish cultural renaissance of 1980s Madrid, which welcomed a

migratory surge from the Americas post-Franco dictatorial regime, *sudaca* was originally a neutral and inoffensive term used to predominantly refer to Southern Cone migrants fleeing their own dictatorships (Caparrós), but soon took on negative connotations to pejoratively refer to the often poor and racialized migrants arriving from Latin America. Shifting to imply an unwanted presence connected to elevated crime, unhygienic conditions, poverty, and racialized connotations, *sudaca* persisted, establishing itself as a popular derogatory term within the Spanish lexicon. Moving to utilize the pejorative to cement their own identity marker and situate the works of Latin American cultural production outside of the colonizer's perspective and power, projects such as Eloísa Cartonera have emblazoned its use onto the production of their own literary editorial works under the Latin American banner of *literatura sudaca border*. Assigning it to the publication of unedited *cartoneras*, for example, for Eloísa Cartonera, this *literatura sudaca* is understood and deployed to "...clama proveer un espacio originado para la reapropiación de estéticas populares y a diferencia de las otras editoriales toma una bandera de identidad latinoamericana que pareciera no justificarse debido a la historia de migración europea que tiene Argentina" (García Mendoza 10).

In the same vein, it likely comes as no surprise that *literatura sudaca*'s reclamation of a third world feminist view beckons us back to the radical *travesti* expressions and monstrous reclamations of Susy Shock. Often analyzed within the domain of her poetry and performative presence, her monstrous modes of expression are often self-referenced as the political and artistic work of *una trava sudaca*, in which she contributes to the sense that:

Los géneros sudacas que su monstruosidad escénica hace estallar—al mismo tiempo recuperados como forma de enclave geopolítico particular—dan cuenta de que su alteridad radical monstruosa y no clasificable se insinúa en los nudos complejos entre la

tradición folklórica del norte de Argentina, y de Latinoamérica, y el discurrir del colectivo trava-trans en la realidad de los contextos locales, entre otros ejes que escapan a la homogeneidad de una identidad discreta y coherente (Martínez and Mora 13).

Definitively positioning her work as both geopolitically situated and radically unclassifiable, Shock's work serves as an additional foray into the recognition of third world feminism's importance through the scope of both *sudaca* and *travesti/trans* analysis. Evident in its connective applications, Shock's self-defined *trava sudaca* status as an artist expansively connects to our comprehension of the decolonizing connective strategies presented in Sosa Villada's *Las malas*.

In closing, in discerning *Las malas* as a speculative fiction work that can in tandem be deciphered as a narrative of *literatura trava sudaca*, this political resistance and reclamation of *travas*, *travestis*, monsters, and *sudacas* actively resituates the analyses of her work as defiantly outside of the existence of the colonizing perspective entirely. Comprehensively, as this section has extensively discussed, the dynamic reclamation of this third world feminist perspective in *Las malas* as *literatura trava sudaca* also manifests in its expansive, transnational applications as it dialogues with common strategies used in distinct geopolitical and sociocultural contexts through the employment of speculative fiction's genre-bending and worlding umbrella. As such, the powerful strategies within her literary work allow her to establish a powerful transfeminist and transnational alliance by distinctively centering the marginalized outside of the settler-colonizer view. Through both its regional decipherings (*sudaca*, *travesti*, *trava*) and speculative fiction's globally expansive applications, Sosa Villada's *Las malas* is thus embedded into a lineage of third world (trans)feminist authors that radically and expansively dialogue with the

possibilities that transpire at the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and (dis)ability—literary or otherwise.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as a rhetorical strategy that dares to dream wildly and imagine otherwise, Sosa Villada's characters and environments within the speculative fiction genre provide a vision of what is possible through the unique nurturing, childrearing, and *travesti* care that transpires in the narrative subversion of their spiritual and material oppression. In her implicit refusal to be classified within literary traditions that have forcefully negated *travesti* and (dis)abled inclusion through violent portrayals of their death or alienation from the publication world, we ultimately find that their vision cannot be bridled by the literary institutions and legacies that have repeatedly failed them. Thus, in following the imaginative resignification of *travesti* identity, Indigenous knowledge, (dis)ability, and modes of kinship through speculative fiction's use and consequent rejection of cisheteropatriarchal literary tradition and ableist ideologies of cure and repair as methodologies for survival in Sosa Villada's novel, *Las malas* demonstrates the power of auto-inscription in offering alternative livable genres through decolonial pathways and reclamations of the monster as ways of being, knowing, and thriving.

## Conclusion

Si yo quisiera podría transformar mi historia en olvido, mi cuerpo en cita, mi felicidad en el grado de concordancia que me devuelve el espejo. Podría dejar de ser trans y convertirme en un hombre, tan sólo un hombre, parte del mismo mundo donde hombres y mujeres reinan. Por supuesto que podría, si yo quisiera. Pero no quiero.

—Mauro Cabral, “Si yo quisiera”

Throughout this study’s examinations, I have demonstrated that the ability to restore the deciphering of *travesti* and its attendant epistemologies as both a Southern Cone gender identity marker and radical political entity are further expounded upon when we go beyond our reliance on the exclusive, albeit crucial, use of historical and socio-political archives that speak to their activist roots and material realities. In my attempt to answer how we can commit to honoring *travesti*’s regional specificities and not further contribute to its erasure from the positionality of Globally Northern scholarship and its resultant queer and trans\* lens, I have situated the literary as an instrument for capturing an aesthetic expression of their subjectivity and a corresponding transformative framework that facilitates analysis of transnational gender expansiveness and dissidence—past, present, and ongoing. Further elucidating upon our ethical engagement with their artistry, lived experiences, and political cause, each author’s endeavors methodologically embed these expressions into their narrative strategies through imaginative genre stylings, both contributing to the ongoing assembly of said frameworks and resultant shifts in our cultural paradigmatic lens.

But in exploring what the tactics of each of these three authors unveils when set into dialogue with their lived experiences, I do not allege to conclusively answer what *travesti* means through the literary nor advocate for any succinct definition that elides its complexities, however accurate they may seem. On the contrary, I have argued that each of these literary case studies reveals just the opposite through the variable uses of genre stratagem sewn in their semi-

autobiographic tales and fictional representations. In this sense (and feigning irony in my claim to not define it), two separate moments from *Las malas* demonstrate how Camila Sosa Villada's characters prompt us to deliberate on the literary's promise to further unveil *travesti*'s Southern Cone significations, first stating, "Irse de todos lugares. Eso es ser travesti" (162), and as a dexterous second, "Ser travesti es una fiesta, mi amor..." (149), both exemplifying the pluralized approaches with which we can unearth this understanding. As illustrated in these excerpts, this very centering of *their literary voices as the critical framework*—no matter how small—has been the purpose of this study's aims to analyze how these authors construct novel pathways for decolonizing the binary conscripts of Western sex and gender that frequently come with their interpretation. As I draw this study's examinations to a close, it thus seems appropriate that its grounding in critical (trans)feminist analysis would declare that there are often more generative lines of inquiry in the lack of definitive answers than in its certainties. Corresponding with Susy Shock's poetic response to redefining failure in *Hojarascas*, her words mirror much of this sentiment as she writes against the banality of accepting state-funded institutions and their neoliberal protections:

Y entonces, la única certeza es el fracaso,  
ese es nuestro punto de encuentro,  
desde ahí estallarán los nuevos hallazgos (9).

This investigative work has engaged with the liberatory elements of embracing this failure as understood by Shock, thereby unlocking additional lines of inquiry through the examination of these very texts. Taking cues from Shock, I believe we may even delight in the discoveries extracted at this point of contact that are marked by the unresolvable.

One facet of inquiry that immediately arises from this study is the extent to which it can effectively enlist cross-regional and cross-temporal dimensions of Latin American literary and cultural examinations, which interrogates what limitations are at play upon deploying Argentinean analysis beyond the scope of its national and spatiotemporal borders. Nonetheless, as I mentioned in the introduction, there is a wealth of literary texts within the Southern Cone that generatively connect with how Argentina has developed an analysis of *travesti*'s representational history, specifically in the parallelisms that emerge in Chile's shared socio-political realities.<sup>110</sup> Already evident in this dissertation's assertions, we are reminded of the invaluable dialogue that has already transpired between the two Southern Cone nations upon revisiting Pierce's "I Monster," which richly conveyed how the activism and artistry of Shock has transcended these national borders through fierce *travesti* comradery with Chilean poet and activist Claudia Rodríguez.

In addressing connections such as these, I believe we can bridge additional robust analysis within these Argentinean-Chilean narrative intimacies by evaluating "untouchable" characters that have been historically analyzed outside *travesti* conceptualizations in both regions, such as: José Donoso's la Manuela in *El lugar sin límites* (1966), Manuel Puig's Molina in *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), and Pedro Lemebel's La Loca del Frente in *Tengo miedo torero* (2001). Specifically, in thoughtful expansions of the aesthetic literary framework discussed in this dissertation, I believe that by discerning Lemebel's novel as a masterpiece of *travesti* dissent in Pinochet's Chile that it mobilizes a reframing of its Argentinean narrative intimacies as well, thus serving as a literary framework that resituates inaugural *travesti* characters. Southern Cone extensions such as these, which I argue look to discern *Tengo miedo*

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<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Hiner and Garrido's "Antitrans State Terrorism: Trans and Travesti Women, Human Rights, and Recent History in Chile."

*torero* as a retelling of *El besos*'s queer-leftist romance, provide reevaluations that transcend national borders while balancing the parameters of their historical domains. As such, copious neocolonial queer readings, such as that of Molina, are thereby reinvigorated in the literary canon as well through these revisions—repositioning both her and Donoso's la Manuela as seminal *travesti* characters that uphold its atemporal geopolitical reality.

In the same vein, while these transnational examinations are fruitful within Southern Cone intimacies, it also demands a vigilant eye on its sprawling geopolitical uses. As evident in this study's examinations of a specifically Argentinean *travesti* aesthetic, we cannot simply reintroduce these diverse gender-expansive characters and authors into its architectural scope in broad strokes, treating the analyses of their literary, national, and dissident gender identities as monolithic categories within Latin American narrative. While provincial examinations of gender expansiveness and dissidence continue to flourish, whether in Mayra Santos-Febres' *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000) (Puerto Rico), Luis Zapata's *La hermana secreta de Angélica María* (1989) and Mario Bellatin's *Salón de belleza* (1994) (México), or Severo Sarduy's *Cobra* (1972) and *Maitreya* (1978) (Cuba), careful attention must continue to be paid to how these engagements dialogue with, across, and apart from each other. What is more, the proliferative discussions of regions such as Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Puerto Rico, México, and Perú also provide insight into what discussions have been both purposely and inadvertently elevated, i.e., (in)visibilized, in these transnational conversations, as many of these contiguities offer clear approximations to the inherent whiteness and neoliberal ideologies that the Global North demands. Rhetorically queried—how does this far-reaching absence of transnational trans\* and queer dialogue in multiple Latin American contexts continue to demonstrate the need to mobilize additional paradigmatic shifts that simply cannot be put into contact with the contents of this

dissertation's analyses? Or perhaps posed another way, we might instead ask—what benefits lie in deciphering the dissonance and tensions that transpire when they are put into contact.

A final idea I would like to engage with that has appeared throughout this study is the re-evaluative relationship of joy that can be found in flipping the script on compulsory social constructions of sexuality, gender, (dis)ability, race, kinship relations, and more in these texts. As I have shown, all three authors proffer novel ways to reformulate conceptions of a life previously deemed irredeemable or unlivable, and in turn, instead moved to forge innovative networks of care, methods for survival, and pathways to unfettered pleasure. By way of conclusion, I would attest to the idea that while it is explored distinctly in each one of these narrative texts, this embrace of their material conditions and spiritual realities perhaps manifests most audaciously in the renderings of Sosa Villada's semi-autobiographical accounts within *Las malas*.

I make this assertion specifically due to the utilization of flashbacks within the novel in which Sosa Villada intermittently juxtaposes childhood memories that convey the fear, rejection, and abuse of the father that dreads a *travesti* or *maricón* child with unabated portrayals of love and acceptance amongst the *Encarna* household, even at their most vulnerable moments. In a fitting statement of how these family structures have failed her, and in response to the shame her family projected onto her as a child, she turns this narrative on its head, refusing to frame herself within a compulsory belonging to her birth family's nuclear ideals, saying: "Pero yo también sentía vergüenza de ellos. Vergüenza de nuestra miseria, de nuestra distancia de la belleza [...] por la necesidad de mi padre de que su hijo sirviera para algo. Yo no pertenecía a aquella familia, estaba desterrada por ser quien era, yo no pertenecía al núcleo que formaban ellos dos" (82). But this textual interweaving of memories and a reformulation of kinship between Camila's two

households becomes most poignant when positioned in direct contrast to each other at the beginning of the novel's final chapter as it opens with, "'Vas a terminar tirada en una zanja,' me decía mi papá desde la punta de la mesa. 'Tenés derecho a ser feliz,' nos decía La Tía Encarna desde su sillón en el patio. 'La posibilidad de ser feliz también existe'" (216).

As an excerpt that feigns an internal dialogue between the parental love of chosen family and the obvious lack of care in relation to her blood kin, Encarna's assertions that they all had the right to be happy circles back to Camila's initial ruminations upon entering the household with Encarna and the newly found baby boy. Mirroring the above internal dialogue at the beginning of the novel, she first recounts from the chair where she sleeps how her birth was marked by two days of painful labor, which only came to an end when her father threatened the doctor with a gun—a precedent that marked her existence in perpetuity, as she states that "Eso fue lo que dijeron de mí después: que había nacido bajo amenaza" (27). In a moment of tranquility after the discovery, Camila then narrates, "Desde mi sillón, cubierta con los abrigos de las otras travestis de la casa, me duermo con la canción de cuna que Encarna entona para el niño. El relato mil veces escuchado de mi doloroso nacimiento diluye como el azúcar en el té. En esa casa travesti, la dulzura puede hacer todavía que la muerte se amedrente. En esa casa, hasta la muerte puede ser bella" (27). Although initiated through the firsthand semi-autobiographical experiences of its author and protagonist, Camila's sense of safety and happiness throughout the novel is secured in this space through their newly curated kinship that proliferates in the character development of the entire household. The accompanying sweetness that is born within their networks of survival restructures what they had previously deemed to be impossible—to live and experience abundant joy, and to also flourish together—as they are emboldened in their communal strength and resolute commitment to remain visible.

In response to these suffocating restrictions of (in)visibility posed throughout the novel and within this dissertation's examinations, Camila and her sisterhood as a collective entity defy these parameters by going to *la Isla de los Patos* in Alberdi one day for sunbathing in broad daylight. Taunting their onlookers with seductive smiles and exuberant laughter out in the open, this scene in Sosa Villada's novel encapsulates the lifeblood of this study's undertaking in outlining an innovative framework that captures their aesthetic expression, which subverts narrative trajectories that refuse the portrayal of their happiness or presence altogether. Transcribing this very moment into the novel that looks to forever capture their existence through both her narrative voice and subjective vision, Camila as a character pauses, reflecting on the promise that strictly the literary can offer, as she narrates, "Estamos ahí para ser escritas. Para ser eternas" (118). With expert brevity, Sosa Villada gestures us to how the literary provides an unparalleled space for both inscribing this history and a vibrant resignification of *travesti* joy that indeed defies all odds. In conversation with *La Virgen Cabeza*'s reclamations of trash, Menstrual's twisting or torqued trajectory of pleasure and death, and the monster as ways of being and knowing in Sosa Villada's speculative worlds, this study has demonstrated how the literary imaginations of *travesti* authorship and representation insolently transcend the restrictions of literary conventions—a revelation that is requisitely intertwined with an examination of *travesti*'s material and political realities.

Overall, while this body of work has contributed to the critical analysis of cultural, activist, and literary strategies that foreground decolonized examinations of Latin American *travesti* and trans\* identities, it has also demonstrated how these contributions can be mobilized to provide additional alternative systems for understanding the diversity of non-Western global gender identities. In doing so, my discussion of their artistry has incorporated an analysis of how

their literary imaginations concomitantly offer new visions of what humanity can look like, how it can mutually thrive, and insight into invaluable practices of kinship formation within the growing international field of Trans\* Studies. By building on the promise that these collective studies have entailed, I aspire to believe that we may just read, hear, and heed their call for the better worlds and networks of human care that they inspire.

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