◆ Chapter 8

The Thrill of the Crime in a Decade of Crisis: Carlos Montero's *El desorden que dejas*

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Over ten years after the start of the 2008 crisis, we have reached a point where the act of remembering the crisis—the causes, the immediate effects, the political changes, the iconic movements such as 15-M, the *indignados*, the creation of *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*—is, at least in my mind, beginning to meld together in an uncertain timeline. Part of this, I argue, is the sheer length of the crisis and the difficulty in pinpointing an end to the malaise of 2008. Economists could look to GDP growth and IBEX performance and provide dates and years when the crisis officially ended, but those abstract numbers poorly reflect the reality of millions of Spaniards. Meanwhile, cultural productions of the crisis have skyrocketed in Spain, with literature, visual culture, and countless other platforms remembering and retracing the impact that this long decade has had on everyday lives.

To that end, Olga Bezhanova's book *Literature of Crisis: Spain's Engagement with Liquid Capital* opens with a triumphant quote from Mariano Rajoy declaring the end of the crisis. At that point, in late 2013, Rajoy was almost three years into his presidency with the Partido Popular, enjoying what would be his last comfortable majority. Bezhanova argues that "[c]risis literature is pointing to the probability that the crisis is not a temporary problem that can be finally resolved if correct economic measures are taken" (xiii). Indeed the fuzzy timeline of the 2008 crisis reinforces this idea: Rajoy makes his statement just over five years after the start of the crisis, yet it has been more than five years since Rajoy gave this speech. We have come more than the same distance in time since the crisis supposedly ended; meanwhile, "*la crisis*" has become quotidian and permanent for many Spaniards. At the same time, Spain's literary production has expanded on "*novelas de la crisis*" as a means of describing and working through the decade since 2008.

Crisis Unleashed: Crime, Turmoil, and Protest in Hispanic Literature and Visual Culture
Hispanic Issues On Line 29 (2022)

In this chapter, I posit that the connection between the 2008 crisis and the crime genre in Spain—composed of subgenres such as *novela negra*, *novela policíaca,* and the crime thriller—provides a unique means of scrutinizing and counteracting this long decade of Spanish crisis. Scholars such as Malcolm Compitello, Renée Craig Odders, and José Colmeiro, among many others, have explored the genre's close connection to the Spanish transition to democracy and the rising tide of global cultural exchange.[1] The genre has expanded in popularity and critical attention as Spain has pivoted from its newly minted democratic identity to arguably its greatest democratic crisis beginning in 2008. I will investigate one specific example of the combination of crisis novel and detective fiction: Carlos Montero's second novel, *El desorden que dejas*, published in 2016. Montero is better known for writing screenplays, with several series credits, such as on the show Élite. *El desorden que dejas* won the Primavera literary prize and was a commercial success, and, in 2019, it was announced that Netflix had acquired the rights to produce a streaming television series based on the novel.[2]

In this article, I will show that *El desorden que dejas* (*Desorden*), as a recent example of the Spanish crime thriller subgenre, facilitates a dual investigation of its own contemporary society via two complimentary techniques. First, I contend that the use of a female investigator, and a female body, in identifying the crime and providing a possible solution offers a unique vantage point for detailing the effects of the crisis, while also connecting the novel to the booming subgenre of women's crime fiction (even though the author is male). Additionally, I argue that the novel's exploration of rural space allows it to critique and condemn the political and economic conditions that fomented the ongoing Spanish housing crisis. Through these dual investigations, *Desorden* provides a means of working through a landmark economic crisis that threatens to move from an exceptional event to a new, twenty-first-century standard.

Before moving further into characterizing the genre specifics of crime fiction, a short detour is warranted. Critical attention to the novelistic production of crisis in Spain increased during the ten year anniversary of 2008. As argued by Pablo Valdivia, the anniversary of 2008 marked the permanence of a "crisis simbólica" (symbolic crisis) as well as "un proceso de reajuste de estructuras" (22) (a process of readjusting structures)—in other words, a crisis that disconnects itself from numerical economic performance while fanning the flames of social and cultural change.[3] Central to this ongoing situation is Valdivia's claim that these narrations "habiliten no sólo espacios de resistencia y de consumo diversos o propicien la posibilidad de ámbitos discursivos alternativos, sino que además construyen y describen la realidad cognitiva en la que nos inscribimos social e intelectualmente" (22) (enable not only

different spaces of resistance and consumption, or provide for the possibility of alternative discursive contexts, but rather they also construct and describe the cognitive reality in which we define ourselves socially and intellectually). Crisis literature therefore becomes fundamental to creating a symbolic resistance to the ongoing economic stagnation, in both its ability to lend visibility to the effects of the crisis and in its creativity in responding and resisting the power structures that foment cyclical recession. Valdivia later groups several crisis novels into "núcleos operacionales" (operational nuclei) to show the spread of subgenres that had the 2008 crisis as a central focus: these subgenres run the gamut from humor to sci-fi to crime fiction (25–26). Similarly, Jochen Mecke's analysis of several crisis novels notes that "no se limitan a contar la evolución individual de un personaje, sino que establecen relaciones con la Historia colectiva de la crisis" (204) (they do not limit themselves to narrating the individual narration of a character, but rather they establish connections with the collective History of the crisis). As a result, the crisis itself becomes a central overarching character in these novels, reinforcing the absolute penetration of the precarious in both "real" life and in literary production. In fact, Mecke later notes similarities between past literary uses of realism and naturalism and current novelistic quotidian descriptions of the crisis (206). While crisis literature remains in its early stages, from a critical standpoint, the increased visibility and commercial success of crisis literature signals that both authors and readers are drawn to these literary interpretations of austerity.

Desorden tells the story of Raquel, a substitute high school teacher struggling to find consistent work who is assigned a relatively long-term role in her husband's small hometown, the fictional pueblo of Novariz, near Ourense, in Galicia. Her husband, Germán, an unemployed writer, encourages her to take the job and move from the much larger city of A Coruña. Later, Raquel learns that she is substituting for a beloved teacher, Vircua, who supposedly committed suicide. Quickly Raquel becomes obsessed with Viruca's death and the suspicions that some students might be behind her demise. Raquel transforms into a detective of sorts, uncovering new evidence that eventually leads to a sexual scandal involving her students and a powerful, wealthy family in town. But, before she can prove anything, she herself becomes a target and is set up for her own "suicide."

In fact, references to the lingering 2008 crisis are laced throughout the novel: from Raquel and Germán's underemployment to Viruca's troubling financial instability to Novariz's precarious economic recovery following the housing collapse. These stubborn reminders of the previous decade of crisis contradict Rajoy's glorious proclamation from 2013. Therefore, I argue, as is the case in many examples of Spanish crime fiction, the crime under investigation morphs from a woman's possible suicide to a systematic, global crime

of financial mismanagement and market correction that has left an indelible mark on the lives of everyone in the novel. Even the novel's positive resolution—Raquel solves the mystery, splits with her husband, and reinvents her life in cosmopolitan A Coruña—signals a dark undertone to a long-lasting economic shift that will continue to haunt towns like Novariz and an entire generation of Spaniards, now in their thirties and forties, who are struggling to establish a career and a family. At the same time, *Desorden* provides a way forward in localizing a global crisis and in critiquing the social and political structures that allowed for the 2008 bubble to grow and later burst. Of course, these structures point back to the very defining point of what Spain is today: the neoliberal framework of the Spanish transition to democracy.

Alongside the backdrop of crisis, *Desorden* depicts a female narrator as an investigator, contributing to a subgenre of crime fiction written by women and featuring women protagonists that has become increasingly popular since the turn of the twenty-first century. Shelley Godsland argues that the genre explores and critiques gender politics by challenging the male-dominated *flaneur* with women investigators (7, 23). As Godsland states, "[t]he woman who pounded the pavement could never simply be a *flaneuse* in the nineteenth-century context, nor, in more recent texts, could she be just a female equivalent of the tough male sleuth; rather, she was always perceived as a 'public' woman who occupied public spaces" (23–24). Therefore, the female detective must operate in a dual movement: both against the constraints of spatial gender politics and also within the bounds of the male-dominant detective figure or police officer.

At the heart of the increased presence of women in the genre lies the female body. Traditionally, as Godsland analyzes, the female body is equal to the body of the victim, overtly sexualized and battered (92). In geographic terms, Gillian Rose was among the first female perspectives to lament the lack of "focus on women" inherent in the field, suggesting a "fundamental resistance to women as subjects and authors of geographical knowledge" (3). Rose centers on the body's movement in space, stating that "routine actions of individual human agents in time and space, producing and reproducing social structures, are represented by the paths that their bodies follow" (30). Studying the restrictions placed on these movements allows feminist geographers to show the "unnatural constraints" imposed by masculine agents (30).

Nevertheless, for Ann Davies, Rose does not do enough to distinguish between women and mother in a geographic sense (103). In Davies's case, it is the thriller genre—in literature and in film—that reinforces the idea that "women seem better able to cope with" disorientation due to time-space compression (103). Davies continues by saying that "the female detective raises the possibility of rationality combined with the ability to negotiate city spaces

on a variety of levels" (104). In effect, it is the power of this negotiation via the female body's movement through space and time that allows for a diverse and critical reading of contemporary Spain in gendered terms. Critically, Godsland notes that even the lifeless bodies of women victims, when written from a female perspective, "often delve into the bleak realities of victimization" (92). In post-crisis Spain, these "bleak realities" take on the form of a double-edged sword, with one side manifesting the constant gender struggles of Spanish women in a patriarchal society, while the other manifests the knife-edge of economic crisis, which has upended the positivist and unrealistic perspective of the steady attainment of wealth and capital.

Even with the overarching depiction of economic and cultural crisis that permeates the novel, Vircua's cadaver is the opening act and a recurring symbol throughout Raquel's investigation. Glen Close notes that twentieth-century crime fiction "tended to lend the cadaver an ever greater narrative prominence and dramatic weight," while also abandoning the "hygienic discretion" of classical detective fiction (9). When this cadaver becomes sexualized—a woman's body gazed upon by the hard-boiled male detective—Close argues that "the narrative discourse of the hard-boiled crime novel enacts the subject's struggle to assert its agency and substance against the negating void marked by the cadaver" (15). In fact, *Desorden*'s opening chapter depicts a couple finding Vircua's floating corpse and the subsequent investigation by male police officers (11–12). As expected, the men harden their gaze, yet the woman in the scene can't help but vomit at the sight (11). Outside of this opening scene, which is narrated in the third person, Raquel herself never comes into contact with Viruca's cadaver; instead, she interacts with images and fragments of her life as she conducts her unofficial investigation. This provides both Raquel and the reader with a non-traditional perspective of our dead female victim and the crimes that contributed to her demise.

While *Desorden* closely follows Raquel's first-person narration, and while the only dead body is that of Viruca, the novel is of course written by a man. However, this male gaze is complicated by Raquel's narration, especially when she describes the female victim. Her first encounter with Viruca is when she sees her missing person poster in a pharmacy. Raquel states, "Era guapa. Muy guapa. Y no sé por qué esa belleza casi hipnótica me sorprende tanto. Será porque este tipo de mujeres se suelen encontrar en una revista de moda o en un anuncio de tele y no como profesoras devotas en un instituto" (80–81) (She was pretty. Very pretty. And I'm not sure why her nearly hypnotic beauty surprised me so much. Maybe it's because these types of women are usually found in fashion magazines or in TV ads and not as hard-working teachers in a high school). At first glance, Raquel seems to be doing the work of the traditional male detective in sexualizing the dead female corpse—in

fact, she continues by focusing on Viruca's "labios carnosos que desprenden una sexualidad innegable" (81) (thick lips that give off an undeniable sexuality). Yet, I argue that this sexualized image does not lead to an obsession, or even to victim blaming. As Godsland rightly points out, obsession and victim blaming are all too common in male-lead detective fiction in Spain (92). Instead, Raquel begins to compare herself to Viruca, noting her inferiority both physically and sexually (81). Because Viruca's death at this time remains classified as a suicide, Raquel cannot comprehend her motive. She remarks, "¿De verdad alguien así de bello quiso matarse?" (81) (Is it really true that someone this beautiful wanted to kill herself?). While a seemingly superficial observation, which causes Raquel to doubt her assumption that beauty equals mental health, Raquel's observation nonetheless pierces through the excuse of suicide. Therefore, she begins her turn as detective, slowly unraveling the case.

Raquel's strained relationship with her husband Germán throughout the novel offers another insight into the complication of the traditional male gaze imparted by our narrator-turned-detective. Just after wrestling with her feelings of inferiority after seeing an image of Viruca, Raquel relies on Germán's image of her as a means of defining her own sexuality. After Germán cloyingly demands a striptease—keeping in mind that the couple are still staying with Raquel's mother-in-law until they can rent a place of their own—Raquel suddenly feels sexually empowered: "el hecho de que me vea *sexy* precisamente hoy . . . me reconforta. Como si ya no solo estuviera compitiendo por ganarme el respeto de sus alumnos, sino también por la aprobación de mi marido. Es absurdo, lo sé. Pero es la verdad" (85) (The fact that he finds me sexy today of all days . . . comforts me. As if I was not only competing for my students' respect, but also for my husband's approval. It's absurd, I know. But it's the truth). Of note is the fact that Raquel not only feels physically inferior to Viruca but also still considers her students to belong to Viruca, and her sense of inferiority comes from seeing an image of the disappeared woman. Instead of the male body possibly exciting the female gaze, it is instead the idealized female body, the body of the victim, that serves as the basis for Raquel's excitement. This also allows Raquel to move forward despite her perceived inferiority—she allows herself to inhabit the workspaces that Viruca has left behind. Additionally, these moments set up the dynamic between Raquel and Germán: their marriage is defined not only by a constant comparison to other marriages but also to the constant impact of the ongoing economic crisis. In fact, Raquel, inferior though she may think she is to Viruca, remains the sole breadwinner in the relationship, as Germán's frustrated plans to be a writer have left him unemployed (14). However, even Raquel's career borders on the precarious, as she must change schools several times a year as a substitute teacher with no fixed position—a common situation following the economic

crisis as government spending tightened for long-term salaried positions (15). Finally, Raquel's privileged position as investigator and narrator affords her the ability to interpret and critique her relationship with Germán, which eventually leads to her domestic independence at the end of the novel.

Once Raquel begins to act as the detective, her conflicted relationship with space undermines her career opportunities in Novariz. While fictional and not far from the provincial capital Ourense thanks to recent highway access, the town doubles as both the hometown of Germán and his extended family and a testament to the economic crisis's profound effects on spatial development (16). While I will further explore the overarching economic trends regarding the collapse of the Spanish housing market and Novariz in the second half of this essay, I would first like to develop Raquel's personal interaction with this space as she begins to investigate Viruca's death. Following Doreen Massey, I contend that Raquel suffers throughout the novel from "time-space compression." Massey analyzes time-space compression as the sense that place has multiple definitions as globalization and exchange decrease the spatial distances of interaction. According to Massey, an interconnected world means "open and porous networks of social relations" (121). Critically, Massey posits that "the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people. Differential mobility can weaken the leverage of the already weak. The time-space compression of some groups can undermine the power of others" (150). Raquel, as a precarious substitute teacher, has never been able to choose what space she inhabits within Galicia, having to move between temporary assignments as they are available. In fact, early in the novel, Raquel moves out of the apartment that she inherited from her mother in A Coruña, the second-largest city in Galicia, mostly at the insistence of Germán (16). She states: "Estoy acojonada. Temo que después de esos seis meses, cuando me destinen a otro instituto, Germán decida que ya está bien de mudanzas y que por qué no establecer el campamento base en el pueblo" (16) (I'm scared. I'm afraid that after these next six months, when they send me to another school, Germán will decide that he's had enough of moving and so why don't we make the village our new home). Despite being the breadwinner in the relationship and despite inheriting a valuable apartment, Raquel, as a woman, remains in a weaker position in terms of spatial mobility and control. Notwithstanding Raquel's economic importance to the couple, it is Germán who chooses what space she will eventually call home. Raquel is motivated by her own desire to see her marriage succeed, which adds additional pressure that Germán, at least from Raquel's narrator perspective, does not seem to share.

As a result, once Raquel takes on the case to solve Vircua's murder, she shows a new spatial mobility by penetrating spaces under investigation that

were previously inaccessible to her. In fact, the first space she enters as she takes on the detective role is the apartment where Viruca and her husband Mauro lived (122–23). Mauro, also a teacher at the same school, is the principal instigator for continuing the investigation into Viruca's death after the police declared the case closed and ruled the death a suicide. Raquel arrives unannounced at the apartment after obtaining Mauro's cell number and home address from work but not before her colleagues suspect she's romantically involved with him (118–19). This in part explains Raquel's self-doubt before entering the space: "Llamo al telefonillo después de haber ensayado varias veces lo que le voy a decir. Es una temeridad presentarse así, sé que roza la mala educación, pero me pueden las ganas" (120) (I ring the intercom after having practiced several times what I'm going to say. It's reckless to show up like this, I know I'm bordering on a major faux pas, but I have to keep investigating). Nevertheless, it is Raquel's investigative desire rather than her sexual desire that leads her to follow through and enter this previously inaccessible space. In effect, Raquel's description of the apartment as "plagado de libros" (stuffed with books) evokes the solitary crisis of Mauro and helps convince Raquel to participate in the clandestine investigation (120).

Following this change in her spatial tactics, Raquel is tasked with combing Viruca's small apartment for clues. Vircua separated from Mauro just before her death and lived alone. Raquel remarks that, as she opens the door, "Me siento como si estuviera profanando un lugar sagrado. No sé muy bien qué hago aquí" (130) (I feel as if I were desecrating a sacred place. I don't really know what the hell I'm doing here). Nevertheless, she enters, and Raquel's descriptions breathe life back into the novel's dead victim. Raquel's narration focuses on the banal, everyday fragments of Viruca's life that remain in place in her apartment. Godsland comments that contemporary women authors tend to "delve into the bleak realities of victimization . . . the casualties of gendered murder are . . . individuals whose lives and bodies (and also minds if the woman is not killed) have been rent asunder by their victim status" (92). Although *Desorden* is not an example of women-authored detective fiction, I argue that the first-person narration that Raquel provides does indeed coincide with Godsland's analysis. Raquel therefore focuses on Viruca's clothing, her personal effects on her computer, including her photos, and even her CrossFit habit. She also, strangely enough, spends quite a bit of time going through Viruca's bathroom toiletries, saying "No sé por qué lo hago. Pero lo hago . . . Huelo las colonias que tiene. Diferentes, y hay una masculina" (133–34) (I don't know why I do it, but I do . . . I smell her perfumes. Each one different, and one that's a men's cologne). In addition to the effect of a woman investigating the life of another woman, Raquel's status as amateur detective also allows her to deviate from what would be expected from a professional

detective or police investigation. For example, Raquel does not (or cannot) dust for prints or obtain DNA samples. Instead, she must focus on the fragments of everyday life that Viruca left behind. From this study of Viruca's daily bathroom routine, Raquel questions Vircua's love life and the possible motives for her death. Above all, Raquel's investigation of Vircua's personal space contradicts the traditional masculine sexualization of the female corpse. Raquel offers this personal perspective because of her ability to infiltrate these personal spaces that were previously inaccessible to her as an outsider. Notably, during her investigation, Raquel does not visit the lake where Vircua's body was found. In other words, Raquel puts more stock into the personal and ostensibly private spaces of Vircua's life than she does into the crime scene where the police focused their now-archived investigation. As a result, she becomes the principal investigator, even working as an amateur, thereby substituting the authority figures that are unable, or incapable, of resolving the case. These insights, and Raquel's spatial strategies, allow her to paint a much clearer picture of the crime, both on a local level and on a global scale.

Alongside the innovative use of a non-professional female investigator, *Desorden* follows a relatively recent trend in moving away from the traditional city space of Spanish crime fiction and toward unexplored and undocumented peripheral spaces. As genre giants like Manuel Vázquez Montalbán explored the Barcelona urban area or Juan Madrid did the same for the Spanish capital, recent novels have expanded their spatial territory to include suburban communities of Spain's two largest cities, as well as underrepresented cities in Spanish fiction, such as Seville or Bilbao. Other novels have set their sights on the Spanish countryside and rural areas, as *Desorden* does in its choice of setting in Novariz. This multiplicity of spaces in both geographic and in economic terms offers up a diverse investigatory perspective in the decade following the collapse of 2008. As Rosi Song writes,

> La operación espacial que realiza el posmodernismo no es trazar la ruptura de un preexistente y antiguo orden totalitario sino la emergencia de lo múltiple de maneras nuevas e inesperadas, de eventos no relacionados y de tipos de discursos, que constituye en una diferenciación y especialización de la realidad. (466)
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> (The spatial operation that postmodernity achieves is not tracing the rupture of a preexisting and old total order, but rather the multiple emergence of new and unexpected ways, of unrelated events and types of discourses, that constitute a differentiation and specialization of reality.)

For contemporary Spanish crime fiction, this new specialization of reality is inevitably fixed on the economic and social aftereffects of crisis: as a result, the spaces of the periphery gain prominence as ground zero for Spain's ongoing housing market and construction woes.

As a result, contemporary detective fiction is particularly adept at highlighting the acceleration of the consumption of space in Spain leading up to the crisis, as well as the fallout that those spaces have come to embody in the aftermath of the collapse of the housing market. From a theoretical perspective, Henri Lefebvre argues that "[t]he capitalist city has created the centre of consumption . . . We already know the double character of the capitalist city: place of consumption and consumption of place" (169–70). Lefebvre rightly highlights the contemporary city's quest for consumable spaces, where lived experience is relegated to a secondary position under the exchange value that these spaces can harness. This can be seen in the overemphasis on new construction and spatial development, which often leads to gentrification of historical neighborhoods. Lefebvre also maintains that the flow of people in these spaces is critical to their consumption: "In these privileged sites, the consumer also comes to consume space; the collection of objects in the windows of boutiques becomes the reason and the pretext for the gathering of people." In the end, these spaces are controlled by "the language of commodities, of the glory and the extension of exchange value" (170). Therefore, the capitalist penetration of urban space continues to create consumable cities with near-limitless extensions, moving beyond the city center and out into the urban periphery.

In Spain, the consumption of space through property ownership was uniquely fomented during the Franco dictatorship. Between 1950 and 1981, the percentage of properties owned and owner-occupied rose from 49 percent to 73 percent, rising yet again to 78 percent in 1991 and 81 percent in 2001, before finally falling to 79 percent in 2011, three years after the start of the crisis (Rodríguez Alonso 29). In the UK, by way of comparison, roughly 55–69 percent of properties were owned and owner-occupied during the 1980s, while in France that number rose from 42 percent to 58 percent (Rodríguez Alonso 28). However, even more surprising is that, in Spain, in 2011, 28 percent of homes were unoccupied: that's 3.4 million homes (Rodríguez Alonso 23)! Raquel Rodríguez Alonso and Mario Espinoza Pino correctly underscore the fundamental shift in market dynamics that embodies the 2008 housing bubble and crash:

> El hecho de que gran cantidad del stock que sale al mercado se desvíe hacia la inversión, perpetúa una demanda oculta de viviendas cuyo mejor

> reflejo es un grotesco parque vacío. Cuando los objetivos de los planes de vivienda son tan contradictorios, la balanza siempre acaba inclinándose del lado de la acumulación: se privilegia el valor de cambio de la vivienda en detrimento de su valor de uso (33).
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> (The fact that a large quantity of housing stock that is placed on the market is diverted towards investment income, perpetuates a hidden demand for homes whose most obvious reflection is a grotesque empty housing stock. When the objectives of the housing plans are so contradictory, the balance always ends up shifting towards the side of accumulation: housing exchange value is privileged at the expense of use value.)

These authors pinpoint the 1998 "Ley del suelo" (Law of Land Use) as the catalyst for rampant speculation and aggressive construction in Spain. The Ley rezoned vast swaths of land for urbanization, much of it located in peripheral areas outside of traditional city centers (39). As a result, in Spain the "center of consumption" shifts from the city center to the edges of urban development in the long lead up to the 2008 crash. Peripheral space becomes a commodity, and, while sparsely inhabited, it is constructed and traded based on exchange value. Once the crash arrived, exchange value continued to reign supreme, with aggressive eviction practices against owners and residents unable to pay their underwater mortgages.

Returning to *Desorden*, the use of the thriller genre propels the story forward as Raquel becomes increasingly obsessed with the case and increasingly attacked and threatened by certain residents of Novariz. The globalized, popular appeal of both the thriller and the investigative genre ground the story in a familiar style that evokes classic Hollywood thriller archetypes.[4] At the same time, Montero's strategic use of the genre in the localized place of rural Galicia—complete with smatterings of the regional language, Gallego, references to local food and wine, and several visits to the local hot springs—creates a space that is at once global and local. Stuart King underscores the importance of crime fiction set in Galicia, "para comentar sobre los enormes cambios socioculturales que se han experimentado" in this region (185) (in order to comment on the enormous sociocultural changes that have been experienced). Of special concern to King is how Galicia comes to represent a place caught in an incomplete modernity while also idealizing a rural past (189). Montero's novel therefore carries on this distinctive investigation of the effects of economic crisis in Galicia that stem from both global and local sources.

In that way, the housing market collapse becomes a prominent parallel crime during Raquel's investigation of Vircua's death. Her description of Novariz upon first arriving, indicates the spatial remnants of the crisis:

> Veo muchos comercios cerrados, la crisis y la ruina de la fábrica Acebedo han acabado con ellos. Y se empiezan a ver algunos edificios en muy mal estado. Qué rápido se deteriora todo y qué triste pensar que este puede ser otro de esos pueblos que se queda atrapado en el tiempo. Como si la vida se escapara a otros lugares más prósperos. Como si hasta las horas y los días quisieran huir de aquí. Todo empieza a oler a pasado. Quizás exagero porque las crisis se superan y el cierre de una empresa no puede acabar con quinientos años de historia (75).

> (I see a lot of shuttered businesses, the crisis and the financial ruin of the Acebedo's factory have finished them off. And one can begin to see a few buildings in need of renovations. How quickly everything deteriorates and how sad it is to think that this could become one of those towns that becomes stuck in time. As if life had escaped to more prosperous locales. As if even the hours and the days wanted to get out of here. Everything begins to smell like the past. Maybe I'm exaggerating because these crises can be overcome and just because one business closes doesn't mean the end of five hundred years of history.)

As Raquel attempts to maintain confidence in the current political and economic system to find a solution, this description also underscores the uneven application of the spatial effects of the crisis. In some city centers, such as Madrid and Barcelona, economic recovery has been more palpable and effective, while in many peripheral and rural areas, the housing market collapse remains largely unresolved. Like space, the differences between rich and poor provide clear evidence as to who has emerged as winners or losers over the past decade.

Raquel examines this clear divide in Novariz when her investigation takes her to a lower-class neighborhood on the edge of the city. Before heading into the apartment building where one of her students lives, Raquel is struck by the visual panorama of the housing development:

> La urbanización, que nunca debió de ser bonita, ahora es cochambrosa. Las casas parecen semiabandonadas, todas las fachadas necesitarían una buena reforma. Hay desconchones, manchas de moho y humedad, las farolas están oxidadas, las calles hace mucho que no se asfaltan y todo son socavones. Y pienso que siempre acaban pagando el pato los mismos en épocas de crisis, creemos que nos afecta a todos por igual pero es mentira. (154).
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> (The development, which never had been pretty, was now a dump. The homes seem semi-abandoned, all of the facades need extensive renovations. There are chipped walls, mold and water stains, the streetlamps are rusted, the streets are littered with potholes and who knows the last time they were paved. And it makes me think that the same people always end up paying the price in times of crisis, we think that it affects everyone the same but that's a lie.)

Here, this peripheral construction embodies the spatial excesses of the '90s and early 2000s in Spain, where residents overpaid and took on too much debt for lower-quality construction that is all but abandoned nearly a decade after 2008. Of note is Raquel's focus on the lack of maintenance and upkeep in this neighborhood, which signals a long-term decline of both the property value and the inhabitants' purchasing power. The neighborhood therefore confirms that the 2008 crisis is simply one of many recurring crises that are inherent in the capitalist system. Palmar Álvarez-Blanco and Antonio Gómez-Quiñones explore this idea by linking precariousness with capitalism:

> No sólo no hay capitalismo sin precariedad, sino que éste produce precariedad (estratégicamente distribuida) como una de sus constantes históricas más claras. La precariedad es una estrategia altamente eficiente (casi inevitable) con la que resolver momentos imposibles de contradicción interna en el sistema capitalista (11).
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> (Not only is there no capitalism without precarity, but also that capitalism produces [strategically distributed] precarity as one of its clearest historical constants. Precarity is a very efficient strategy [almost inevitable] that can resolve impossible moments of internal contradiction in the capitalist system.)

For the inhabitants of this peripheral neighborhood, this strategic use of spatial planning has pushed them out of the town center and into this semi-abandoned built environment. For Raquel, and for many inhabitants of this area, this space would be unknown and unexplored without the investigative process that motivates our narrator.

Shortly after Raquel's visit to her student's neighborhood, *Desorden* introduces the spatial excess of the enormously wealthy Acebedo family. Notably, Gabriel, the principal antagonist of the novel, is the middle-aged heir to the fortune. The Acebedo home is described as follows:

> un edificio enorme de piedras. Es un antiguo pazo restaurado. No sé ni los metros que tendrá la fortuna que habrá costado reformarlo. . . . Paredes de piedra, maderas nobles en los suelos y en los muebles . . . Gabriel nos conduce hasta una piscina interior. Es de ensueño . . . Es obsceno que viva en esta casa, que presuma de ella, cuando más de la mitad del pueblo vive en la miseria desde que cerró la fábrica de su familia (167–68).

> (an enormous stone building. It's an old restored Pazo, a Galician country home. I have no idea how big the stack of cash necessary must have been to renovate this place. . . . Stone walls, hardwood floors and solid wood furniture . . . Gabriel guides us to an indoor pool. It's like a dream . . . It's preposterous that they live here, that they get off on showing this place off, when more than half the town lives in misery ever since their family's factory closed.)

This portrait of the town's wealthiest inhabitants contrasts greatly with the public consensus that the crisis in Spain was brought on by a generalized attitude of overindulgence. In fact, Raquel's spatial investigation confirms that the Acebedo family has suffered only minimally due to the 2008 crisis and the closing of their factory. Similarly, Rodríguez Alonso and Espinosa Pino explain that:

> La ideología oficial de los grandes partidos—orquestada con un claro consenso orgánico—intentó enviar un mensaje culpabilizador a toda la

> sociedad: el país había vivido por encima de sus posibilidades. . . . El objetivo era cargar sobre los hombros de la sociedad civil el peso de la crisis, disciplinando moralmente a la ciudadanía e intentando evitar una crisis de legitimidad. (79)
>
> (The official ideology of the major parties-organized with a clear organic consensus-attempted to send a message of guilt to the entire society: the country had lived beyond its means. . . . The objective was to place the burden of the crisis upon all of civil society, giving moral discipline to the citizens while at the same time avoiding a crisis of legitimacy.)

However, Raquel's tour of this space of excess reveals the hypocrisy in the government's messaging. The richest continue their previous lifestyles with few changes, while the majority of Spaniards continue to struggle in increasingly dire conditions. The crime that is exposed, then, is a crime of complicity: a dangerous adherence to a fickle market where economic crisis is not an uncertainty but rather the norm.

Raquel's investigation eventually reveals that Viruca's downfall was accelerated in part by the economic crisis and by the couple's desire to live beyond their means. As the school principal explains, Mauro "invirtió mal, muy mal. Metió miles y miles de euros en acciones de la fábrica Acebedo" (175) (invested poorly, very poorly. He invested thousands and thousands of euros in the Acebedo factory stock). This bad economic gamble, plus the couple's taste for expensive clothing and travel, led to a desperate struggle with debt after the 2008 crash, so that "tuvieron que rehipotecar la casa, pedir dinero a bancos . . . venga más créditos, venga más endeudamiento, un follón" (176) (they had to get a second mortgage on their house, ask for loans from banks . . . then another loan, then they were more in debt, what a mess). Viruca and Mauro's struggles mirror what thousands of other Spaniards experienced in order to maintain their economic status while government bailouts were directed toward banking institutions. Viruca's error in believing that their professor salaries would propel them toward an upper-class status inherently reveals the crux of contemporary capitalism: the increased difficulty of economic ascendance. The 2008 crisis was spectacularly timed for Vircua, Mauro, and the Spanish middle class to come to terms with the fact that their financial ceiling had been reached.

In the final third of the novel, Raquel discovers that she has been manipulated by Mauro and even by her students into following the investigation down certain paths. Nevertheless, she discovers the principal antagonists:

Gabriel Acebedo, the wealthy family heir, and Tomás Nogueira, the father of one of Viruca and Raquel's students who is a construction magnate and under-the-radar pimp. Significantly, these two antagonists watched their legitimate businesses crumble during the crisis; yet, economically, they remained afloat thanks to intergenerational wealth or illegal, off-the-books businesses. In the framework of the novel's crime, Montero constructs a clear economic dichotomy of us-versus-them, pitting the rich, corrupt upper class against the nearly ruined middle and lower classes of Novariz. Montero's depiction of economic struggle aligns with how Mecke defines crisis novels, especially with "el hecho de que no se limitan a contar la evolución individual de un personaje, sino que establecen relaciones con la Historia colectiva de la crisis" (204) (the fact that they don't limit themselves to telling the individual evolution of a character, but rather they establish connections with the collective History of the crisis). This allows *Desorden* to narrate a wider view and critique of the ongoing crisis, despite the first-person perspective that Raquel provides.

In addition to Montero's use of crisis fiction, the author also includes allusions to other detective texts as a means of engaging the self-reflexive capacity of the genre. For example, Raquel ironically compares her hacking abilities to Lisbeth Salander's people skills, referencing the bestselling *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* series and films (214). Raquel also narrates her thoughts on the idea of a "perfect crime" that she believes can only occur in literature and cinema—ironically referencing the novel's own fictional identity (264). The effect of this investigative self-reflexivity allows *Desorden* to move between the fictional aspects of the crime and the real, pervasive backdrop of the economic crisis that the novel develops. In turn, the fictional antagonists move beyond their stereotypical descriptions and point to the overarching causes and repercussions of 2008, as well as to the future crises to come. Montero's novel references this larger collective history of the crisis via the use of a female, self-reflexive narrator and investigator, as well as via the spatial development of a "glocal" fictional space that stands in as a representation of the space of Spanish crisis.

As the novelistic thrill ride reaches its climax, Raquel finds herself tied up in a garage with Gabriel and his associates preparing her imminent "suicide." This final space—at least, the intended final space—evokes Raquel's spatial investigation throughout the novel:

> Una urbanización de casas adosadas a medio construir. De esas que se quedaron abandonadas por culpa del estallido de la burbuja inmobiliaria . . . La urbanización es desoladora. Las casas sin acabar de construir y que

> se empiezan a deteriorar con el paso del tiempo, comidas por el moho, la humedad y una vegetación que se va adueñando de ellas, siempre dan esa impresión (367–68).
>
> (A condo development that was half built. One of many that was left abandoned because of the collapse of the housing market . . . The development is desolate. These homes always give off this impression, the ones that are unfinished and begin to fall apart with the passage of time, eaten by mold, humidity, and relentless vegetation reclaiming the land).

Raquel seems about to become yet another victim of the Spanish housing crisis, trapped in a valueless, abandoned new construction that embodies the speculation and excess of an economic model enshrined in neoliberalism. In effect, the cause of Viruca's death is economic in nature, as both Viruca and Gabriel's associates cross paths when searching for alterative income to keep their previous lifestyles afloat after 2008.

This final scene also exposes Gabriel's crime in parallel with the ongoing crime of economic struggle that Novariz continues to face. In fact, Gabriel's use of "assisted suicide" as a cover-up for the murder of Viruca and the attempted murder of Raquel underscores the perceived social vulnerabilities of these female characters in a space that continues to view women as less capable than men, especially in the face of the crisis. For example, following the dramatic final scene and Raquel's miraculous escape, Germán admits that he could not see past Vircua's death as anything but suicide: "¡Y a ella le veía muy mal! ¡Cada vez quería más coca, cada vez estaba más demacrada! ¿Por qué no iba a creer que se suicidó?" (390). (And she really looked ragged! She wanted more and more cocaine, she looked more and more emaciated! Why wouldn't I think she killed herself?). The novel's antagonists therefore exploit this prejudice as a means of control against these women who serve as investigators, and therefore potential authority figures, and who threaten their sexual exploits and economic dominance over Novariz.

As it turns out, Raquel survives, and Gabriel and his associates are seemingly brought to justice. But little progress is made in tackling the overt spatial calamities of crisis that the novel exposes. Raquel's decision to return to her inherited apartment in A Coruña and divorce Germán due to his connections to Gabriel can be read as a rejection of the speculation and economic inflexibility of company towns like Novariz, where one factory closing is the difference between survival and ruin. This ending also highlights how Raquel overcomes the effects of time-space compression by choosing

her own domestic space, though it remains to be seen what impact her decision will have on her career. Additionally, Raquel's success in resolving the case, despite nearly losing her own life, functions as a critique of the male-dominated police and their connections to corruption, especially in rural areas. The fact that an amateur female investigator cracks the case when others could not (or would not) investigate is a reminder of the persistence of violence against women in Spain and an ineffective justice system made even weaker by economic malaise. Meanwhile, from a spatial perspective, the novel invites the reader to look beyond the traditional setting of the city center, where the last decade of crisis may be partially erased by more favorable economic conditions, less aggressive construction practices, and the nearly steady influx of tourism. Instead, the novel provokes readers to contend with a housing model that has created millions of unused homes in a country that is forecast to shrink by nearly a million inhabitants by 2030 (Rodríguez Alonso 60). All told, the novel's allegorical thrill ride of the housing marking boom and collapse highlights the political and structural changes necessary to make crisis an anomaly as opposed to an inevitability.

Notes

1. For example, Compitello's succinct article on the "new *novela negra*" summarizes the narrative and critical applications of the genre's structural adaptability, while also examining how the genre's realistic credibility serves as a vehicle for both critiquing and describing the transition period (189). Similarly, Craig-Odders asserts that Spanish detective fiction was fomented by the penetration of democratic ideals in Spanish society following the transition (39). See also Colmeiro's study on Spanish novela negra, where he posits that detectives filter reality and in turn narrate the spatial layout of the urban environment (171).
2. Carlos Montero is also known for writing the popular Netflix series Élite (2018) and has several other screenwriting credits. In February 2019, it was reported that Netflix would launch five new series based in Spain, with *El desorden que dejas* selected as the only novel adaptation. Montero is tasked with writing the adaptation himself. The series debuted on Netflix in late 2020.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Spanish to English in this chapter are my own.
4. Ann Davies explores the categorization of the Spanish thriller genre in film. Notably, she proposes that Spanish cinema's adoption of Hollywood thriller archetypes may serve as "an interface of the negotiation between different cinemas" (177). This discussion can be extended to the novel's adoption of the thriller, as well as to how it

operates in a space that is local, national, and international—especially with Montero's role in developing the novel as a Netflix series.

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