

Review: Aramburu, Diana. *Resisting Invisibility: Detecting the Female Body in Spanish Crime Fiction*.

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Aramburu, Diana. *Resisting Invisibility: Detecting the Female Body in Spanish Crime Fiction*. University of Toronto Press, 2019. Pp. 296. ISBN: 978-1487504595.

Diana Aramburu's book, *Resisting Invisibility: Detecting the Female Body in Spanish Crime Fiction*, is a thorough analysis of the crime fiction genre in Spain through a feminist lens. In her work, she creates a genealogy of the female body in both male- and female-authored crime novels produced in Spain from the late 19th century until the present day. Aramburu reviews the history of this popular genre, which has functioned as a "critical and strategic literary space that problematizes the sociopolitical and cultural panorama of the time" (3) during the transition to democracy, and also a place to represent the marginalized spaces and social classes. Aramburu also points to the recent shift that the genre has experienced due to the impact of the 2008 economic crisis in the country, when new groups of marginalized people emerged and began "claiming visibility and resisting invisibility" (5). We then attend to a switch from a *novela negra* to one *gris asfalto*: "According to Villalonga, the *gris asfalto* narrative employs antiheroic characters whose motives for committing these crimes, such as revenge, injustice, and guilt, are easily identifiable to readers" (6), forcing us to reconsider traditional concepts of crime and criminality. Nevertheless, according to Aramburu, these changes in the genre do not start with the *gris asfalto* novel, but with the appearance of the modern female detective in crime literature, "because by feminizing the eye, regendering the eye and the I of the detective, crucial changes and subversions to the genre have occurred, beginning with the genre's politics of visibility" (6).

In her analysis of these works, Aramburu focuses on how the female body is central to both male and female authors. The body becomes the place of subversion, functioning as a critical tool of resistance against a system that is proven to be ineffective (especially towards women). Even though the critics date back the birth of the femicide phenomena to 1979, when the first female hard-boiled detective, Bárbara Arenas, appears in Lourdes Ortiz's *Picadura mortal*, Aramburu traces the gendering of crime fiction back to its beginning, establishing a genealogy that takes into account the different viewpoints regarding women's positions in these narratives before and after the so-called feminization of the genre. She identifies four types of female bodies in her corpus: the delinquent, the victimized, the eroticized, and, of course, the female detective body. Studying the body in crime fiction is crucial, since the narration usually starts with a (dead)

body. The male-dominated genre either uses the female corpse as its foundation and then discards it or uses the eroticized body of the detective's female love interest as a narrative pause to produce visual pleasure for both the male sleuth and the (again, male) reader. Under these circumstances, Aramburu asks what happens when the woman looks back, or when she is the owner of the "eye" that is doing the looking.

In chapter one, "Reading the Female Delinquent in Early Spanish Crime Fiction," Aramburu explores how the image that we obtain of the female delinquent body in crime fiction is generated and mobilized in the 19th and early 20th century, and how a profeminist counter-discourse starts to take place in texts such as Pedro Antonio de Alarcón's *El clavo* (1853) and Emilia Pardo Bazan's *La gota de sangre* (1911). Aramburu's analysis differs from that of other critics because she signals that the feminization of the genre has already taken form in these earliest crime fiction models by centering the narrative on the female delinquent, the adulteress, and the femme fatale, as a trope to investigate the nation's moral degeneration and fears surrounding female sexuality and criminality.

Chapter two, "Investigating the 'Eye' in Twentieth-Century Spanish Crime Novels," provides a further reading of the criminal female body in two of Federico Mediante's novels, *Sombras siniestras* (c. 1944) and *Fuerzas ocultas* (c. 1944), and the character of Diana Fletcher, the first example of a female detective in Spanish crime fiction, in *La señorita detective* (1944); she also analyses Manuel Pedroso's *Joc brut* (1965). In this chapter, Aramburu explores how the gazing mechanisms work in the narrative pauses that are used to present the woman, and how the female characters employ the male gaze against itself, humiliating the man. Unfortunately, all these female characters do not present the same challenge to the patriarchal society as the ones in the previous chapter, since in Mediante's work they slowly disappear, and in Pedrolo's the femme fatale is humiliated, and her body is marked forever.

In chapter three, "Parodying the Male Gaze in Lourdes Ortiz's *Picadura mortal*," Aramburu demonstrates how the novel is an investigation of female gender roles in a post-Francoist society and how it signals crime fiction's prevailing *machista* attitudes using parodic strategies. The mechanisms of subversion rely on a reformulation of the politics of visibility in the genre, "creating a series of inversions with respect to the ways that the gaze operates in the genre" (115).

Chapter four, "A New Politics of Visibility in the Lònia Guiu Series," is an in-depth study of Maria-Antònia Oliver's female detective series in Spain. For the first time, according to Aramburu, there is a real exploration of the female body as a victimized body, and it is now the site for a discussion of gender violence and for redefining victimhood and justice in the genre. The body itself tells the story of its victimization and violation and provides an alternative feminized and personal form of justice in the hands of a woman who can sympathize with it.

Lastly, chapter five, “Lesbianizing the Genre,” uses Isabel Franc’s Emma García stories and Susana Hernández’s crime fiction trilogy as an example of how the lesbian subgenre has helped redefining the conditions of visibility for lesbian women in Spain. According to Aramburu, Franc’s concern in her short stories is not only to give visibility to the lesbian community (as she does in her previous novels), but also protecting the lesbian couple against the patriarchal system. Hernández’s series, on the other hand, underscores how lesbian crime fiction changes the discourse on the body by staging it as a site of both narrative pleasure and of victimization, by giving visibility to female sexual experience—both lesbian and non-lesbian.

The book concludes with a reflection on how this alternative genealogy for the politics of visibility of the female body and perspective on crime fiction has opened the doors to other models of visibility that now continue in the *gris asfalto* formula.

Resisting Invisibility is organized in five chapters that altogether provide a reading of the female body in crime fiction stories in Spain, and how the gendering of the genre has contributed to the creation of both a space of awareness of women’s vulnerability in the patriarchal system and a site of resistance against it, opening the doors for the subjects depicted in the *gris asfalto* novels. Using both feminist and film theories, as well as crime fiction theory and literary criticism at large, *Resisting Invisibility* is essential reading for those interested in furthering their knowledge of the genre. Overall, Diana Aramburu’s book is a great addition to the field of Iberian studies and to the study of crime fiction.