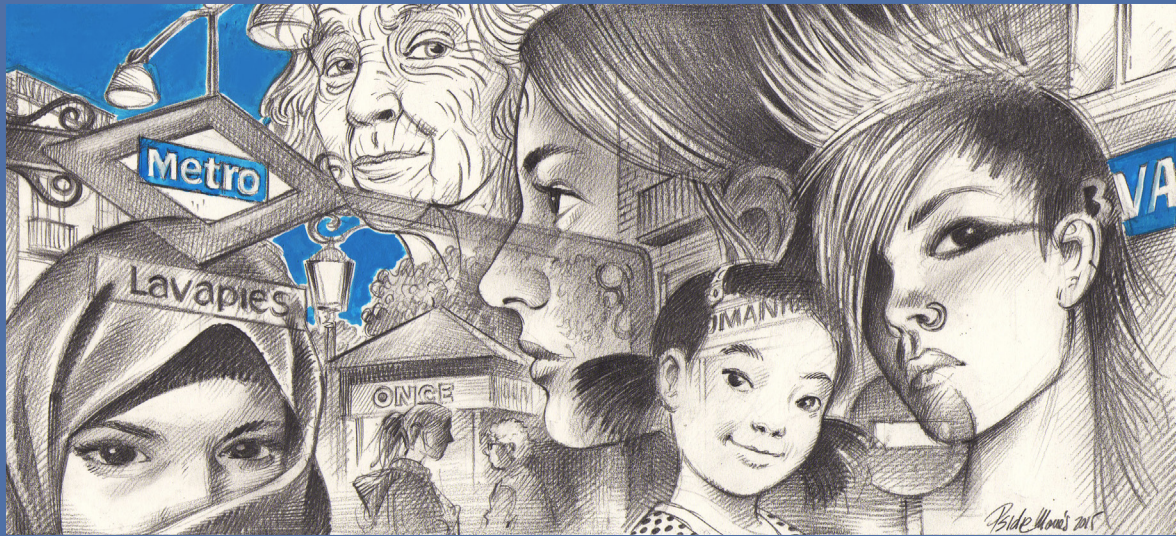


THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GLOBAL FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN LUCÍA ETXEARRIA'S *COSMOFOBIA*

Mazal Oaknín

University College London



Resumen || Set in the neighbourhood of Lavapiés in Madrid, Lucía Etxebarria's novel *Cosmofobia* explores the friction produced by the experiences of numerous literary personae from extremely different backgrounds now living in close contact with one another. This article will examine female characterisation in *Cosmofobia*, to see whether the private and public realm are represented as a similarly complex negotiation of inner and outer selves in the light of the increasingly importance of migration and multiculturalism in Spanish society. Particular attention will be paid to the intersection between the expression of a unique individuality in the form of confessional mode, and the intersubjective elements of women's experience conveyed in the representation of these characters' entangled relationships.

Palabras clave || Immigration | Normativity | Testimony | Subjectivity | 21st century Spain

Abstract || *Cosmofobia*, de Lucía Etxebarria, transcurre en el madrileño barrio de Lavapiés. La novela explora las fricciones que se producen cuando un gran número de personajes literarios provenientes de orígenes extremadamente diferentes viven en estrecho contacto. El presente artículo examina la caracterización de los personajes femeninos en *Cosmofobia* con el objetivo de determinar si los ámbitos público y privado aparecen representados como una negociación compleja de los seres internos y externos en el contexto de una sociedad española en la que la inmigración y la multiculturalidad adquieren cada vez más importancia. En particular, el artículo se centrará en la intersección entre la expresión de la individualidad, que aparece en un modo confesional, y los elementos subjetivos de la experiencia femenina, representados en las complicadas relaciones en las que se ven envueltos los personajes.

Keywords || Inmigración | Normatividad | Testimonio | Subjetividad | España del siglo XXI

0. Introduction

In *Postmodern Spain. A Cultural Analysis of 1980s-1990s Spanish Culture*, Antonio Sánchez considers that the decisive political processes and socio-political changes that would follow the establishment of democracy were recognised, symbolically, with three internationally famous events that were celebrated in Spain a decade later in 1992: the Olympic Games in Barcelona, the EXPO 92 World Fair in Seville, and the designation of Madrid as the official European capital of culture (Sánchez, 2007: 21). These events, held four years before the date Lucía Etxebarria published her first novel *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1996), mark the point at which Spain appeared to enter what Francisca López terms the “prevailing culture in the developed capitalist world” (2008: no pagination). The focus on a centralised, archaic notion of “patria”, overexploited during the Franco regime, had given way to an increasing decentralization of the State, as well as to a growing sense of regionalism. And with this political transformation came the shift to a broader acceptance of cultural, ethnic and sexual differences that is probably the major change Spain has experienced in the last three decades, and that is so central to the themes of Lucía Etxebarria’s work and to the novel examined in this article, *Cosmofobia* (2007).

Besides her numerous articles, essays and editions, Etxebarria has published ten novels to date¹. The topical themes in her novels illustrate the contemporary value of her work: they all explore the most dramatic social changes since the Franco years to do with increasing immigration and the role of women. Indeed, the views of the fictional female personae Etxebarria produces reflect the tension between the fact that, despite the progress that has been made with regard to the legal equality of sexes, one of the President’s firmest commitments, in recent years, has been to extend women’s rights, since full equality has not yet been achieved in practice.

Set in the neighbourhood of Lavapiés² in Madrid, *Cosmofobia* explores the friction produced by the experiences of numerous literary personae from extremely different backgrounds now living in close contact with one another. This article will examine female characterisation in *Cosmofobia*, to see whether the private and public realm are represented as a similarly complex negotiation of inner and outer selves in the light of the increasingly importance of migration and multiculturalism in Spanish society. Particular attention will be paid to the intersection between the expression of a unique individuality in the form of confessional mode, and the intersubjective elements of women’s experience conveyed in the representation of these characters’ entangled relationships.

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1 | Etxebarria has so far published the following novels: *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1996), *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998), *Nosotras que no somos como las demás* (1999), *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* (2001), *Una historia de amor como otra cualquiera* (2003), *Un milagro en equilibrio* (2004), *Cosmofobia* (2007), *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso* (2010), *El contenido del silencio* (2011), and the theater play *Dios no tiene tiempo libre* (2013).

2 | In the late 1980s and 1990s, the neighbourhood of Lavapiés had acquired a reputation as a “vertical slum”, with its tenement blocks either occupied by older people paying low rents or empty. As a consequence, it became the most important location for squatting in Madrid. In recent years, Lavapiés has become the focal point for immigrant populations, mostly Afro-Spaniard, Chinese, Arab, and people from the Indian subcontinent. It has been estimated that around 60% of the population is of foreign origin.

1. The 'cosmos' in *Cosmofobia*

In his article "Compromiso feminista en la obra de Lucía Etxebarria", Senís Fernández avows that the construction of female subjectivity in Etxebarria's novels is indissoluble from a feminist commitment (Senís Fernández, 2001: no pagination)³. In fact, the way Etxebarria represents herself in her prologue to *Nosotras que no somos como las demás* has adapted to the contemporary discourse of celebrity that is dependent on the (paradoxical) construction of an image of individuality and structured by a desire to unveil the private self behind the public persona (Rojek 2001). Interestingly, while acknowledging that Etxebarria's voicing of her political opinions has been made possible mainly through the platform of her media appearances, the construction of her public persona is not taken into account in the consideration of the construction of female subjectivity in her novels. Thus, by regarding first her essay *La letra futura* and the prologue to *Nosotras que no somos como las demás*, and secondly her novels *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas*; *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*; and *Nosotras que no somos como las demás*, Senís Fernández explores the ways in which the feminist ideas exposed in Etxebarria's non-fiction appear in her fiction, and specifically in her construction of female subjectivity. In his article, the author distinguishes three different resources that are related to the use of a first-person narrator:

La rememoración del pasado, la alternancia de discursos y la opinión directa. Los tres sirven para poner de manifiesto diversos problemas de la mujer que Lucía Etxebarria exponía en sus ensayos: la educación, los roles impuestos, la tendencia a etiquetar, el fanatismo y las dificultades en el mundo laboral. (2001: no pagination)

While all three resources can be found in *Cosmofobia*, the main difference between Senís Fernández's consideration of Etxebarria's construction of female subjectivity and my own reading of it in *Cosmofobia* lies in the global, relational nature of identity in this novel. Thus, although Senís Fernández highlights the importance of the relationships between women characters in Etxebarria's novels, his consideration of the significance of these relationships is limited to the plot and to the transmission of a political message, but not considered in the construction of female identity, and is defined as:

una suerte de combinatoria y juego de espejos en que las mujeres de ficción se entrecruzan en toda clase de relaciones íntimas. A pesar de que todos los personajes importantes son mujeres, se trata de tipos diferentes –casi se puede hablar de prototipos– que se oponen, se atraen, se repelen, se necesitan, se odian y se aman [...] no sólo permite, como casi siempre, que los personajes expongan por sí mismos sus vivencias, sus sentimientos y contradicciones, sino también que conozcamos de primera mano sus opiniones sobre algunos conflictos y, más en concreto, sobre su propia situación como mujeres. De hecho, en

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3 | Given that Senís' study dates from 2001, it only considers the essay "La Eva futura/La letra futura", and the prologue to *Nosotras que no somos como las demás*.

algunos momentos, la voz narrativa se vuelve casi ensayística o incluso reivindicativa. (2001: no pagination)

However, I would like to argue that the way in which the characters in *Cosmofobia* are interrelated is not merely a technique to drive the narrative forward, nor a simple vehicle to voice the author's political opinions. Just as Etxebarria's mass-marketing of herself is subjected to a variety of readings, some welcome and others unwelcome⁴, each story in *Cosmofobia* is narrated by multiple perspectives and interpreted by other characters, both within the same chapter and in other chapters, in a variety of ways. The complexity and the even paradoxical nature of negotiational identity are established from the outset, when the narrator, "Lucía Etxebarria", opens the "novel" by "establishing" three facts: her own authorship, her friendship with one of the characters, and the fact that this is a novel made up of entangled stories: "Mi amiga Mónica solía contar la anécdota con la que abro esta historia de historias cruzadas" (Etxebarria, 2007: 1).

Setting aside the first of these points, which establishes the self-referential aspects of the "authorship" of this novel (said to be narrated by one of Lucía Etxebarria's numerous personae), the second and third facts are pivotal to this reading of the construction of identity in *Cosmofobia*. Mónica's story exemplifies the on-going, shifting nature of subjectivity in the novel. This is a "friend" of the author, who met the successful cinema director Pedro Almodóvar at the beginning of his career and dismissed his offer to take part in the film (*Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*) that would make him famous. The story is inserted to establish the role of chance in the construction of identity: were Mónica to have accepted his offer, would she have become a successful actress such as Victoria Abril, or would she now be forgotten, like other women who appeared in Almodóvar's early films? Had she chosen to accept this offer, would her decision, the narrator wonders, have led to:

el [final] feliz, en el que Mónica acaba por convertirse en una estrella de prestigio internacional, o el no tan feliz, en el que acepta el papel e, inmersa en los oropeles y falsos relumbrones de la modernidad, y sin la madurez suficiente para afrontar según qué retos [...] acaba heroinómana? (2007:11)

What "Lucía Etxebarria", the narrator, chooses to highlight about Mónica's story, is not so much the "fixity" of her present identity ("Mónica a día de hoy tiene un trabajo razonablemente bien pagado, una relación estable, ningún problema de adicción y la seguridad de que está viviendo la vida que eligió", 2007: 11), but how "unfixed" was the trajectory that brought her to this point.

This introductory section takes the form of a prologue, establishing that *Cosmofobia* will be made up of interlocking stories that are

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4 | See Ignacio Echevarría, "Otra vez Nada", *El País*, 21st February 1998; Vicente Verdú, "La creación sin posteridad", *El País*, 23rd April 1995; and Akiko Tsuchiya. "Gender, Sexuality, and the Literary Market in Spain at the End of the Millennium", in Ferrán, Ofelia and Kathleen M. Glenn (eds.): *Women's Narrative and Film in Twentieth-Century Spain*. New York: Routledge, 2002, 238-55, among many others.

composed of eighteen chapters, each focusing on one or more characters. With the exception of 'Las oportunidades perdidas', which is a personal letter from one of the characters (Héctor) to another character (Diana), all follow one of the two following structures:

- An omniscient narrator called "Lucía Etxebarria" focuses on one or more characters and tells their stories.
- A character tells their story to a silent interviewer ("Lucía Etxebarria") who, we assume, is the narrator gathering information for a novel. This implied narration from the character's viewpoint often telling the story of another character, which is in some way related to the chapter's protagonist.

Both of these narrative techniques allow Etxebarria to represent a multiplicity of perspectives, giving voice to the wide range of subjectivities that compose the portrayal of the society in *Cosmofobia*. In the first case, the omniscient narrator "Lucía Etxebarria" interprets for the reader the thoughts, feelings, and stories experienced by each character. In the second case, the silence of "Lucía Etxebarria", the interviewer who is gathering information for a novel, allows the characters to tell their own story, and as all three have suffered some form of abuse, Spivak's approach to the subaltern is a useful theoretical frame from which to consider the political implications of this construction of anxious and self-doubting literary personae.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of the subaltern suggests that, while providing characters with the possibility of unveiling their repressed story may be positive, the breaking of their silence is only possible when these marginalised characters speak for themselves (Spivak, 1988: 271-313). As a Spanish-born author, Etxebarria can only be regarded as a subaltern in the sense that female authors have entered the canon so recently. As the literary canon has traditionally been written by male authors, Etxebarria feels that for centuries, women readers have lacked the opportunity to see their experiences portrayed in fiction: "Hasta hace muy poco la experiencia de la mujer, de la mujer como paria en un sistema patriarcal, se ha mantenido invisible en el arte" (2000: 110). According to Etxebarria, the need for recognition is the driving force behind the reader's enjoyment of fiction, and she believes that all readers "nos acercamos a los libros, a las películas, a los poemas o a las canciones con la esperanza de ver reflejadas nuestras experiencias específicas y encontrar modelos a partir de los cuales afirmarnos en nuestra identidad" (Etxebarria 2000: 107). Indeed, Etxebarria's championing of 'women's writing' is linked to the appreciation that literature is a two-way process of identification between the reader and the writer. By fictionalising the experiences of a series of female subaltern characters, and by

interpreting her characters' thoughts through the persona of her narrator, "Lucía Etxebarria", and by allowing her characters to speak to her silent interviewer persona, she addresses the problems of alterity and identity in contemporary Spain.

The novel's provocative title is immediately reinforced by an epigraph citing the *Urban Dictionary* definition of the term *cosmophobia* as: "A noun (Psych.). Morbid dread of the cosmos and realising one's true place in it". The 'cosmos' in *Cosmofobia* is made up of a considerable number of characters, who—in spite of, and because of, their differences—contribute to the portrayal of a heterogeneous, pluralistic society. Apart from sharing the Spanish language, in some cases as their mother tongue and in others as their second language, what these characters have in common is the fact that their stories, and therefore their identities, are interrelated. So entangled is this interrelation that no characters can be entirely defined without taking into account their relationship to the rest of the characters. This is, of course, a familiar aspect of characterisation and plot development, but what Etxebarria highlights is the provisional nature of her characters' interrelationship with one another.

2. 'Los molinos de viento': testimonial subjectivities

With a view to simplifying, for the reader, the complex relationships between the multiple narrators of *Cosmofobia*, Etxebarria includes, in the *Dramatis Personae* provided at the end of the novel, a description of each character that is qualified with perfunctory reference to other characters in a way that appears to highlight the fragility of their interconnection. The characters in 'Los molinos del viento', who will be used as a case study in this section, are described as:

Cristina (Cris): Anoréxica. Novia de Mónica. Paciente de Isaac en el grupo de terapia 'Las Positivas' [...]

Esther: Hermana de Silvio, el novio de Susana. Asiste al grupo de terapia 'Las Positivas', que dirige Isaac [...]

Amina: Hermana mayor de Salim. Fue asistente de Yamal y Miriam. Vecina de la casa de Sonia, La Chunga [...] (2007: 380)

These three female characters are: a first-generation, heterosexual, married woman; a lesbian; and a first-generation Spaniard who is still treated as an immigrant. Esther is a twenty-seven year old woman who is affected by her poor relationship with her family of origin: "Soy la menor de cuatro hermanos [...] no sé casi nada de sus vidas y ellos saben menos de la mía" (2007: 153-154). The fragility of these family ties finally broke with her father's death: "Hace un año se murió mi padre y vino el cuento de la herencia [...] Y nos enteramos de que se lo había dejado todo al chico [...] Yo llamé entonces a una abogada que me dijo [...] que a mí me correspondía una parte legítima [...] E

impugné. Y se armó la gorda” (2007: 156). Esther’s attempt to fight her family’s traditional and Catholic traditions which privileged her brother has resulted in psychological crisis: “Desde que murió mi padre yo me empecé a sentir mal [...] Ataques de ansiedad, insomnio, pesadillas [...] el patrón bulimia-anorexia del que en el Centro tanto se habla y que sufrimos todas...” (2007: 157-158)

Cristina is a twenty-eight year-old anorexic who seems to have replaced her distant father (“Mi padre nunca en su vida me ha pegado, jamás. ¿Cómo iba a hacerlo si nunca estaba?”, 2007: 135) with a distant girlfriend (“Yo a Mónica no le tengo miedo, claro, pero la veo lejana, distante, inalcanzable a veces, y eso era lo que sentía con mi padre”, 2007: 136). The main reason for her alienation, however, seems to be her tyrannical and critical, although also dependent, mother: “Mi madre me llama más o menos cada día para quejarse de lo sola que está y de lo mal que la trata mi padre [...] No le gusta mi ropa, no le gusta mi casa, ni mi novia, ni mi vida, ni el modo en que trato a los demás. No le gusta que esté tan delgada y no le gusta que sea lesbiana” (2007: 137-138). The emotional control her mother exerts over her, and the complexity of her affective relationships makes her feel as if she only exists through the opinions of others, and she reacts to this by controlling the “boundaries” of her own body (and therefore the response of others to her) rigidly, which appears to be very in tune with the wider variant meanings that Rita Felski ascribes to different beauty phenomena:

The trajectory of feminist work on beauty has shown a distinct (though far from unanimous) shift from the rhetoric of victimization and oppression to an alternative language of empowerment and resistance [...] what once spoke of female subjugation is being reinterpreted as a site of real, if constrained, female agency. Such acts of redescription allow us to see that cultural phenomena may have widely variant meanings, that the politics of aesthetics is far from being predetermined or given in advance. (Felski, 2006: 280-281)

However, Cristina’s failed attempt to take control of a frustrating and sad situation by controlling her body and weight has resulted in a grave and dangerous illness that can only make her feel more oppressed. As she does not feel valued, she has lost sight of an inner sense of her own subjectivity, except insofar as she experiences this as “lacking”: “[A] mi hermano no le intereso [...] Y a mi padre le intereso menos [...] Llevo tanto tiempo pensando en los demás que me he olvidado de lo que yo soy” (2007: 139).

Amina’s cultural background is Moroccan. Although born in Spain, she is still regarded by others as an immigrant and, as such, is subject to constant assumptions about her identity. However, Etxebarria chose to begin the narration of her story by confounding the readers’ potential prejudices, and expectations. Having been introduced to her

as a young woman whose previous partner was abusive, when Amina takes control of her own narrative, she draws immediate attention to the fact that she was not constructed by the Muslim norms in the way the reader might have expected, and that she chose to have a relationship with her violent ex-partner Karim: “Supongo que usted sabe que a muchas chicas marroquíes las familias las casan con un chico al que ellas no conocen, que son arreglos entre familias. Pero en mi caso no fue así. A Karim lo elegí yo. Es verdad que mis padres estaban encantados, pero nunca me lo impusieron, qué va” (2007: 142). As a result of her mistreatment by Karim (“sabía que no iba a ser feliz; porque me gritaba y me gritaba y me gritaba”, 2007: 152), and the lack of family support she experienced when she decided to cancel their wedding (“Y el padre de Amina le dice que se tiene que casar [...] que si ella deshace el compromiso atrae la deshonra sobre toda la familia. Llegó a pegarla y todo...mucho, por lo visto”, 2007: 153), Amina had joined the neighbourhood’s therapy group, the site that links the three characters in this chapter “Porque estaba asustada, porque tenía miedo, porque estaba amenazada” (2007: 153).

The chapter heading, ‘Los molinos de viento’, highlights, with reference to *Don Quixote*, the instability of subjectivity, the notion that identity is constructed out of some sort of collision between fantasy and reality, fiction and fact. These comments establish the identity of each character as subject to that of others, reinforcing the construction of identity in *Cosmofobia* as relational and unfixed. As we have previously noted, *Cosmofobia* is a novel about the so-called “melting pot” of modern Spanish society, and these three female characters are, in some way, representative of a failure of what Louis Althusser would call “interpellation”⁵.

This term seeks to understand the way ideology functions in society. So pervasive is ideology in its constitution of subjects that it forms our very reality, and therefore cultural ideas seem to us as “obvious”. We wrongly believe that our culture’s values are our own, when in reality, and through the consensual and almost invisible process of “interpellation”, we simply encounter and internalize these ideologies, that is, our attitudes towards gender, class, and race. Hence, ideologies play a pivotal double role: firstly, they construct our identities; and secondly, they give us a specific place in society. A fully *interpellated* individual is someone who has been successfully brought into accepting a certain role, or certain cultural values willingly.

However, this is not the case in ‘Los molinos de viento’. None of the female characters studied conforms easily to the values of traditional, pre-Transition Spanish society. They have not been successfully *interpellated* and, as a result, they all attend group counselling and

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5 | In his work *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1969), Louis Althusser defines ‘interpellation’ as the process by which subjects recognise themselves to belong to a particular identity or society.

all feel adrift in the cosmopolitan, post-Transition society in which they find themselves. This makes them particularly representative of the 'phobia' the novel's title highlights: negative reaction from their families has instilled a diminished sense of self-worth, which has exacerbated their fear of the multiple, and perhaps equally negative, reactions of the wider society they now live in. The novel's title sums up the fear of not being able to establish a place for themselves in the modern Spanish society.

'Los molinos de viento' conforms to the testimonial format mentioned in the previous section, whereby a character is introduced, or developed, by the way they speak to their silent interviewer, "Lucía Etxebarria", a novelist who is said to be conducting interviews to gather information for her next novel. One character begins by narrating another character's story from her own viewpoint, then that character takes up the story to narrate her own experience. By the time the circle has been completed, the three characters have been given the chance to express their own views, and in this way Etxebarria builds up her fictional narrative in the form of a pseudo-oral history of marginalised characters. These characters' lack of self-worth is suggested by their tendency to focus in their narratives on others, rather than on themselves, as if their own subjectivity was irrelevant, or could only be expressed by mirroring others. A minimum of two viewpoints is involved in the construction of the stories about these characters, emphasising the notion that permeates the novel that the more global contemporary society becomes, the greater the fear of losing a sense of inner subjectivity, and the greater the blurring of the boundaries of the self. The interview format represents subjectivity as fragile and fluctuating, and serves to illustrate that, even when identity in *Cosmofobia* is global and relational, it is still a product of the negotiation between the private self and the public perception of the self.

In her article "Las descaradas chicas Etxebarria", María Bengoa outlines some of the most characteristic aspects of Etxebarria's narrative. She affirms that

Lucía Etxebarria hace una literatura a medio camino entre la sociología y la escritura cinematográfica: producto de su tiempo, ágil, ligera, visual y efectista. Sus logros proceden de su parentesco con la cultura audiovisual y se sirven de un lenguaje llano que pone en escena modelos propios de un videoclip. Apenas hay un esfuerzo de profundizar en el dramatismo de los personajes. Ahora bien, esto no quiere decir que la autora practique una literatura gratuita: siempre deja constancia de su visión feminista y denuncia a través de una estética de anuncio publicitario lo que no le gusta del mundo, lo que a sus ojos no es como debería ser. (Bengoa, 1999: 56)

Similarly agile descriptions, straightforward urban language,

and quick narrative rhythm appear in the construction of female subjectivity in 'Los molinos de viento'. Here, the cinematographical portrayals referred by Bengoa are constructed in a multiperspectival, relational way. Bengoa is correct in noting that "apenas hay un esfuerzo de profundizar en el dramatismo de los personajes", an aspect of Etxebarria's approach to the experience of postmodernity. The brief narration of each character that would appear to conform with the lack of interest in "going deeper" that Begoa notes, is an aspect of a carefully constructed narrative of different voices, and a further layer of complexity to these brief narratives is provided by a second narration of that character from a different point of view.

The female characters used as a case study in this section are women who find themselves in some way placed in a situation of inferiority, who have been mistreated in a variety of ways. In her essay "Feminist, female, feminine", Toril Moi explains how a clear grasp of the differences between these three terms is crucial in understanding what the fundamental political and theoretical implications of contemporary feminist criticism really are. The word "feminist" implies a political position in line with the objectives of the new women's movement that emerged in the 1960s. It is a long established practice among many feminists to use the term "feminine" in order to refer to an imposed sexual and behavioural pattern, as opposed to "female", which is reserved for a nature usage. Thus, whereas all women are "female" (sex), they are not necessarily "feminist" (political position) or "feminine" (social construct). The distinction between these three terms must be taken into account in my analysis of three characters whose subjectivity is directly affected by their biological status as female.

The lives of the three protagonists of 'Los molinos de viento', Esther, Cristina, and Amina, are entangled as they live in the same neighbourhood and attend the same therapy group. Through the passing of their stories onto the reader, the reader becomes a silent therapist listening to these stories, which establishes a very intimate form of communication with the reader. Moving from the small audience of participants in the therapy group to whom the stories are narrated to the wider audience of Etxebarria's readership, their stories are conveyed in a two-step, two-viewpoint fashion. Cristina still suffers from the effects of anorexia and maternal abuse, Esther's dysfunctional family has left her with a permanent feeling of anxiety, and Amina's integration problems are aggravated by the mistreatment exerted by her former fiancé. It therefore seems particularly appropriate to apply Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern theory when considering the construction of the negotiation of their subjectivity that Etxebarria, although not a subaltern herself, employs in her attempt to form a fictional space for her far more marginalised characters.

Spivak is a polifacetic and prolific author, best known for her theories of postcolonial counter-discourse, and in particular her theorising of the subaltern, which brought her international fame. The term subaltern was first coined in a non-military sense by the Marxist Antonio Gramsci, but Spivak took it much further to include a more flexible use of the term. This flexibility allows the inclusion of social categories and social struggles such as women's movements or post-colonial movements, which do not usually fit under the stricter Gramscian terms of class struggle. In her use of the term post-colonial, Spivak includes a wide range of positions that do not appear to be pre-defined in mainstream political discourses. Although her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) refers to the subaltern subject in post-colonial India, her theory is also applicable to abused and mistreated women in contemporary Spain. In this sense, Spivak's denunciation of the silencing of numerous examples of subaltern resistance in India can be extended to the silencing of the suffering of abused women and immigrants in Spain. This omission is even more acute in the case of women immigrants such as Amina. As Spivak asserts, "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak" (1988: 307). It would be perhaps logical to expect that every attempt, by writers such as Etxebarria, to find a fictional space to explore the voices of marginalised characters such as Esther, Cristina, and Amina, would fail in the attempt. Spivak warns against the ethical risks at stake when privileged Western intellectuals, although often driven by well-intentioned purposes, speak on behalf of oppressed groups.

Perhaps in an unconscious attempt to avoid the pitfalls Spivak warns against, Etxebarria's approach privileges the voices of the multiple, marginalised characters through the testimony to the silent interlocutor. 'Los molinos de viento' opens up with Esther acknowledging the presence of a silent interviewer who will use her testimony in a book about the neighbourhood: "Verá usted, yo creo que para su libro no le voy a servir de nada. Porque está usted escribiendo un libro sobre el barrio, ¿no?" (2007: 130). Esther, born in Spain, heterosexual, happily married, and the mother of a child, defines herself as a "very normal" person: "Mi vida es muy normal, o sea, que maltratada yo no soy y anoréxica tampoco, así que no sé por qué Isaac le ha dado a usted mi número..." (2007: 130). Esther is the character who best fits white heteronormativity in Spanish society, and yet paradoxically she begins her narrative by establishing that her voice is irrelevant. Paradoxically, Esther has no reason to struggle to "fit in" to contemporary society and yet she expresses her own "normativity" as a lack of self-worth. Instead of commencing by telling her own story, Esther focuses on Cristina's family and health problems, and in this way draws attention to the fact that she has modelled her persona in accordance with the traditional, self-sacrificial model of Spanish maternity. Addressing more contemporary feminine "ideals",

Cristina is said by Esther to look like a model (“Porque a mí Cristina nunca me ha parecido desnutrida. Me parece una modelo” 2007: 130). This comment draws attention to the burden placed on women (whether Spanish-born or not) to control the “boundaries” of their physical body to conform to model images of women whose bodies might be confused with the bodies of anorexics. This comment also highlights the extent to which female subjectivity is bound up with the body. Esther defines as “like a model” the appearance of somebody who suffers a life-threatening illness, which Cristina tends to hide, as Esther notes, behind baggy clothes. This is the illness that Cristina herself considers as vital to her sense of her own subjectivity. Her own narrative, when her character takes over from Esther focuses immediately on her health: (“Soy anoréxica desde los catorce años y, en algunas temporadas, también bulímica. Es decir, que me defino por eso más que por ninguna otra cosa”, 2007: 133). Cristina’s subjectivity is also defined by her sexuality. She is a lesbian and therefore an outsider to traditional Spanish heteronormative society. The construction of her identity, for the reader, is provided both by Esther’s account of her external perception of her, followed by Cristina subsequent testimony, that “fills out” this external perception with more complex insights into her family background and her own feelings. In the more globalised Spanish society represented in *Cosmofobia*, this establishes the balancing act that is Cristina’s fragile identity, and the way that, more generally, the novel explores the fear of the cosmos that threatens the already fragile sense of subjectivity of characters like Cristina:

Llevo tanto tiempo pensando en los demás que me he olvidado de lo que yo soy. Nos pasa a todas las del grupo, todas nosotras vemos con meridiana claridad la realidad de los que nos rodean pero no sabemos mirar para nuestros cuerpos. Es como si tuviéramos miopía selectiva [...] En este caos informe, aterrador, que es el resto de la existencia. (2007: 139-140)

After Cristina’s conclusion of her testimony, Etxebarria returns to Esther’s voice to introduce Amina’s story: “Sí, a Amina también la conocí en el Centro, en el grupo [...] Yo la historia me la sé de memoria” (2007: 140). Once again, Esther’s closeness to the Spanish normative society either allows, or restricts her to transmit the story of another character whose voice is less likely to be heard by the society to which Esther conforms with a degree of comfortable self-abnegation. Although Amina was born in Spain, she maintains extremely strong ties with the Moroccan culture, her culture of origin. These ties are seen by Amina as something less chosen than inevitable: “Yo fui al colegio aquí, en España, y al instituto después, y ya conocía la cultura española y mis derechos [...] Pero también sabía que no me casaría con un español, porque aquí de mestizaje nada” (2007: 142); “Porque yo no vivo en Marruecos, pero como

si viviera, yo con un español no me voy a casar” (2007: 147). She therefore assumes that a great part of her identity has been imposed on her by societal and family expectations, as she explains in her long testimony, which is preceded by Esther’s introduction of her case, and finally wrapped up by Esther’s conclusion.

The chapter concludes with Esther’s own testimony. Reflecting her more comfortable assimilation within contemporary Spanish society, perhaps, Esther is the only character in this chapter who narrates her own story without prior discussion of her by another character. Although her own lack of self-worth was established from the outset, there are many different forms of the “subaltern”, and many different degrees of marginalisation. Even Esther, as a Spanish-born woman, assumes that others are more interesting than her, both because she regards herself as ‘belonging’, and because part of that belonging means adopting a self-sacrificing persona. However, in a vindication of the relative nature of identity, the opening of her own narration reveals that, in order to tell her identity, she has had to acknowledge her relationship to both Cristina and Amina: “Y ahora viene mi historia, claro, que es a lo que íbamos desde el principio. A ver, me llamo Esther, tengo diecisiete años, estoy casada, tengo un niño pequeño, quiero a mi marido, o eso creo. Me considero una persona normal, ¿entiende?” (2007: 153). As this emphatic and at the same time rather tentative account reveals, Esther is aware of herself as “Spanish” and as “normal” in relation to the diverse nationalities and cultural backgrounds of the women she meets at the group, but at the same time the qualifying “¿entiende?” leaves room for some doubt. This incomplete and fluid understanding of her own identity appears to be a result of the fact that in Spain, as Isabel Santaolalla explains, “The new democracy turned its back on the previous monolithic notion of Spanishness and sought to replace it with renewed versions that could acknowledge internal differences, as well as reconstitute external allegiances and identifications” (2003: 44). Thus, Esther considers herself “normal”, in a Madrilenian *barrio* where normality is being re-structured, becoming more provisional as Spain becomes more multicultural. The characters are aware of themselves as individuals while they are at the same time aware of themselves as part of an on-going multiple narrative. The fact that they all are speaking into a microphone provided by the silent interlocutor (who is “Lucía Etxebarria”), and in an unidentified location adds to the sense of these characters ‘floating’ in a new and “unknown” contemporary society, their voices conjuring up the “cosmofobia” of the title via Etxebarria’s literary construction of contemporary society in Lavapiés, in the form of a “cosmofonía” of self-asserting and self-doubting recorded voices:

Mi madre dice que me lo invento, que ella nunca tomó eso, pero yo recuerdo muy bien que yo le robaba las pastillas a mi madre [...] (2007:

Para mi familia soy una egoísta, pero mi marido dice que soy muy generosa. Yo pienso que mi hermano está loco, pero mi madre no lo cree así. Supongo que porque la vida depende del cristal con el que se mira [...] También es cierto que cada uno puede ser en un mismo día personas completamente distintas; depende de con quién estemos tratando. (2007: 159)

In this way, *Cosmofobia*, introduced by and partially narrated by “Lucía Etxebarria” presents subjectivity as a process of constant negotiation between the individual and the environment in the light of the increasing importance of migration and multiculturalism in Spanish society. This analysis of the construction of female subjectivity in the novel has paid particular attention to the way the expression of a unique individuality implied by the confessional and the testimonial mode conflicts with and/or corresponds to the representation of the intersubjective elements of women’s experience conveyed in the characters’ comments on others and on their entangled relationships. The conclusion drawn is that this approach to female characterisation is central to the aim in this novel to give voice to the multiple subjectivities that make up modern Spanish society. Reflecting dramatic and recent changes to the ethnic mix of Spanish society, the novel fictionalises the lives of a number of inhabitants of the *madrileño* quarter of Lavapiés, its polemical title establishing from the outset that this lively and direct portrayal of an increasingly plural society also reveals a sense of *cosmophobia*, the fear that as the boundaries of our immediate world become more global, the boundaries involved in the construction of a sense of inner subjectivity may appear to become more fragile.

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