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## Narrating Immigration, Gendered Spaces, and Transnational Feminism in Lucía Etxebarria's *Cosmofobia* (2007)

Maryanne L. Leone, Assumption College

Is it possible for a Spanish author to narrate immigration without speaking for immigrants and thereby colonizing their voices, perspectives, and positions? As part of the hegemonic national body, authors of Spanish origin occupy a problematical position when constructing narratives about immigration to the Peninsula. Tabea Alexa Linhard has argued that narratives that “consist of complex and somewhat messy layers of representation” (401) exemplify ethical literary responses to immigration, in contrast to dualistic characterizations of immigrants and Spaniards, “reified immigrant experiences” (403), or “an idealized or desired multiculturalism or hybridity as a solution” (403). She observes that Lucía Etxebarria’s “Sintierra,” narrated from the perspective of a Sauhari woman, presents a “complete lack of layers [...] [and] seamlessly appropriates the voice of this young girl without questioning what such a gesture might imply” (411).<sup>1</sup> In turn, this article examines a subsequent Etxebarria narrative on the subject of immigration and argues that the 2007 *Cosmofobia* attends to the issues with which Linhard rightly found fault in the author’s earlier narrative and in many Spanish authors’ immigrant tales. *Cosmofobia* presents instead a multilayered, nuanced representation of Spain’s evolving ethnic composition that engages self-consciously with the issue of authoring, narrating, and representing the story of individuals and groups of ethnic minority and directly addresses discourses of race and gender. *Cosmofobia* places particular emphasis on women’s voices, where concerns common to their gendered experience emerge as points

of mutual understanding and posit the potential for transnational feminist collaboration in a multicultural environment in which ethnic enclaves persist.<sup>2</sup>

Etxebarria states in the introduction that the text we are about to read does not conform to literary conventions. This challenge to convention, however, *very much* conforms to the Etxebarria public and authorial persona that has sparked controversy and that has provoked strong sentiments on the value, positive and negative, of her writing. Christine Henseler has examined critical reception of her work, her strategies of auto-promotion, conflictive relationship with the publishing industry, and creation of a place for herself among the writers of her generation and the reading public. Calling attention to women’s place in the cultural establishment, Silvia Bermúdez also suggests the merit of the author’s dialogue with literary production, consumer culture, and gender, and she proposes that the anxiety that Etxebarria causes has more to do with the taboo of talking about the business of producing and selling literature than about sex.

Focusing on sexual relations, Carmen de Urioste argues that in Etxebarria’s first two novels, *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1997) and *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998), the author pioneered for Spanish narrative female homoerotic desire that subverts heterosexual normativity and an oppositional understanding of identity. Kathryn Everly emphasizes as well a model in *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* for lesbian relationships that transgresses dual boundaries, and she observes the representation of women’s identity

as process rather than physical corporeality (“Mujer y amor lesbiano”). Also focusing on the body in the same novel, Jessica Folkart suggests that the narrative act serves to overcome isolation and pain in a social environment without boundaries and create a female subject position that exists in a productive dialogic relationship to others. Sandra Schumm concurs that Etxebarria’s literature offers positive new models in her study of the mother-daughter relationship in *Un milagro en equilibrio* (2004) and Verónica Tienza-Sánchez studies empowered images of women in *Beatriz* and *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* (2001). Akiko Tsuchiya has argued, however, that although the author self-identifies as a feminist writer, her works turn the gendered and sexual strictures she critiques into commodities with mass appeal, and she fails to suggest satisfactory models for women.

In his study of social and narrative networks in *Cosmofobia* and *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso* (2010), Luis Prádanos concludes that Etxebarria’s works capture multicultural interdependence in Spain’s global, postmodern society yet fail to resist neoliberal globalization and consumerism. Certainly one might accuse the author of attending to the global mass market, detracting attention from her literary work, and seeking the vanguard topic of the moment (homoeroticism, drug use, domestic abuse, immigration, and social networks are some examples), yet I concur with critics who have argued that her literature brings a critical eye to the historical and social conditions of her time and that her experimentation with textual strategies merit critical attention.<sup>3</sup> For its enmeshed layers, conscious authorial presence, and feminist concerns, Etxebarria’s *Cosmofobia* warrants consideration as an ethical literary response to Spain’s multiethnic society.

Etxebarria sets the novel in contemporary Madrid, where the uneven effects of neoliberal capitalism are seen in the migration of people to this European city from all areas of the globe. Paradoxically, as Spain joined the

European Union and brandished its official European identity, that same European status and Spain’s burgeoning global economy attracted unprecedented immigration until the worldwide financial crash and the subsequent implosion of the Spanish real estate market led this trend to reverse in 2011. Etxebarria’s *Cosmofobia* outlines not only disparity in the global economy and the uprooting of people from their home societies, but also the potential of globalization to forge new and productive connections among people of different habitus, or social conceptions of place.

In *Cosmofobia*, Etxebarria interweaves an intricate web of some one hundred and thirty-five characters of diverse backgrounds with a direct or indirect connection to the Madrid neighborhood of Lavapiés, a narrative structure Prádanos has termed “narrativa sistémica” (n.p.).<sup>4</sup> The seven degrees of separation-type network creates the sensation that one is getting to know a considerable swath of the neighborhood’s residents and, if the reader is a contemporary living in Madrid, perhaps even some of the characters. In sharp contrast to the traditional association of this neighborhood with a *castizo* identity that originated in the late nineteenth century and is celebrated with dance, *zarzuela* music, and *chulapo* dress on the festival of Madrid’s patron San Isidro, Etxebarria’s narration highlights the multicultural composition of Lavapiés in twenty-first century Spain.<sup>5</sup> The introductory section of the novel describes a community center that serves primarily immigrants in “la Comunidad de Madrid” (12), in the neighborhood later identified as Lavapiés. “El Caserón” offers classes in Spanish as a second language, employment counseling, explanation of immigrants’ rights and requirements for residency, and support groups for women, while its annex “La Casita” organizes evening activities for “niños derivados de Servicios Sociales” (12). Interethnic conflicts are patent in the neighborhood, as punctuated in the observation by Claudia, a social worker at “La Casita,” and others that “el barrio es multicultural, no intercultural

[...] las comunidades se toleran, pero no se mezclan, los límites se respetan" (27). *Cosmofobia* explores the limits of these ethnic borders, where friction occurs yet also where convergence attenuates the perceived rigidity of difference.<sup>6</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" and Doreen Massey's work on the gendered implications of place elucidate Etxebarria's creation of shared urban spaces in *Cosmofobia* and her contribution to feminist goals that traverse ethnic borders. The notion of habitus denominates organizing structures of human behavior by which people act based on past experiences and their power relative to others; in Bourdieu's words, "a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (*The Logic of Practice*, 53). Shared histories and conditions produce consensus in practices, though not consciously recognized as norms, at the same time inequities in social power differentiate people's sense of what is and is not possible (64). Bourdieu emphasizes the durability of habitus, yet when asked if the concept describes stable societies only or if it also applies to "contemporary western cities" and our "fast-changing world," he replies affirmatively ("Habitus," 27). People inhabit dynamic social environments, the "field," in which differences in dispositions generate conflict and also may generate change in structures of behavior (31-32). This observation is especially relevant to contemporary Spain, where in the last few decades a diversity of people have arrived with backgrounds of distinct individual and collective experiences that have shaped behavioral structures and expectations. Uneven social power influences the conditions, economic and otherwise, in which immigrant and Spanish populations act and live, generally favoring the latter, with conflicts in habitus producing greater social tension yet also potential for change.<sup>7</sup>

Consistent with Bourdieu's argument that social interactions reflect the internalization of expected practices and pos-

sible outcomes, Massey emphasizes that "the geographical stretching out of social relations" in this era of "time-space compression," or globalization, "forces us to recognize our interconnectedness" (122). Nonetheless, the "power geometry" (149) in this global spatial and social reorganization presents uneven, differentiated relationships within and with a place. The issue is not who migrates, but rather the power that one has in migration: "some initiate flow and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (149). Particularly acute in globalization, the sharing of social and political space with peoples considered of another place has incited nostalgia for a perceived homogenous place that never was, assertions of local or national uniqueness, and protectionist policies (151). In Spain, some signs of this negative perception of displacement include various cycles of reformation of the country's immigration law, increased border policing, and both open and (partially) concealed racist sentiment. Massey disputes the dominant binary association of space with stagnancy and time with dynamism, female and male respectively. Instead, she argues, places are open, porous "geographies," multiple and in flux, that connect seemingly disparate locations and groups, and in which gender, ethnicity, economic status, and age, among other factors, influence people's experience and conception of place (121, 255-58).

Etxebarria presents a "gendered geography" (Massey 181) in *Cosmofobia*, in which "its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular *constellation* of social relations" (Massey 154, emphasis added). The meaning of space and social power fluctuate in Etxebarria's Lavapiés and broader Madrid in relation to the characters that inhabit or move through a place, and their interactions with each other. Moreover, Etxebarria's novel suggests that this gendered and social conception of place may alleviate the contemporary experience of "Cosmofobia" as defined in the

epigram: “A noun (Psych.) Morbid dread of the cosmos and realising ones [sic] true place in it” (n.p.). Although the characters only occasionally recognize interethnic connections and often stake a defensive position *vis-à-vis* the perceived other, constellations of shared experiences emerge to suggest a flexible understanding of community for a multicultural, global Spain. The amalgamation of voices and stories in Etxebarria’s narrative, particularly of women, reveal fissures in the belief that the other is completely different. Similar to Etxebarria’s *Una historia de amor como otra cualquiera* (2003), feminist concerns in *Cosmofobia* textually unite women who otherwise might seem to have little in common and, in this more recent text, create connections across the seemingly impervious racial barriers at the *ludoteca*, on the playground, in the Lavapiés neighborhood, and in the capital city. Uneven economic and social power in global Spain is just one of a multitude of overlapping contemporary concerns that traverse the text, included among them domestic violence, single motherhood, pressure on women to conform to impossible body types, and superficial interpersonal relations. Immigration does not become the issue or problem under analysis, but rather part of a host of contemporary social issues that many of the characters share thus suggesting the complexity and messiness that Linhard argues is critical for an ethical textual representation of global Spain.

*Cosmofobia* unites the politics of space with transnational feminism’s attention to social justice concerns that arise from globalization and the potential for collaborations across national borders to improve conditions for women. Etxebarria self-critically approaches voice, authorship, representation, subalternity, and uneven power geometries in feminist partnerships.<sup>8</sup> The blurring of generic boundaries and multiplicity of narrative voices in *Cosmofobia* place in doubt the verisimilitude of the text, disperse the power of storytelling, and thus mitigate the colonizing potential of a Spaniard authoring and narrating immigrant experiences. Etxebarria begins *Cosmofobia* with a “Nota

de la autora” in which she echoes a statement typically made in films based on real stories, though also a convention in novels: characters and situations are fictional, however real people, testimonials, and research serve as the basis for the text. “Esta es una obra de ficción” (n.p.), Etxebarria confirms. Nonetheless, references to actual people throughout the text not only blur genres but also highlight the author’s presence, in particular because the Etxebarria that the real author crafts recounts her personal relationship with several of the characters, including some well-known figures.

The alphabetical listing of “Dramatis Personae” at the end of the narration illustrates this vacillation between the fictional text and the real world of Madrid and Lavapiés. In the list we find film director Pedro Almodóvar and painters Alfredo Álvarez Plágaro and Robert Rauschenberg, figures associated with Madrid and international culture of the 1980s, alongside characters who are not well-known and thus more readily believable as fictional constructs. A case in point, Fátima, “niña que juega en el parque y va a la ludoteca” (372), is a prototype, as her popular Arab name suggests, yet this same name also negates absolute ethnic boundaries for its association with both the Muslim and Christian faiths, the daughter of Muhammad and the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Fátima, Portugal, so named Our Lady of Fátima. Claudia, “trabajadora social [y] supervisora de la ludoteca [...] su cantante favorita de todos los tiempos es María Dolores Pradera” (371) and Mónica, “novia de Cristina [...] Almodóvar le ofreció un papel en su primera película, que ella rechazó” (375), also demonstrate the ambiguity that Etxebarria creates between the fictional and non-fictional realms. Etxebarria, as narrator in the introductory chapter that follows the “Nota de la autora,” identifies Mónica as a personal friend and recounts a story that Mónica supposedly told her about an encounter with Almodóvar in a bar in Chueca in the early 1980s, during which he offered her the role of Bom in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*

*y otras chicas del montón*. The implied reader recognizes these cultural references and enters into the illusion that Etxebarria is telling a true story, until Etxebarria reminds us to be wary of assuming that the stories accurately represent reality. “Puede que la historia sea cierta o no” (10), she says of the encounter between Mónica and Almodóvar. Etxebarria plays with the novelistic expectations that she sets up to draw attention to ambiguity between fiction and reality, the author’s role in creating the text that we read, and unlimited perspectives on a story.<sup>9</sup> In this way, Etxebarria’s *Cosmofobia* differs from narratives in which Spanish authors leave unaddressed issues of authority, representation, and voice when writing collective and individual stories about immigrant experiences.

Etxebarria attends to the critique of post-colonial scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty that the perspectives of first-world feminists often have dominated projects that involve “Third World Women” and homogenize women’s experiences (17). While on the one hand Etxebarria’s novel presents similarities between Spanish women and women who have immigrated from so-called Third World and developing nations, her text self-consciously reflects on her own power as author and power variances among women who share similar concerns and occupy a shared space, yet differ in economic status, ethnicity, age, or other facets of identity. A key strategy that Etxebarria employs in *Cosmofobia* is a shifting narrative voice. Of the eighteen titled chapters plus the implied author’s untitled introduction, eleven have a heterodiegetic voice and nine have homodiegetic narrators, with one of the chapters switching among several different characters.<sup>10</sup> Reiteration traverses the narrative as well; a character will narrate his or her own story, or an outside narrative voice will tell of a character, and then another character will include the story of that character in his or her own narration, and so on, so that we learn of characters from diverse perspectives. These vacillating perspectives and multiple

versions of a story spread the narrating power among the web of characters in the geometry of Lavapiés, creating both tension and convergence among the perspectives in the field.

To illustrate, I will return to Etxebarria’s “friend” Mónica, who appears on multiple occasions. She is the object of the narrating author’s story, told in the introductory section, of Almodóvar offering Mónica a role in his first film. She also is a character in two different narrators’ narrations in the chapter “Los molinos de viento.” And finally, Mónica is the sole narrator of “El rastro de tus labios.” From her girlfriend and lover Cristina’s perspective, we learn that Mónica is reserved and distant and that she hypocritically encourages Cristina to eat but does not want her to gain weight. Mónica herself tells of desire, jealousy, and depression she experienced until recently because of a past relationship with Emma, a singer-songwriter who was her first female lover, and confides that in her relationship with Cristina, she feels wanted for the first time. The various angles from which the reader learns of this character signal a diverse experience of place and the instability of identity, in the way that Massey conceives of space. In this cacophony, no one voice is the authoritative speaker of another’s story and no one view is unequivocal. Etxebarria leads the reader to consider her text and its multiple versions of the characters’ stories, indefinite and subjective.

Although the text highlights multiple voices, this dispersion of narrative authority simultaneously is in tension with Etxebarria’s voice, which holds a key position as the narrator of the opening and closing sections, a listener and recorder of others’ stories, friend or acquaintance of some characters, witness, and recipient of second hand information. The narrating author voices her belonging and comfort in the habitus of Lavapiés and Madrid while the bookend narration and intervening presence throughout the novel evidences not only a strong ego but, more importantly for this study, resistance to losing control of her neighborhood and narrative



space. Referring to the impact of globalization on notions of space, Leonie Sandercock states:

The national issue of migration becomes a struggle which is played out at the level of the locality in terms of an experience of threat and loss, and the desire to reassert control over one's territory, one's spatial habitus. (208)

A sign of the insecurity that arises when local experience does not match the imagined community, Etxebarria expresses superiority along with racism and prejudice when describing the immigrant women she observes with their children at the small playground adjacent to the community center:

Hay madres marroquíes y egipcias con velo y *yilaba*, ecuatorianas con vaqueros ceñidísimos, senegalesas con túnicas estampadas, y alguna española—las menos—vestida con vaqueros de su talla. Eso de llevar pantalones dos tallas por debajo de la propia sólo se estila entre las sudamericanas, porque las españolas jamás lucirán con orgullo unos michelines y unas caderas amplias que para unas son *sexys* y, para otras, motivo de vergüenza. (12)

Slippages such as the previous example suggest that the implied author is unaware of her own “Western eyes.” Talpade Mohanty uses the term to characterize a “paternalistic attitude toward women in the Third World” (40) and the assumption by feminists in the first-world that all women of the third-world are “religious,” “traditional,” “backward,” and “ignorant,” yet sometimes revolutionary out of necessity. The Etxebarria figure's comment about South American women may aim, in its repetition of a commonly held view, to critique the stereotype. Or perhaps the narrating author is critiquing the self-view that she expressed earlier in the same chapter that she is more comfortable than most Spaniards with

immigrants in her shared social space. Yet the lack of irony in this passage and others suggests that Etxebarria may not be conscious of the “Western eyes” from which she also views women from non-Western countries. The narrating author's description of the women's dress reveals imperialist perspectives of superiority towards people of non-European nationalities and ignorance in Spanish society about the culture of the other. Everly points out, citing Henseler, that Etxebarria's writing and her self-presentation to the media and on her website send mixed signals about her feminism (“Textual Violence,” 134). In a similar vein, the cited passage on immigrant women's dress contradicts her self-presentation in *Cosmofobia* as a person without prejudices who fully accepts immigrants in Spanish society. Although the cited passage does not adhere fully to Talpade Mohanty's characterization of typical Western assumptions, Etxebarria's narration communicates a view of greater sophistication among Spanish women as compared to South Americans that reinforces the paternalistic stance that Talpade Mohanty condemns and that Etxebarria may mean to critique as well.

“Western eyes” and simplified notions of the other abound in *Cosmofobia* as characters of all ethnic backgrounds speak negatively about the other. One might argue, therefore, that the text perpetuates the stereotyped views that the characters express. In the novel's complex social network, however, points in common emerge from the chaos of seemingly disparate stories to complicate singular, Western-imposed notions of the “other” and contest the notion that the other is completely different. Greater similarities among individuals from distinct realms emerge than the characters themselves realize. Naming contributes to this effect.<sup>11</sup> The many different names emphasize individualized experiences and perspectives while also suggesting a broader social experience, in that one woman's story, while distinct, also speaks to the concerns of many women. The amalgamation of women's voices in *Cosmofobia* presents the

potential for transnational feminist solidarities to advance better conditions for women and ameliorate anxiety about social change in the habitus of contemporary Spanish society.

Etxebarria's liminal position in *Cosmofobia*, straddling the fictional world of the novel and the real-world referent that she actually inhabits, emphasizes from the narrative's start, borders and the significance of place in the construction of identity. Read favorably, the author as narrator makes the reader aware of her relation to the text, characters, and location she fictionalizes, which suggests that she recognizes the positions she occupies when engaging in global feminism. Assuming the narrative voice in the introductory chapter, the author emphasizes that she belongs to this urban, intercultural location, and that she orchestrates the tale we are about to read and thus what we will know of the characters, who approximate real individuals living in Madrid and Lavapiés. "Ahora, permítame que te hable de mi barrio" (11), the Etxebarria in the novel states before she describes the community center, and children and mothers in the neighborhood. By concluding the introduction with "Y como ya conoces el parque y La Casita, déjame que te lleve de la mano hasta allí" (14), the narrating author creates the sensation that she, the author, is physically leading the reader into the text and accompanying her throughout this narrative journey.<sup>12</sup> Her possession of the neighborhood, suggested by "mi barrio," points to the larger issue in this novel and in narratives that address immigration to Spain of who speaks and for whom. Etxebarria's auto-referentiality throughout the text presents a consciousness of her authorial position, absent in the majority of Spanish immigrant narratives, and suggests the intention to address this problematic situation.

At the same time, the narrating voice also presumes that a shared home location translates to *her* privileged access and knowledge about the other. The intimate tone that the implied author assumes by using the *tú* form and inviting the reader to follow her

into the neighborhood creates the impression that she is sharing a secret and extending access to an insider's view. Insofar as feelings of "insecurity" and "vulnerability" arise in this era of global migration when people seen as outside the national or local imaginary move in (Massey 151), the author's offer to hold the reader's hand suggests not only the attempt to foster intimacy but also an offer of protection to an apprehensive reader for whom this familiar neighborhood has been transformed into an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people. Apprehension is not limited to the reader however. Etxebarria's interwoven presence in the text and her self-appointed position as guide also evidence her trepidation about losing control in the neighborhood's social geometry despite the comfort she outwardly expresses with the ethnic transformation that global migration has brought to Lavapiés and by extension Spain.

Etxebarria's account of her relationship with the neighborhood children exemplifies the counter-hegemonic, critical viewpoint she presumes to embody, yet does not always fulfill. Etxebarria's playful dog joins in the soccer games at the playground next to "La Casita" and thus facilitates a relationship with the children. The dog and her daughter's spontaneous play with the Chinese, Pakistani, Moroccan, Bangladeshi, Ecuadorian, Colombian, Senegalese, and Nigerian children suggest the unfettered acceptance of the other that Etxebarria espouses, where ethnic differences do not shape advantages and disadvantages: "el chuchó no sabe de equipos y no juega a favor o en contra de unos u otros" (13). The observation that Etxebarria as narrator makes that "ningún padre pudiente inscribe a sus hijos en las listas de niños a cargo de Claudia, la supervisora de la ludoteca" (14) read against her daughter's occasional participation in the center's art activities is congruent with the author's pattern of positioning and promoting herself as a progressive voice, outside the boundaries of convention and inside the minority, be it sexual, gendered, or ethnic.



Nonetheless, Talpade Mohanty and other transnational feminists have critiqued presumptions of equity on the part of people from economically developed countries in alliances with people from developing ones. Although Etxebarria assumes an empathic posture, her narration makes clear from the novel's commencement that her subject position differs from her immigrant neighbors for as Massey explains, "different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections [of global migration]" (149). The narrating author situates her family inside Lavapiés, yet alludes to the greater possibility that she and her daughter possess to move in and out of this social space in contrast to the immigrant characters' immobility. She distinguishes her daughter's blond hair from the dark-hair and complexion of the immigrant children and her daughter's voluntary presence from the children whose family situation requires their daily attendance at the center: "no se la considera parte «oficial» del grupo" (14). These differences highlight the error of assuming that Etxebarria's Lavapiés is the same as her immigrant neighbors' Lavapiés. The narration suggests that economic status, nationality, ethnicity, gender, educational level and other social factors influence the mobility in and experience of a place.

Etxebarria posits a diminution of boundaries between herself and the children, facilitated not only by her dog but also by learning the children's names; however, she also alludes to the partial view of the friendship that she imagines:

La bolsa de chuches la compro a dos euros en el Día y trae gominolas o piruletas en cantidad suficiente para que ningún niño o niña se quede sin la suya [...]. Con el tiempo me hice amiga de ese grupo y me aprendí los nombres de todos los futbolistas. (13)

This seemingly innocuous description of her interaction with the children reveals uneven power in the social relation that unfolds in

the park. At one level, by characterizing the relationship as friendship, the implied author asserts her progressive voice and unusual position as a Spaniard accepted in this immigrant community, and thus invests herself with more authority to tell a story about the people who live there than writers without these credentials. At another level, although the children are happy to receive Etxebarria's gift, the association between buying candy and befriending the children hints at coercion and draws attention to the one-sided nature of Etxebarria's assertion of friendship. Moreover, while it seems that the dog, candy, and effort to remember names reduce the distance between the narrating Etxebarria and the children of "La Casita," the author's dismissal of the cost of the candy alludes to economic disparity between herself and the children, and suggests that she uses her economic advantage to buy temporary entrance to the immigrant group. By placing the playground story in the introductory chapter, the author as narrator highlights her subject position in Lavapiés and suggests that her perspective may not reflect accurately the experience of others whose background and circumstances differ from her own. In the context of "time-space compression," or globalization, we need to think about how each group's or person's mobility weakens or strengthens another's power (Massey 149-51). Etxebarria's text does not acknowledge that the children's friendship benefits Etxebarria more than the children: she promotes her public and self-image as a progressive cultural figure.

In *Cosmofobia*, Etxebarria's play with testimonial writing constitutes a further strategy to address the issue of narrative control rather than simply hide the influence of the author.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to this pretension of truth, Etxebarria highlights from within her text the problematic nature of representing others' voices. Various characters throughout the novel refer to the presence of the implied author and a recording device as they narrate their story. In the chapter "Molinos de viento," about women in a support group at

the community center, the character Esther remarks on the implied author's motives and hand in shaping the work we are reading:

Verá usted, yo creo que para su libro yo no le voy a servir de nada. Porque usted está escribiendo un libro sobre el barrio, ¿no? Pues eso, que yo le cuento lo que usted quiera, que ya les he dicho en el Centro que colaboraría [...] (130)

Esther's observation as well that "A Cristina la ha entrevistado ya, ¿no?" (130), yet the placement of Cristina's narration after Esther's, calls attention to the implied Etxebarria's organization and manipulation of the text that we read.

While it is not clear if Esther lives in Lavapiés or only attends the support group, it is starkly clear that the Spanish Esther does not believe she belongs in a narrative about the Lavapiés neighborhood, a space with an immigrant identity. For those who think of place as fixed and who possess greater power in a place, in this case a native-born Spaniard in Madrid, the realization that the identity of a place is multiple produces disorientation:

Who is it who is so troubled by time-space compression and a newly experienced fracturing of identity? [...]. Who is it that is worrying about the breakdown of barriers supposedly containing an identity? (Massey 122)

While the hegemony tends to think of place as stable, for colonized peoples and people in the minority, dislocation already forms part of their experience of place. The global era makes more noticeable that place has no authentic character, but rather its composition as a dynamic web of social relations means that place, just as people, have multiple identities that co-exist (153-54). Esther's narration of an abusive brother and her expression of racism towards people of color suggest not only her rightful place in the novel that Etxebarria is constructing, but also the implied Etxebarria's

demonstration that these feminist and social justice issues constitute the norm in contemporary Madrid, for as Esther herself asserts, "mi vida es muy normal" (130). Although Esther rejects a personal connection to Lavapiés, her social condition of abuse implies a shared habitus with some of the characters of immigrant origin in the story.

With the testimonial device, Etxebarria toys with the expectation of intimacy created when offering to serve as the reader's personal guide to Lavapiés and with the notion of a trustworthy author. The chapter "La actriz" demonstrates the implied Etxebarria's betrayal of a subject's trust in order to give the reader an insider's scoop. The narrating character Leonor begins with "Ahora que has apagado el micrófono [...] ya me puedo relajar, ya podemos hablar como amigas, cielo, que amigas es lo que somos [...] y yo ya puedo dejar de decir tonterías" (249) and indicates throughout the chapter, "entre tú y yo" (249), that the information she shares about her intimate relationships, aging, and the discrimination she faces as an older actress is for Etxebarria only: "Doy por hecho que todo esto que te cuento no va a salir de aquí, que te lo cuento como amiga, no como periodista" (250). This interaction at first suggests that the interviewer has special access to a more intimate story, but upon closer consideration makes evident that no one version of a story is more authentic than another. Leonor alludes to the uncertain boundaries of truth and the agency that the characters exercise through decisions about what to narrate: "Vaya, que no te he mentado, *amore*, pero tampoco he dicho toda la verdad" (249). Deteriorating further the reader's sense that Leonor is telling the truth, the narrating subject later indicates her certainty that Etxebarria will use the information told in confidence for her novel. She asks that Etxebarria change her name and lower her age, the latter pointing to societal pressure on women to appear and stay impossibly young. Although the implied author remains silent in this chapter and in others that signal an interview, talk directed

to the implied author about the interview as it is taking place breaks the narrative rhythm to caution the reader about falling prey to an illusion of truth in testimonial writing.

In Etxebarria's novel, a character of Equatorial Guinean origin named Susana fractures the coherent concept of space and of a Spanish national body that characters in the ethnic hegemony hold. As Susana narrates her story from her home, an apartment shared with her boyfriend Silvio, who is of Spanish origin, she recounts connections to approximately twenty individuals and fifteen sites. While the chapter's title "La negra" alludes to the dominance of a white majority in Spain, Susana shifts the balance of social and racial relations through contact in the intimate space of her home with the fictionalized Etxebarria and through interactions in an upscale clothing store with the manager and a wealthy client named Poppy, characters whose power in the spatial geometry of contemporary Madrid presumably would be greater than Susana's.

Similar to other chapters in which the testimonial device is made patent, Susana's references to a recorder and to the interview itself disclose the implied author's influence on her narration. The interviewer's words are absent in this chapter as well, yet Susana also makes us aware of the author's presence: "Usted quiere que hable, ¿no? ¿eso es todo? [...] sí, puede usted poner la grabadora, me da igual" (52). Susana's remarks point to narrative freedom, yet also break the illusion of an unmitigated immigrant voice. The thematic congruence of her narration with the narrations of other women in the novel suggests as well the implied author's hand in creating the novel. Additionally, Susana's comment alludes to unequal power in the relationship with the author. The "usted" form indicates distance and the implied author's greater power in this situation. Small talk that she directs to the addressee at the beginning of the monologue, commenting that maybe they should have met elsewhere because her apartment is small, "pero por lo menos

la casa está bien arreglada" (52), reveals discomfort with the addressee's presence in her home and alludes to disparity in the women's economic status. Despite the differential, the encounter, with Susana as speaker and Etxebarria as listener, represents to Susana a safe place in which to speak about her situation of domestic abuse and her eating disorder and, in doing so, move toward a healthier socio-spatial situation. Susana adopts an air of confidence in this monologue directed at the implied author, while partial information in Susana's testimony communicates that she decides what she tells about herself and that the author and reader cannot fully know her. For example, Susana leaves unclear whether she had experienced physical abuse as a child. Incomplete information and silences recall Doris Sommer's argument in *Proceed with Caution: When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* that gaps in a story may constitute resistance, especially when a minority writer or speaker directs him or herself to a person in a dominant position.

A significant aspect of the attention to space in *Cosmofobia* is its gendered implications, and the chapter "La negra" is no exception. Throughout the novel, boyfriends or husbands expect girlfriends, wives, or domestic help to take care of them and the home while the men go out with their friends and party. Many women in the text experience violence at home, but Susana's narration most vividly portrays home as a place of physical and emotional stress and violence associated with a domestic role for women. Disagreements between Susana and Silvio begin after they move in together, she asks him to help with the housework, and Silvio refuses, arguing that because he earns more money she should clean the house. Susana seeks comfort in chocolate and pastries, and then enters into a cycle of vomiting, abstinence from food, and binging again. The opportunity to talk about her habitus to the implied author, however, creates a reflective space in which Susana challenges Silvio's assertions and identifies his and others' behavior as abusive instead of

assuming fault herself. In confidence to the implied Etxebarria, Susana suggests that Silvio expects her to clean because he believes it is woman's role, one that his mother had fulfilled. Susana also recalls her father's yelling when she was a child and speaks of the racism that Silvio's family expresses towards her now. She describes, too, hitting Silvio in response to his insults and her fear of ending up alone. Susana has not disclosed the abuse and these feelings to her family or best friend, yet she opens up in a conversation in which the implied author remains silent. Susana also draws connections in her narrative to other women in abusive or unhealthy relationships, including her best friend's mother, who experiences domestic violence and stays with her husband. This situation in common, albeit negative, highlights that abuse has no color and crosses ethnic divides. Susana's narration contests the sharp differences among ethnicities that characters in her story express: her friend's mother's prejudices against women of color, Susana's own racial stereotypes, and her sister's racial attribution of Silvio's abuse.

Talpade Mohanty critiques feminist texts that portray Western women as the saviors of third world women, and Etxebarria's *Cosmofobia* is guilty in part of this dichotomy and hegemonic view. Etxebarria as implied author and interlocutor of Susana's narration provides a platform for her to express her emotions, assess her situation, and receive validation that her experience matters. A wealthy Spanish client in the store where Susana works also prompts her to critically view her domestic situation. Susana worked at MANGO until she turned to sweets to alleviate the stress provoked by her relationship with Silvio and knew that MANGO would not renew her contract because she no longer fit into the clothes. At Superwoman, her new place of employment, Susana meets Poppy, an attractive, wealthy working woman who expresses to Susana her frustration with the skinny standards to which women are held, sentiments Susana shares. Susana progressively tells Poppy about her relationship with

Silvio and finds that this woman, of a different economic status, age, and color, leads her to think more critically about the abuse she suffers and to imagine herself in a new place, without Silvio, a changed habitus: "Porque sin esta chica, o esta señora, o lo que fuera la Poppy, yo ni me habría planteado dudas, hubiera seguido pensando que qué suerte tenía yo de estar con Silvio" (63); "Me impresionó a mí aquella mujer, me hizo pensar" (64). This portrayal of a European woman who helps and serves as a model for a woman of lesser financial status and education with origins in Africa falls into the paradigm of discursive colonization that Talpade Mohanty critiques in Western feminism.

Strains of first-world superiority appear throughout Etxebarria's text, and I have noted some already, yet the narrative also attends to some of the requirements that Talpade Mohanty posits for a decolonizing feminist solidarity. Mohanty cites a study that "illustrates how the category of women is constructed in a variety of political contexts that often exist simultaneously and overlaid on top of one another. There is no easy generalization" (32). To actualize a feminist text and project, one must study the relationships that create specific situations for women, how women act in these relationships, and where they challenge hegemones and norms, and resist; in other words, feminist studies must represent women as subjects rather than as powerless victims. Susana's narrative depicts the complexities of her persona, the specificity and multiplicity of her background, and a fluctuating subject position that depends on with whom she is interacting. The novel does not portray that all women of the so-called third world are the same or that they share certain characteristics that Western women do not share, nor are women of Spanish origin singular. Susana's narration presents connections between her experience and other women, Spanish and immigrant, while also attending to the particularities of her situation. Susana's discussion of her friend's mother's violent domestic situation in tandem with the same woman's

racist views cautions against assuming that Spanish men are less violent and Spanish women more liberated than their counterparts from non-Western countries. Susana's narration furthermore portrays the complicated psychology of abusive relationships rather than a triumphant transformation of her situation.<sup>14</sup> Narrating the abuse to the implied author, Poppy, and the novel's presumed readers, Susana questions patriarchal norms and improves her sense of self-worth. She resists her boyfriend's victimization and also the white European body's characterization of her as other, as I discuss below. The uncertainty about her future suggests the complexity of her situation. Through telling her story in the place where much of the abuse occurs, her home in Lavapiés, she modifies not only her habitus, but also voices a larger protest against the attribution of domesticity to woman, gendered salary differentials, and especially domestic violence.

While it first seems that Susana finds positive support in Spanish women only and in this sense the text fails to challenge the tendency of first-world feminists to position themselves as models for the emancipation of third-world women, Susana concludes with a focus on the neighbors in her building. At the beginning of her narration, Susana observes that she feels stuck and at risk of losing herself: "Yo cada vez me deprimó más y más y me veo en un callejón sin salida. Porque si me convierto en todo lo que él quiere, me perderé a mí misma" (57). As she finishes her story however, Susana views her future more positively. She wistfully imagines peering into the window of a home with a happy family. Poppy's family first comes to mind, but then Susana turns her attention to the happiness that exists in her local realm. In her apartment building in Lavapiés, she hears a mother singing a lullaby, a baby's crying stop, and neighbors cooking. Her narrations end as follows: "Y todos estos ruidos mezclados como en un cocido, tan familiares, me recuerdan que hoy es ya mañana y que la vida sigue" (78). These sounds of her habitus, the

solidarity she feels with her neighbors, infuse her outlook and suggest hope for a better situation for herself. Susana's story and others' suggest that just as women of many ethnicities experience domestic violence, a diversity of women also represent models for a life free from abuse. This turn to the local recalls the view of transnational feminists that collaborations must attend to historical, social, and political particulars rather than generalize the category of women.<sup>15</sup>

Susana's relationship with Poppy and the narrative project she shares with the implied author suggest positive outcomes when women of first-world and third-world origins collaborate. Perhaps more significantly, Etxebarria's *Cosmofobia* proposes a multi-directional sphere of influence in the social relationships that constitute and transform place in contemporary, urban Spain. When the pressure to conform to a limited weight range requires Susana to seek an alternative employment to MANGO, the places and individuals that form her social space shift. Exchanges between Susana and store manager Dora reveal prejudices and ethnic ghettos, yet also the potential to modify hegemonic views of national identity. Other managers tell Susana that the job is filled once they see her, but Dora is more direct and tells her that she will scare away clients. Dora insists on drawing firm boundaries that place Susana outside the all-white world of Superwoman, where her size fits the client profile but not her skin color:

«Pero, tú, ¿de dónde eres?». «De Alcalá de Henares, señora.» «Ya, pero lo que quiero saber es que dónde has nacido.» «Pues en Alcalá de Henares, señora.» «Ya, pero tus padres de dónde son.» «Pues han vivido toda su vida en Alcalá de Henares.» La señora ya estaba de los mismos nervios. «Pues, si son negros, no han podido nacer en Alcalá de Henares.» «No, señora, mi padre nació en Guinea.» Y la señora parecía aliviada ahora que por fin sabía de dónde viene el color de mi



piel. «¿Y allí, qué se habla, francés o indígena?» «Español, señora, se habla español.» (58)

In this exchange within a place dominated by white Spanish women, Susana destabilizes the store manager's conception of national space. Her repeated claims to Spanish identity and her native-Castilian tongue challenge the borders of national identity that Dora understands and the theoretical notion that liminality most satisfactorily counters colonizing perspectives. Although Susana eventually confirms parental origins outside peninsular Spain, alleviating Dora's fear of unidentifiable ethnic borders, Susana locates herself and her parents within a Spanish town and Spanish identity and thus resists Dora's intention to label her as other. Susana brings to Dora's attention that immigrants have integrated into local communities and consider themselves Spanish. Dora's response, a two-day trial period and subsequent offer of work, suggests that Susana modifies Dora's notion that a black woman has no place in her habitus, from the local retail space she manages to her broader conception of Spain.

If Susana is to succeed, that is secure the job, she must gain "symbolic capital" to modify the power geometry in Superwoman. Bourdieu asserts that actors consider expectations, or rules, in a particular place and their position of power relative to others in order to assess what is possible and impossible, and gain prestige in a community.<sup>16</sup> In principle, Dora yields greater power for in her position as store manager she decides whether to give or deny Susana employment. The clients' response to Susana also will influence her hire and her continued employment, and thus her economic circumstances. Yet, Susana too exercises power and occupies a subject position in the social web at the store. To start, Dora's offer of a trial period suggests that Susana has reshaped Dora's conception of her habitus and of who belongs and does not belong in her social space. Further, with two days to prove her effectiveness as a saleswoman, Susana

strategically determines that, to counter the fright she stirs when clients hear her speak perfect Spanish, she will study the gossip of the day to gain knowledge the clients share and lessen the cultural distance: "Yo me di cuenta de que, si sabía un poco de cotilleos de las estrellas de la tele, enseguida me iban a aceptar [...]. que me veía *masai* y las *masais* no hablan castellano" (61). By gaining symbolic capital, Susana secures a job and opens a new habitus, where her interactions with the store's customers reduce the otherness they perceive. Susana's move to establish a place for herself, the stranger, within the formerly all white world of Superwoman, where she experiences both racism and support, leads to greater awareness of her human rights as well. Although circumstances that threaten Susana's mental and physical health lead her to interview at Superwoman, on the positive side, interactions between Susana and Dora, Poppy, and other clients reduce perceptions of difference and separation. As seen in the clothing store, enhanced mobility in the global era creates new constellations of social relations and infuses a place with the political possibility of altering existing hierarchies (Massey 268).

Typical of Etxebarria's writing, *Cosmofobia* presents inconsistencies that dilute the effectiveness of the author's progressive stance on feminism and immigration, and the text as a model ethical literary response to immigration. As one of the narrative voices, the implied author at times expresses ethnic stereotypes without critical examination. The novel also presents more situations in which a Spanish woman serves as a positive model for women of non-European origin than the inverse. While these failures to acknowledge "Western eyes" diminish the critical potential of Etxebarria's text, the representation of interethnic relationships among Spanish, immigrants, and Spanish born of immigrant parents, and of intimate and familial relationships, reflects on the power relations and changing habitus among Madrid's diverse population in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Numerous



narrative strategies address the concerns that transnational feminists raise about the colonizing potential of writing about the other and of feminist projects that bring together women of different social classes and ethnicities. Repeated reminders of the author's presence in the text make patent her role in its creation. By making her voice and presence visible, Etxebarria presents a consciousness of her position of authorial and social power and opens a dialogue about the dilemma Spanish authors face, and many do not seem to consider, of speaking about and creating voices for characters in ethnically minority positions in Spain. The text is messy. Multiple narrators and the iteration of characters' tales point to the impossibility of knowing the story of another, while the blurring of borders between fiction and reality contributes to this end and calls attention to the power of narrative to shape and question reality.

Along with Etxebarria's treatment of voice and subjectivity, the novel's foregrounding of space and its representation as an extensive social construction emphasize the inseparability of Madrid's host population and the diverse ethnic groups who have immigrated to Spain, despite the assertion repeated throughout the novel that ethnic groups maintain firm social and cultural borders with the other.<sup>17</sup> Massey has asserted that the chaotic, which resides inherently in space conceived as an open social network, may transform not only existing social arrangements but also the future of a place (266-68). In *Cosmofobia*, the chaotic web of more than one hundred individuals and their stories generates new points of social contact that lead to racist sentiment but also to alliances, many unacknowledged. Shared feminist issues create points of contact among characters of different ethnicities even though the characters continue to see the other as different and often as inferior. As Mónica remarks about Amina, Spanish citizens born of immigrant parents still are immigrants in the eyes of most Spanish: "ella nació aquí; tiene carnet de identidad y todo. Vamos, que es española.

Pero para los españoles ella es marroquí, por cómo viste, por cómo luce, por cómo piensa" (140). Etxebarria's novel is attuned to Benedict Anderson's argument that as much as shared customs, the will to be a community is critical to forming a national imagination. Etxebarria's *Cosmofobia* proposes that feminist connections within spaces shared by diverse ethnic and social groups in Spain just may reshape habitus and create new constellations of community, despite anxiety of one's changing place in the cosmos.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Linhard also argues:

literature produced in response to the earlier question—who has the right and the responsibility to narrate the becoming of postnational Spain—begins by assuming that ghosts are embedded in the fabric of literature. (406)

Although my study does not focus specifically on ghosts and "critical melancholia" (405), it does speak of individual and social pain that remain unresolved. Examples of studies addressing the usurpation or simplification of immigrant voices in peninsular fiction and culture include Daniela Flesler's *The Return of the Moor*, Susan Martín-Márquez's *Disorientations*, and Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego's edited *Memoria colonial e inmigración*, among others.

<sup>2</sup>Pilar Valero-Costa's analysis of *Cosmofobia* emphasizes social confrontation and the negotiation of cultural identity in global Spain. Our discussion of some of the same passages focus on different though complimentary arguments, mine on narrative voice and transnational feminism and Valero-Costa's on racism, multiculturalism, and hybridity.

<sup>3</sup>Along with the aforementioned critics who note the literary and cultural value of Etxebarria's narratives, Jorge Pérez contends that "en última instancia son productos que dialogan y problematizan esas condiciones históricas y encierran un punto de vista crítico acerca de esa misma lógica cultural" (214). I do not pretend to provide an exhaustive study of critical reception of Etxebarria's works, but rather to have outlined the different angles from which her work has been studied and the opposing evaluations of her work.

<sup>4</sup>In his analysis of *Cosmofobia* and *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso*, Prádanos explains system theory's emphasis on complexly interconnected and interdependent human experience and knowledge. He argues that, among other narrative styles, Spanish narratives of the new millennium reflect this epistemology.

<sup>5</sup>The *okupa* movement of the 1980s and 1990s, in which unemployed youth occupied abandoned apartments, centered on the partially abandoned Lavapiés, but by the late 1990s young people with money interested in a bohemian environment brought gentrification to sections of the neighborhood. Still, as home to Madrid's Jewish Quarter in the Middle Ages and the working classes through today, it is no surprise that Lavapiés has become a locus for contemporary Spain's immigrant communities. As described in a press release, the Lavapiés neighborhood association organized the first of an annual gastronomic event in Fall 2011:

Tapapiés propone irse de tapas por el mundo sin salir de Lavapiés [...]. China, Bangladesh, Argelia, Tailandia, Pakistán, Senegal, Chile y Ecuador, entre otras nacionalidades, se unirán a [...]. un amplio repertorio de tapas de nuestras comunidades autónomas, desde Galicia y Asturias hasta Castilla la Mancha, sin olvidar las típicamente castizas. (Díaz)

And, one could win an iPad by participating! Etxebarria's attention to ethnic tensions and social webs that extend the perimeters of Lavapiés belies the promotion of this urban space as a harmonious gastronomic world tour into whose borders one crosses and then leaves after a taste of its flavors.

<sup>6</sup>While *Cosmofobia* focuses on Madrid's multi-ethnic fabric, Etxebarria's subsequent *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso* (2010) turns to Madrid's entertainment world and the death of a 26 year-old singer. In this text that privileges the hyperreal, the author repeats many of the techniques in the earlier novel, including an interrelated, dense web of characters and stories, an extradiegetic narrator, and a writer who interviews characters, who narrate different versions of the same story.

<sup>7</sup>The essays in Hiller and Rooksby's *Habitus: A Sense of Place* argue the relevance of Bourdieu's ideas on the formation of one's sense of place and the place of others to urban transformation brought on by migration. Leonie Sandercock's and John Friedman's essays were particularly influential in my reading of Etxebarria's narrative treatment of

urban space and immigration in twenty-first century Spain.

<sup>8</sup>See Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar for a more detailed discussion of the challenges and goals of transnational feminist collaborations, including acknowledging what is at stake for the parties involved and addressing gaps between theory and praxis.

<sup>9</sup>As Kathryn Everly's observes in relation to *De todo lo visible y lo invisible*, these strategies signal "the impossibility of re-creating or knowing the 'truth'" ("Textual Violence," 139).

<sup>10</sup>Gérard Genette explains that a heterodiegetic narrator is "absent from the story he tells" and a homodiegetic narrator is "present as a character" (244-45).

<sup>11</sup>I would like to acknowledge the person at the 2011 conference of the *Asociación Internacional de Literatura y Cultura Femenina Hispánica (AIL-CFH)* in Barcelona who urged me to consider the impact of the many names in the novel, but whose name I do not know.

<sup>12</sup>Everly has pointed out that it seems the real author is "lurking behind the scenes" and speaking to us intimately in *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* ("Textual Violence," 142). The same is true in *Cosmofobia*, in which Etxebarria takes us on a personal tour of "her" neighborhood.

<sup>13</sup>Etxebarria's self-conscious treatment of her position as author contrasts with works such as Rafael Torres's non-fictional *Yo, Mohammed: Historias de inmigrantes en un país de emigrantes* (1995), which purports to deliver an unmitigated picture of the lives of twenty-five immigrants. For an analysis of this testimonial work, see Daniela Flesler's *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Moroccan Immigration*, 168-72.

<sup>14</sup>The characters' low self-esteem, a pattern of escalating violence, separation, pardoning the perpetrator, reconciliation, and then the reiteration of this cycle, conform to typical scenarios in abusive relationships. See Geraldine Stahly, "Why Don't They Just Leave?"

<sup>15</sup>See Lock Swarr and Nagar 15-17 and Talpade Mohanty 7.

<sup>16</sup>Bourdieu argues in "The Forms of Capital" that one cannot understand societal relations without a consideration of non-economic capital, such as education, knowledge, and practices, the value of which a social group determines. See also his essay "Symbolic Capital" in *The Logic of Practice*, 112-21.

<sup>17</sup>Etxebarria's *Cosmofobia* might be an example of the greater emphasis Cornejo-Parriego has

suggested should be placed on studying solidarity among minority groups in Spain (35).

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