

**From Orientalism to Plurality in Contemporary Spanish Literature:
Exotic Imagery of Moroccan Immigrants in *Háblame, musa, de aquel
varón* by Dulce Chacón and *Cosmofobia* by Lucía Etxebarria**

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Spanish contemporary fiction engaged in the political dialogue about immigration when it integrated different perspectives on the spaces inhabited by Moroccan immigrants in its narrative. I argue that the imagery related to Moroccan immigrants is based on myths and metaphors that come from Western literary tradition, introducing the perspective of the otherness that inhabits ghostly, undefined spaces, both geographical and symbolic. What is perceived as Moroccan otherness is constructed on the basis of exotic, sensorial images that arise from nineteenth century Orientalist tradition, in response to what is perceived as the other's non-linguistic nature. Hence we can affirm that within the Spanish artistic consciousness, battles of dualistic essentialism are still being fought, but they are re-written in the transnational movements metaphor. Within a span of ten years, we can observe a shift in narrative attitudes that range from violent responses to the Moroccan immigrants as seen in *Háblame, musa, de aquel varón* (1998) by Dulce Chacón, to progressive acceptance as seen in *Cosmofobia* (2007) by Lucía Etxebarria, where the subaltern subject is granted voice. The result of the interaction between the local and the immigrant population in these two novels is an updated identity of both the subject and the other. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2020 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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Spain has traditionally been a country of emigration. Immediately after the Civil War in 1939, migratory movements of exile to the North of Africa, the Americas and Europe emerged. Nonetheless, only two decades later, thousands of workers went looking for employment opportunities in Germany, France or Switzerland (referred to as *Gastarbeiter* or 'guest workers' in German). After the establishment of the democratic regime in 1975, Spain joined the European Union in 1986 and experienced rapid economic growth, which made the country attractive for migrants. The first migratory flow of Moroccans to Spain occurred in the 1970s, though the history between the two countries goes far back in time: 800 years of Al-Andalus (711-1492) and the later establishment of the Spanish Protectorate in Northern Morocco (1912-1956). This ongoing postcolonial relationship between Morocco and Spain creates the link between postmodern Spanish society and the transnational migration movements that can be understood through the literature that emerged in response to the most significant increase of migration in the decade between 1998 and 2010 (which coincides with a period of significant rise of employment in Spain). Thus, the number of Moroccans registered in Spain grew from 190,497 in January 1998 to 746,000 in January 2010 (INE). This was the largest national community of immigrants until Moroccan immigration was surpassed by immigration from Romania in 2008.

In this paper, my aim is to examine how this profound social change of transnational movements between Morocco and Spain is represented in contemporary Spanish literature, particularly when it comes to writing the immigrants' otherness and the challenge of creating a diverse, tolerant, and pluralistic society. I will discuss Dulce Chacón's *Háblame, musa, de aquel varón* (1998), a novel immersed in the Western tradition of *Odyssey*, and Lucía Extebarria's *Cosmofobia* (2008), a postmodern fragmented meta-narrative that gives voice to the subaltern, as Gayatri Spivak called the oppressed colonized subject in India (Spivak 307). In both novels, the result of the interaction between the Spanish and the immigrant population is an updated identity of both the subject and the other. However, in the paradigmatic case of Spain, the representation occurs to the detriment of the other who then accepts their own otherness as a condition for failed integration and belonging to a ghostly space of the Strait of Gibraltar and multicultural neighborhood of Lavapiés in Madrid.

FROM ORIENTALISM TO IMMIGRATION

When it comes to discursive performance of identity, the contemporary migration phenomenon has its roots in the time of European colonization in Africa² (Martín-Márquez, Flesler, Díaz Narbona, Rueda). Today, in a postcolonial world, Europe is witnessing the growth of immigrant communities and second and third generations of immigrants from North African countries (such as the *beur* generation in France³). The literature that stems from this not only gives voice to the marginalized and oppressed, but also challenges the traditional European white, Christian, male dominated discourse by introducing diverse perspectives on gender, race, religion and language. The emergence of African literary voices in Spanish and Catalan, such as Najat El Hachmi, Laila Karrouch, Said El Kadaoui, Donato Ndongo, Agnes Agboton, and César Mba Abogo, just to name a few, has been gaining the increased attention of scholars and critics (Ricci, Díaz Narbona, Miampika, Epps) from transatlantic, cultural studies, and postcolonial perspectives. However, Spanish contemporary writers who also seized this transnational turn in their narrative expose a very different approach to immigration, as it is perceived through its fundamental mark of

² As a result of the Conference of Algeciras, and after lengthy negotiations, the division of the territories of Maghreb was stipulated in the agreements of 1906. The southern part of Morocco was designated to France and the northern one to Spain, in detriment to the Spanish part. The regime of the Protectorate in Morocco, controlled jointly by France and Spain, was established between the years 1912-1956 through the Treaty of Fez. The territories conferred to Spain by the aforementioned treaties are the areas of Rif, Yebala, Gomara Tarfaya, and Ifni and Western Sahara, establishing the capital of Spanish protectorate in the city of Tetouan. It is essential to point out that those territories were a complicated puzzle for the Spaniards. This fact considerably hindered the power stabilization. At the level of the imaginary, the above-mentioned profound ignorance about Morocco was responsible for the creation of a kind of myth of El Dorado about the immense wealth in resources hidden in the country, which, in reality, never existed. The exercise of political and military power of Spain in Morocco was established gradually over 20 years. The territories of Rif and Yebala were not constituted until the 1930s, while Larache and Ksar el-Kebir were occupied in 1911 and Tetuan in 1913. Between 1911-1912, the territory between Melilla and the river Kert was occupied due to armed conflicts until the year 1927. Its bloody culmination was the Annual Battle, where Spaniards suffered an embarrassing defeat by Abd al-Krim. This only enhanced the Spanish propaganda against the 'savage' Moroccans.

³ For more information on the topic see: Hargreaves, Alec. G. *Voices from the North African Immigrant Community in France: Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*. Berg Publishers, 1991.

difference and otherness and produces responses of ambivalence (Bhabha).

In psychoanalysis, Freud used the term ambivalence to refer to a coexistence of two opposite instincts with a similar level of development. In postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha uses the term ambivalence to refer to the paradoxical process of denial as well as identification with the other that result in symbolical or literal violent reactions. In this way, the identity of the subject during the process of interaction with the other is updated, since it assumes – even if only partially – the identification with the other, similarly to the mirror stage in Lacan's theory where the 'other' in the mirror looks like me, but isn't me (Lacan 5). The other, the colonized, is at the same time the object of desire and contempt, and it is only through the other that the subject builds their identity and places their desire for the difference. Such tendencies can be examined in short stories and novels published in the period (1998-2010), such as "Fátima de los naufragios" or "La piel de Marcelinda" by Lourdes Ortiz, "El séptimo viaje" by Juan José Merino, *Por la vía de Tarifa* by Nieves García Benito, *Las Voces del Estrecho* by Andrés Sorel, *Los príncipes nubios* by Juan Bonilla, to name a few representative examples.

The ambivalence produced by the mere presence of the colonized subject engages the colonizers in the whirl of questioning their own identity and their legitimacy to be the beholder of the authority of the written word. In the case of the writers examined here, this can have consequences that are twofold for the representation of Moroccan immigrants. On the one hand, there is a metonymical cognitive and discursive process of identifying immigration and all the transnational challenges this phenomenon brings along with undocumented immigration and its consequent act of border transgression. This can be seen in *Háblame, musa, de aquel varón* where the characters cross the Strait of Gibraltar (barely 20 km separating Spain from Morocco, Europe from Africa) in a *patera*⁴, an act of transgression that condemns its

4 Patera is a common term for a small ship used for the purpose of shallow waters fishing. The term underwent an evolution when it started to be associated with undocumented migration from Morocco to Spain. The first pateras were seen on the Spanish coast at the end of 1980 after Europe restricted their guest workers program and started to require visas for North African citizens. In the 2000s the number of pateras is estimated to increase from 4.000 to 15.000 a year. Nonetheless, as the National Institute for Statistics (INE) points out, the most common way of transportation for undocumented immigrants is still by plane (62.7%), followed by car. In total, only 1% of all undocumented immigrants actually arrived in a patera. Regardless of that fact, patera is a preferred metaphor by both media and literature to represent undocumented immigration from Africa to Spain. The 2004 volume *Literatura y pateras*, edited by Dolores Soler, is

subject to a life in the perpetual shadow of illegality. On the other hand, we can witness the characters' limited integration within the mainstream spaces due to their racial or religious otherness as seen in *Cosmofobia*. As for form, Dulce Chacón engages in an intertextual dialogue with Western literature tradition where the violence is a result of the clash between the dualistic nature of two irreconcilable opposite forces, represented as Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian order. Chacón's Moroccan immigrants represent a Dionysian, non-linguistic other who lacks any interlocutor, while Etxebarria opts for a narrative construction like Camilo José Cela's *La colmena* to represent the other within their own urban network. The shift produced between these two novels can be used as a narrative paradigm that illustrates the social change in Spanish contemporary society between the 20th and 21st century. However, when it comes to representing the Moroccan immigrants, the literary sources come from the 19th century Orientalist tradition of *A Thousand and One Nights*.

The 19th century Romantic writers sought the uncanny exotic elements, such as Medieval myths about *convivencia* of Jews, Muslims and Christians in Toledo before 1492, and African and Orientalist adventures for the sake of an aesthetic escapism because of the crisis of bourgeois consciousness (Litvak), embodied in the writings of the *Generación del 98*. By doing so, the Romantic movement was giving birth to the literary foundations of Spanish national identity (Labanyi) that arose from its questioning of a centuries-long discourse on *pureza de sangre* (racial purity) and the Inquisition's attempts to repress every sign of racial or religious otherness in Modern Spain by expelling Jews in 1492 and Moriscos in 1609 (García Arenal). The colonial process, although carried out in much smaller proportion compared to France or Great Britain, and the establishment of the Spanish Protectorate in Northern Morocco (1912-1956) (Martín Corrales) would eventually confirm Spanish Europeaness since Spanish-Moroccan "brotherhood" was the main concept used in the colonial propaganda (Mateo Dieste) that denied any tensions and conflicts in the desperate need for national homogeneity.

As for Moroccan immigrants in Spain today, as noted by Daniela Flesler in *The Return of the Moor*, the ambivalence of the other is doubly problematic because: "unlike other Western European nations, Spain is not only experiencing the return of the colonized but also that of its

one of the first studies done on immigration and literature in Spain, following *La inmigración en la literatura española contemporánea* (2002) by Irene Andrés Suárez, Marco Kunz, Inés D'Ors.

medieval colonizers" and hence, "Moroccans turn into a 'problem' not because of their cultural differences, but because they are not different enough" (Flesler 9). Consequently, the construction of an apparent *pureza de sangre* over 500 years is being threatened by the presence of the other coming from within. The paradoxical and repressed identification with otherness generates a feeling of threat in the subject. Hence, in an effort to re-establish control that apparently is being lost, the subject turns to the use of stereotypes. Those stereotypes as well as the attitudes of ambivalence are legitimized through repeated metaphors, deeply rooted in the Orientalist perception of Moroccan otherness in the Spanish literary tradition, as noted by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). Unlike their French and British counterparts, Spanish narratives identify the Orient with Morocco. Seeking an exotic, mysterious, magic imaginary is rooted in the Romantic need for escapism and sensorialism, but also linked to political propaganda discourse that used different discursive approaches to justify colonization. Etxebarria depicts one of the main characters, Moroccan painter Yamal, as 'seductive' and 'irresistible,' while Chacón's Aisha is described by her 'involuntary exoticism' and is belittled when her joy is compared to a child's joy when contemplating a gathering at a movie opening party. Stereotypes employed to depict Moroccan immigrants' otherness present an aesthetic of exoticism inherited from the nineteenth-century orientalist fascination with the strange, different and uncanny (Rodinson). Thus, when dealing with 'the other,' authors use sensorial elements to depict them; they search for the visual impact, but they involve other senses, too. They explain in detail colors, scents, materials, etc. They use folkloric elements and repeatedly describe wedding ceremonies and mourning rituals at funerals. We have already witnessed these aesthetic tendencies in the Romantic and Modernist (beginning of the 20th century) literature, which had a special predilection for Orientalism as a form of escape from the bourgeois crisis of consciousness. We continue to witness the same phenomenon in contemporary literature, too, when referring to immigration. This brings us to the core of our topic: how the two novels deal with otherness and what it means for the identity construction for both parts.

THE IRREPARABLE OTHERNESS AND VIOLENT DEATH IN *HÁBLAME, MUSA, DE AQUEL VARÓN*

Dulce Chacón (1954-2003) was a writer, poet and storyteller from Extremadura who died prematurely of cancer. She was awarded the

Premio Azorín in 2002 for her most famous novel *La voz dormida*, in which she goes back in time to the Spanish Civil War and narrates the story of several women, Republican supporters who are condemned to death in prison during Franco's dictatorship. Chacón felt especially committed to the memory of the Civil War, especially in regard to female victims of the Francoist repression. *Háblame, musa, de aquel varón* (1998) is part of the so-called "Trilogy of an escape" (*Trilogía de la huida*), which also includes *Algún amor que no mate* (1996) and *Blanca vuela mañana* (1997). The three novels provide the female perspective on vulnerability and subsequent empowerment within the context of immigration, gender-based violence, and illness, respectively.

Háblame, musa, de aquel varón is a groundbreaking novel since it brings in the perspective of a Moroccan immigrant – a woman – as a fundamental element in the development of the narrative plot and the characters. Jacqueline Cruz affirms that one of the merits of Dulce Chacón as a writer is that she introduces social issues as literary themes before they actually come into the spotlight (Cruz 398). In 1998, the issue of immigration was not yet dominating public debate, and even less so from a woman's perspectives. Family reunification policies adopted during the 1990s would contribute to more equal gender immigration (López García 214), which nowadays represents roughly 46% of all immigrant groups living in Spain (Soriano Miras 170). That being said, Chacón's novel is without any doubt groundbreaking since it will introduce a Moroccan woman's story of immigration, but it will do so in the form of a *A Thousand and One Nights* narrative structure, and it does not provide any space for the expression of the subaltern voice. On the contrary, she will need a mediator, Matilde, to retell her story, but the real main protagonist is Ulises, like the one from *The Odyssey*.

Homer and James Joyce's Ulysses provide *Háblame, musa, de aquel varón* with its intertextual framework through the title and the initial quote that is part of Chapter XII of Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Ulysses recounts his adventures on the island of Helios with Caribda and Scylla and on the island of Ogygia. The title and quotation are an explicit invitation to the "muse" to break the silence – the thread of the novel – and talk about Ulysses, the man (*varón*). Hence, we can think of the muse as the omniscient narrator in the novel who addresses her message to Adrian (in the second person, as you), retrospectively, after the loss of his wife Matilde to Ulises. The main topic is a love triangle between Matilde, who desperately tries to preserve her marriage to Adrián, a writer, but fails after she meets Ulises, a successful film producer, with whom she is able to create real intimacy. As a secondary character, there

is Aicha from Morocco, who works as a housekeeper along with her husband Pedro in Ulises' beach house. Her tragic story works as the main plot catalyst, but at the same time she becomes the main character of *A Thousand and One Nights*, distant, mysterious and exotic, narrated by Matilde-Sheherezade, who also symbolizes Penelope waiting for Ulysses. As such, the novel resorts to the Orientalist tradition as a tool for the development of the main plot, rewriting Orientalism in terms of immigration.

The novel itself represents a hybrid space where East meets West, but through the vindication of the Western condition when it comes to writing the immigrants as the colonized in Spain. It is the domain of the colonizer's identity that is being deconstructed when meeting the immigrant's otherness. It is not Aicha's voice that is heard in the novel, it is Matilde's consciousness that is being challenged instead. The novel acknowledges the existence of the repressed oriental otherness as a haunting ghost of Spanish identity (Labanyi), but the attempt at its full integration fails, since its mere ghostly presence precipitates the plot towards a new outcome, i.e., the rupture of a dysfunctional marriage and the end of Adrian's promising career. It is the direct confrontation with the immigrant's otherness, once Aicha penetrates into the public space, and the tragic impossibility of her integration that make the main characters in this novel question their own existence and rethink their history.

Matilde uses silence as a form of repressing reproach (Chacón 35) that must be verbally expressed in order to create a change, hence, the invitation of the title to break the silence (*Háblame, musa...*). Nevertheless, there is a deeper silence that ought to be broken and it is the silence of society when it comes to witnessing the tragedy of irregular immigration in the Strait of Gibraltar. Ulises, hero of seas of all times, blames himself for allowing Aicha, Pedro, Farida and Yunes to attend a party without actually attending it. They were able to observe it from afar, but not engage with other participants in the festivities such as dancing or chatting, which created a perfect scenario for an "invisible" murder of undocumented immigrants that takes place just a few steps from the crowded beach party. This is why the "muse" is narrating the story in second person, making the readers allies of the silence of the drama of immigration.

The invitation to break a silence is not meant for Aisha. Her subaltern otherness as portrayed in this novel does not allow her to verbalize her experience. Aisha and the collective of irregular immigrants inhabit invisible, secluded, marginalized spaces where they gather for security

reasons. Nobody knows where their meetings are held, but once their secret is broken, there is no salvation for them, no refuge. This explicitly broken silence means being exposed to violence and death, which is what happens to Aicha and her friends. Aicha does not master the language well, a sign of her character lacking voice, and thus her story is being told through Matilde and the muse. Aicha is the racial other in the novel, built through images of exoticism, since she is described as "luminous," "irresistible," "magic," and as an "involuntary exotic" (Chacón 151).⁵ Her intangible nature implies that Aicha is a Derridean ghost of the Spanish past and the future. As a foreigner, she is different, asymmetrical, threatening to the predetermined order, and her presence alters the established social rules and subverts the passing of time since, as a Moorish ghost, she brings the Reconquista past into present.

Aicha has a recurring nightmare of looking into the eyes of her drowning boyfriend Munir when the *pateta* that was clandestinely transporting her and other passengers through the maritime border of the Strait of Gibraltar from Morocco to Spain shipwrecked and many of them died. Ever since, she has lived a self-imposed punishment of constant guilt for having survived. Her story is narrated through the use of sensory means; a dream as a premonition to her own death and the look into the eyes of dying Munir (Chacón 151). In *The Odyssey*, it is Ulysses and his look becomes the borderland between the self and the other, considering it is his look that traces the division line of the border (Jarauta 191). He becomes the metaphor of the Western and Eastern encounter, of the encounter of the self with the other, life and death, but this time, the chimera would be irregular migration. So it is not a coincidence that the entrance to the realm of death is through the look. First, Aicha's premonition dream: "She remembers how her boyfriend fell in the sea, his horrified eyes, the deep sadness she saw when he knew that he was looking at her for the last time. Many nights she still dreams with those open eyes"⁶ (Chacón 93); later she is forced to look into the eyes of her murderer: "Look at me! Look at me! Look at me, I'm telling you, bitch! . . . Aicha was the last to die. But you did not see it"⁷ (Chacón

⁵All translations are mine. "Aisha se deslizaba luminosa entre la gente, como un destello irresistible, y cada persona que dejaba atrás se volvía para mirarla . . . la naturalidad de su encanto, la magia que desprendía su exotismo involuntario. . . ."

⁶"Ella recuerda cómo su novio cayó al mar, sus ojos de espanto, la profunda tristeza que vio en ellos cuando supo que la miraba por última vez. Sueña todavía con esos ojos abiertos, muchas noches" (93).

⁷"¡Mírame! ¡Mírame! ¡Mírame, te digo, perra! . . . Aicha fue la última en morir. Pero no lo visteis."

162). The last accusation formulates the ultimate critique of this novel. Even though it fails to grant a voice to the subaltern, it disapproves of a Western (Spanish) pattern that frames immigration in terms of the other. This reaction aligns with history, that is, with complete annihilation and objectification of the immigrants, since the murderers are referring to their act as cleaning up the beach and hunting (Chacón 150). "You did not see it" is an accusation targeted at Ulises, Matilde, and everyone who allowed them to attend the party without any real participation beyond mere observation, but also, at the reader, since it is the muse narrating this story. At the end, Aicha will look at her friends, and they will look back at her. She will be watched, but she won't be seen.

The story of Aisha and Pedro and their friends Farida and Yunes is a tragic tale of a murder of otherness, which plays an important cathartic role in the main plot. The Moroccan characters enter the realm of ghosts through eyes full of torment and panic. It is the way they look when near death. The novel presents, as Euripides did in the *Bacchae* noted by Nietzsche in *The Birth of the Tragedy*, a space of encounter of two essentially opposite orders. While the Apollonian order represents poetry, moderation, form, light, beauty, and sublimation of the principle of individuation, the Dionysian order would represent the non-language, the dark side, the passionate, disproportionate, the savage, the dissolution of the principle of individuation through the presence of the choir and its music. Nietzsche asserts that the true tragic dimension comes from the fact that both orders are inseparable, though inherently irreconcilable. The Dionysian knowledge that comes from music, ecstasy, from a wandering of the spirit collides with the Apollonian knowledge from linguistic and poetic order. Aicha's non-linguistic nature coincides with the Dionysian concept that has been banished from Spanish public spaces through constant polishing of Spanish national identity that identifies as white, European, and Catholic (Tofino-Quesada 144). Her Dionysian-Orientalist otherness becomes explicit at the end of the novel when the chorus of undocumented immigrants is brought in to mourn her death. The chorus emerges as a ghost from ruins of abandoned houses, faceless, chanting, invoking the divinity: "In the name of God, the gracious, the merciful . . . The verses of the Holy Book [of Qur'an] were mixed in the different intonations of the voices that chanted the psalms in a cacophony that did not end until the bodies reached the Earth"⁸ (Chacón 169).

⁸ "En el nombre de Dios, el clemente, el misericordioso . . . Los versículos del libro sagrado se mezclaban en las diferentes entonaciones de las voces que los salmodiaban, en una cacofonía que no terminó hasta que los cuerpos alcanzaron la tierra."

Each of five parts into which the novel is divided is preceded by verses from the Syrian poet Adonis⁹, which serve as metaphorical setting of the main plot and conceptual cornerstones of the narrative on immigration: the return, the origin, the tragedy, the journey, and the memory.¹⁰ Derrida's ghosts in Spain imply the idea of memory and the desire to erase it (Derrida, Labanyi). If Aicha is the embodiment of a Spanish Moorish past that feels extremely threatening, then hers is a cry for the return. The closer she finds herself to death, the more important her memories become for the development of the plot. What is different is that her memories are imagined; they are based on the condition of what would have happened if she had never had left Essaouira. So Aicha lives in a symbolic space between life and death where being alive means feeling guilty and the punishment for her transgression is a constant longing for home: "Aisha thought that the longing was a punishment and that punishments have to be carried out in order to clean the soul"¹¹ (Chacón 97). The death, expressed through a look that never existed, would materialize through Aicha's metafictional memories of her origin that are nonetheless expressed in Orientalist language: ". . . she would look at the very fine henna drawings on her hands, different in each palm, trying to learn them so that they would become a gift for her memory"¹² (Chacón 108). Aicha, as an alter-ego of Moroccan immigrants, cannot free herself from her origin, but she cannot return to it either. Hers is the cry of the human tragedy as she will walk towards death, which shall dwell forever in the memories of the origin.

At the moment the silence about Aicha's story is broken - Adrián tells it as an anecdote at a social gathering - she approaches death. Her subaltern condition prevents her from verbalizing her experience and as such she never acquires the condition of a subject. The result of

⁹ Alí Ahmad Said Esber (1930, Al Qassabin), poet and essayist of Syrian origin and literature professor at La Sorbonne during the 1980s, authored more than twenty books, translated to Spanish and other European languages.

¹⁰ 1. . . . Murió el *grito* del retorno/ . . . The *call* for the return died

2. . . . vivir *la creación* como tu propia naturaleza/ . . . to live the *creation* as your own nature

3. . . . el resplandor . . . profeta de su propio *llanto*/ . . . the *glow* . . . Prophet of his own crying

4. . . . como si el día fuera *caravana* de lágrimas/ . . . as if a day was a *caravan* of tears

5. . . . amigos *perdidos* . . . en el confin de los desiertos/ . . . *lost* friends . . . in the confines of the deserts

¹¹ "Aisha pensaba que la añoranza era un castigo y que los castigos deben cumplirse para limpiar el alma."

¹² ". . . miraría los dibujos finísimos que la alheña dejaba en sus manos, diferentes en cada palma, intentando aprendérselos para que fueran un regalo en su memoria."

unification of two thriving contrary forces, as Nietzsche said, is the tragedy and *Háblame, musa de aquel varón* inserts itself in the literary tradition of essential identities. This perception will change drastically less than ten years later in 2007 when Lucía Etxebarria publishes her *Cosmofobia*, a postmodern novel with an increased sense for regionalism that explores multiple perspectives of very diverse characters. Even though Etxebarria herself could not resist the Orientalist temptations of exotic imagery, she tackles African immigration from a very different perspective, pointing towards the transnational turn Spain underwent in only a decade to become a more accepting, diverse society.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON DIVERSITY IN *COSMOFOBIA*

Lucía Etxebarria (1966), originally from Valencia, is one of the current best-selling Spanish authors. She was awarded the very prestigious Nadal Prize for her novel *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998), Premio Primavera for *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* (2001), and Premio Planeta for *Un milagro en equilibrio* (2004). Her work illustrates the most significant social changes in Spain since the fall of the Francoist regime, related mostly to immigration, racism, combating stereotypes about the other, and equal position for women in society. *Cosmofobia* is set in Lavapiés, a multicultural neighborhood in Madrid that offers a unique space for interaction of multiple characters who are otherwise unlikely to cross paths. *Cosmofobia's* characters are portrayed living their everyday lives in a hostile world, and the cast of all of them is included in the detailed index at the end of the novel as "Dramatis Personae." The story develops through two types of narrative techniques: through the narrator "Lucía Etxebarria's perspective who focuses on one or more characters and their stories" and through a "silent interviewer who we assume is the narrator gathering information for a novel" (Oaknín 187). One of the major differences in comparison to *Háblame, musa...* is how Etxebarria's narrative techniques allow her to make her subaltern characters express themselves without any sort of intermediary, while keeping the narrator in the story for metafictional purposes.

The novel's complex structure has its precedent in Camilo José Cela's *La Colmena* (1951), in which more than 300 characters interact in post-civil war (1942) urban Madrid. The author recreates a metaphorical space of an urban beehive in which many characters live in an anguished, bitter existence. In *Cosmofobia*, Madrid is described as "a city dense like

a nest of poisonous insects,"¹³ (Etxebarria 127), and the neighborhood Lavapiés "is multicultural, but not intercultural . . . communities tolerate each other, but they do not mingle, the limits are respected"¹⁴ (Etxebarria 34). Through a beehive structure, the novel erases the boundaries between the other and the self and instead it creates a space in which everyone is 'the other' to everyone else.¹⁵ The marginalized social strata, drug dealers, immigrants, and gang members, appear and disappear, interconnected with snobby artistic circles and characters from the entertainment world. The ghostly existence of undocumented immigrants, expressed through the stereotyped caricature of the paradox, connects with its specular alter-ego through a game of perspectives in order to reflect these essences, and gives them a new space in which to fit both 'them' and 'us.' The elements that inhabit the ghostly space in *Háblame musa de aquel varón* are now placed outside the immigrant and it is him, Ismael, for example, an immigrant from Côte d'Ivoire, who, in a reversed direction, perceives the outside world in terms of shadows and ghosts. Thus, we can discuss the no-look (*no-mirada*) which establishes the border between racial otherness and the subject: "In the eyes that were not looking one could feel disdain, suspicion against the black perception standing there . . . a conspiracy of silent shadows, ghost enemies that his imagination was placing on real people"¹⁶ (Etxebarria 125).

As for Moroccan and African immigration, three characters are especially important for the development of the plot: Susana, Amina, and Yamal. Susana is a daughter of Equatorial Guinean parents, who, because of her origin, is not considered Spanish. Even though she was born and raised in Madrid she has trouble finding a job. Although Susana is given voice in this novel and can tell her story, her descriptions are marked by stereotypes and essentialist assumptions. For instance, her personal traits, likes and preferences are based on her African heritage, rather than her character and upbringing: "If I get depressed, as a black woman I go to the kitchen, the most familiar space"¹⁷ (Etxebarria 67); "And I keep quiet, because if there is anything about an African woman,

¹³ "una ciudad densa como un nido de insectos venenosos."

¹⁴"el barrio de Lavapiés es multicultural, pero no intercultural . . . las comunidades se toleran, pero no se mezclan, los límites se respetan."

¹⁵ "No existe mi verdad o la del otro, sino mi verdad y la del otro" (118).

¹⁶ "En los ojos que no le miraban sospechaba desdén, recelo contra la percepción negra parada ahí...una conjura de sombras silentes, fantasmas enemigos que su imaginación localizaba en personas reales . . . "

¹⁷ ". . . si me deprimó, yo, que soy negra, voy a la cocina, que para mí es como el sitio más acogedor, más familiar."

it's her patience, she is very patient"¹⁸ (Etxebarria 89). Many women in the text face gender-based violence at home and Susana is no exception. Maryanne Leone points out that Susana needs an older white European woman of higher economic status to teach her critical thinking about her situation and the possibility of a change, which resonates with Tapade Mohanty's critique of Western Feminism (Leone 58). Similarly, Aicha needs Matilde to make sense of her story, while Matilde would become the guardian of her vulnerability. So even though we can observe a certain shift in perception of immigrant women from Chacón to Etxebarria, there is still a trace of the hegemonic view on immigrant women as part of discursive colonization (Leone 58). Leone states that "[w]hile these failures to acknowledge 'Western eyes' diminish the critical potential of Etxebarria's text, the representation of interethnic relationships among Spanish citizens, immigrants, and Spanish citizens born of immigrants parents and of intimate and familiar relationships, reflects on the power relations and changing habitus among Madrid's diverse population in the first decades of the twenty-first century" (Leone 60).

Aminais, a daughter of immigrants from Morocco, was also born and raised in Spain, but has always been perceived as the other due to the way she looks, and thinks.¹⁹ She joins a therapy group after leaving her abusive Moroccan boyfriend, Karim whom she chose herself. She becomes an object of analysis for Isaac, her therapist, who writes a psychological paper on her case, offering a Freudian analysis of her "hysterical" breakdown. This happened after she met Yamal, a beautiful and sensual Moroccan-Lebanese painter who supposedly bewitched her and tried to seduce her. She is only able to free herself from the spell after traveling to Tangiers and consulting with a shaman. Amina, like Susana, although granted space for self-expression, is trapped between two worlds and her situation allows only a little space to save herself: "I don't live in Morocco, but it feels like I did,"²⁰ she utters.

Finally, the apparent contrast between the dark side represented by the precarious world of immigration, and the world of shallow glamour and ephemeral materialism, finds its inflection point – as we have already seen in *Ulises* in the previous novel – in Yamal Benani. He is portrayed as an extremely mysterious character, hence his alleged bewitching of Amina does sound veridical. His character and actions are represented

¹⁸ "Y yo callada, porque lo que tiene la mujer africana es lo que tiene, que es muy paciente, que tiene mucha paciencia."

¹⁹ "por como viste, por cómo luce, por cómo piensa" (Etxebarria 140).

²⁰ "Porque yo no vivo en Marruecos, pero como si viviera" (147).

through Orientalist, sensorial images related to magic during Achoura night, a harem-like communal living with his mother and his aunts recalled as if they were princesses, the smell of incense, light of the moon and heat of the fire.²¹ In the final scene, Lucía Etxebarria doubtfully contemplates his painting hanging in her living room, wondering whether they are made of human blood. This scene brings us to the interpretation of Lavapiés embodied in Yamal: "Yamal is the Whole to which he himself referred, because he is the same neighborhood: a survivor, a mystery, an abyss"²² (Etxebarria 404). The possibility that Yamal is Lavapiés itself offers an interesting rewriting of urban space in terms of interculturality. As noted earlier, the Orientalist imagery is still attractive to contemporary writers when it comes to writing immigrants' otherness, but we can perceive a qualitative shift in immigrant women's stories, from a helpless, non-verbal character who is predestined to die, to more empowered subjects, like Amina and Susana, who though still subject to racial discrimination, are granted voice and with it and are able to articulate their own discourse regarding the otherness in Spanish contemporary society.

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²¹ "Yo era entonces un niño, apenas tendría seis o siete años... Antes de que apareciese la gran luna de la fiesta de 'Achoura' mi madre y mis tías se engalanaban como princesas y subían a la azotea encalada. Llevaban unos braseros en los que quemaban un incienso mágico y en donde echaban amuletos mientras salmodiaban, con los ojos fijos en la luna y las manos tejiendo arabescos alrededor del brasero, las fórmulas mágicas del qbul."

²²"Yamal es el Todo al que él mismo se refería porque es el barrio mismo: un superviviente, un misterio, un abismo."

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