

The Nature of Anxiety: Precarious City Lives in *La piqueta* and *La trabajadora*

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Abstract

Separated by more than fifty years, the novels *La piqueta* (1959) by Antonio Ferres and *La trabajadora* (2014) by Elvira Navarro parallel each other in location and theme. Ferres locates his novel in the *Chabolas* (shantytowns) of Madrid's southern periphery, specifically Orcasitas, in the late 1950s. Navarro's novel is set primarily in the working-class neighborhood of Aluche in 2011. Both novels critique the southern periphery of Madrid during times of restructuring and crisis through descriptions of and movement through landscapes that infuse, superimpose, and ultimately are confused with the body and mind of the protagonists. These movements through Madrid's center and periphery reveal incongruences between imagined landscapes and real lived spaces. The former, constructed through tropes and metaphors of the natural environment, serve as an anchor of communal and individual identity and become unmoored from the reality of actual lived spaces. This divorce between the ideals of the imagined landscape and the concerns of the real one provokes anxiety and a breakdown of community and self.

Keywords: Antonio Ferres, Elvira Navarro, housing crisis, social realism, Ecocriticism, Spain, crisis, urban theory, affect.

Resumen

Separados por más de cincuenta años, las novelas *La piqueta* de Antonio Ferres (1959) y *La trabajadora* de Elvira Navarro (2014) se parecen en situación geográfica y tema. Ferres localizó su novela en las chabolas madrileñas de Aluche a finales de los años 50, mientras Navarro ubicó la suya en el barrio periférico de Aluche en 2011. Ambas novelas critican la construcción de la periferia de Madrid durante épocas de crisis política y económica a través de descripciones de y movimientos por paisajes que se infunden, se superponen y se confunden con el cuerpo y mente de los protagonistas. Además, los movimientos entre los paisajes imaginados y los espacios reales ponen al descubierto las incongruencias entre ambos. El anterior se construye a través de los tropos y metáforas del mundo natural capaces de anclar la identidad individual y comunal. Cuando estas nociones del mundo imaginado se desamarran provoca una ansiedad y el desmoronamiento del ser y de la comunidad.

Palabras claves: Antonio Ferres, Elvira Navarro, desahucio, realismo social, ecocrítica, España, crisis, teoría urbana, afecto.

The action in Antonio Ferres's *La piqueta* (1959) and Elvira Navarro's *La trabajadora* (2014) takes place in adjoining neighborhoods in Madrid, and the novels

mirror each other in their construction of identity and dispossession in the urban periphery. In *La piqueta*, a community of Andalusian and Extremaduran immigrants awaits the pick-axe, which is coming to demolish their illegal shantytown. The action is set in post-war Madrid, mostly in the Orcasitas neighborhood on the southern margins of the city. Jumping forward more than fifty years to *La trabajadora*, the action takes place in a different neighborhood of the urban periphery, Aluche. The later novel centers on two women who live under the constant threat of the *desahucios* [evictions] which characterized post 2008 crisis Spain. Both novels build a critique of the exploitation of the outer districts of Madrid through descriptions of and movement through landscapes that infuse, superimpose, and ultimately are confused with the body and mind of the protagonists. These movements through Madrid's center and periphery reveal incongruences between actual lived spaces and imagined landscapes, where tropes and metaphors of the natural environment serve as anchors of communal and individual identity. The unmooring of these anchors from reality prompts anxiety and the breakdown of community and self.

In *La piqueta* and *La trabajadora* the natural world is both foil and metaphor for affective experience. The landscape and the Spanish natural terrain are deployed in these texts in such a way that their destruction as poetic and idealized places is equal to the disintegration and collapse of national and economic projects. Bodies, landscapes, and cities are bound together by ideology and torn apart through crisis. Understanding how these two novels about evictions in Madrid employ the natural world in relation to individuals and communities opens a window onto how city, body, labor, and landscape are constructed for the benefit of ideologies, political or economic. Analysis of the creative tension within and between how the novels construct the "natural" and "built" environments shows that nature goes beyond mere metaphor. Shared notions of the landscape and the environment permeate, direct, and define affective responses to a city in economic and ecological decline. To this end, this essay will look at how *La piqueta* and *La trabajadora* use literary social realism to explore Madrid in their respective time periods. Rather than seeking to fulfill a set of genre expectations, Ferres and Navarro use social realism as a tool to diagnose how crisis infects landscapes and those who inhabit it. The two novels capture their present moment to document how individuals and communities both shape and are shaped by their natural and built environments. In *La piqueta*, Ferres explores how the southern periphery of Madrid became an 'operational' landscape, open to the forces of 'accumulation by dispossession'—terms from Neil Brenner and David Harvey that will be defined in the coming paragraphs. Navarro's *La trabajadora* extends this critique to the Madrid of 2011, three years after the devastating economic collapse of 2008.

Social Realism, Ecocriticism and Urban Theory

Antonio Ferres was born in Madrid in 1924 and was one of the main authors of the social realist movement in Spain in the 1950s. His first novel, *Los vencidos* (1960), was censored by the Francoist government (1939-1975) and was not published in Spain

until 2005 (*el Cultural*). His second novel, *La piqueta*, which escaped censorship and was published in 1959, established his place within the social realists of the 1950s. Elvira Navarro was born in Huelva in 1978 and grew up in Valencia. She lives in Madrid and writes novels, literary criticism, blogs, and editorials in several online journals and newspapers. In 2010 *Granta* magazine named her as one of the twenty-two “Best Young Spanish Novelists.” The Spanish magazine, *El Cultural*, followed in 2013 naming her a rising star in Spanish literature. While Ferres’s career underwent a distinct evolution from the social realist movement in the late 1950s to the structural novel in the 1960s and 1970s, Navarro’s literary style is harder to define. Her first novels, *La ciudad en invierno* (2007) and *La ciudad feliz* (2009), are coming-of-age narratives that take place in Valencia. *La trabajadora*, her first novel entirely set in Madrid, employs social realism in its focus on the lives and surroundings of the protagonists. In *La trabajadora*, the narrator anchors the story in the present to reflect the continuation of the processes started under Franco and continued through the transition that brought Spain to crisis.¹ Both Ferres and Navarro employ social realism to draw lines between text and context, to show how ideology literally builds space and acquiescence to hegemonic power structures.

In his seminal study, *Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Post War Spain*, David Herzberger examines the social realists’ recreation of the first decades of the dictatorship. While Franco legitimized a disastrous present through a mythological past, when Spain was a global empire fueled by National Catholicism, Ferres and other post-war writers of the 1940s and 1950s pushed back against this illusion and censorship by subversive depictions of what they saw. Although they focused on the day-to-day lives of people, as Herzberger notes, the authors did not create simplistic “representations” of a reality divorced from historical and political circumstances. Language itself became a tool to break down myth and time. Herzberger emphasizes that the social realists critiqued real issues of the dictatorship—rural isolation, the alienation of youth, starving fishermen—with a language “so deeply common, so utterly transparent, that we remain largely unaware of its presence even as we gather together meaning from what it says” (63). This language “in all its commonness” fuses history with a tension: “[i]t speaks against the myths of the Regime (conquest, liberation, heroism, and the like) in the language of the Regime, and in doing so lays bare the deceit of its own homogeneous discourse” (63). Herzberger understands social realism as working ironically “to demystify Spanish history” because “[i]t establishes a base for understanding the historical by positing a reality in the present that necessitates a past vastly divergent from the official one” (63). Both Ferres and Navarro employ language as described by Herzberger: while anchored in the present moment, a “common” and “transparent” language coalesces with history and landscape to produce a tension capable of disrupting political and economic myths.

¹ The question of genre in this text deserves its own study. Although *La trabajadora* tends towards social realism, the unreliability of the narrator and the meditative tone of the text make its genre hard to pin down. For an extended discussion of genre concerns in Navarro’s previous novels, read Susan Divine, “Cityscapes and the *novela de autoformación*: Elvira Navarro in Valencia”.

Where *La piqueta* builds the critique of Franco and 1950s urban growth through a dynamic natural world aligned with the vulnerabilities of the working class, *La trabajadora* uses a deteriorating landscape as an affective mirror of the debilitating condition of the protagonist, Elisa. Both novels trace the process of urban development on the southern fringe of Madrid from a “natural” to a “built” and “rebuilt” environment. Through studying these two novels together, we can focus on how landscape is manipulated to benefit the power structure—first that of Franco, then that of post-crisis capitalism.

Land, City, and Identity

Gayana Jurkevich, in “Defining Castile in Literature and Art,” locates the origin of key myths of landscape and nationality in Spain in the beginning of the twentieth century and the second generation of Krausistas. These were the first to “turn their attention” to the Spanish land:

familiarity with and appreciation of the national landscape were considered indispensable since the prevailing belief held that a nation’s *medio ambiente* shaped the indigenous population and its history, and could be held accountable for the current deplorable state of the Spanish nation. (57)

According to both Carlos Blanco Aguinaga in his seminal *La juventud del '98* (1970), and Roberta Johnson in *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel* (2003), for the Spanish modernists, to understand the landscape was to understand an “authentic” or “pure” Spanish identity (Johnson 64). In his rebuilding of the nation, both in terms of infrastructure and ideology, Franco used the rural land as a container of meaning embracing a glorious history and a *castizo* identity. When Franco espoused global capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s, landscape became cityscape and the myths of national identity had to likewise be shifted from the “natural” to the “urban.”

Although urban theory is well-established in Hispanic literary criticism, the ecocritical turn is in a nascent stage. Peninsular Spanish literary scholars, such as Susan Larson, Matthew Feinberg, and Luis I. Prádanos have led the discussion on ecological concerns in literary and cultural studies. In a short but intriguing article co-written by Feinberg and Larson, the authors look at activism in real space. They focus on “places that capital seems to have ‘refused’—a term that refers to a ‘refusal’ to invest both private and public resources, but also to the notion of city space itself as ‘refuse’ or ‘trash,’” and outline how architects and philosophers reimagine these spaces ecologically (117). In Prádanos’s “Energy Humanities and Spanish Urban Cultural Studies: A Call for a Radical Convergence,” the author pleads for a joining up of “energy humanities”² and urban cultural studies. Prádanos stresses that an ecocritical and urban cultural studies approach to literature should prompt questions such as “[w]here do the energy and nutrients that support urban infrastructures and characters (human or not) come

² Jennifer Wenzel defines the “energy humanities” as a field that wants to “understand the discrepancy between the everyday tedium of filling the gas tank and the sublimely discrepant timescales at work in fossil fuels” (31 qtd. in Prádanos).

from?”), as well as seek to expose the “geographies of extraction and exploitation that feed the neoliberal urban growth machine” (Prádanos unpublished manuscript).³ In Ferres and Navarro, the answer to these questions is found in how the land and the human communities around it are constructed as operational landscapes.

As David Harvey asserts: the urban is a process (1996). Likewise, Nature is a process. The process of urbanisation is carefully pursued by the forces of capitalism in order to facilitate the accumulation of capital; that of natural change works through the forces of an ambivalent evolution on a time scale that is mostly beyond the lifespan of a human being. Urban theory, on the whole, looks at how economic systems build and structure the lived reality of cities. Literary scholars apply this to cultural and literary texts to understand how artists represent or oppose that process. Ecology, in general terms, encompasses the study of biological systems and the political movements to protect the environment from the consequences of industrial pollution and human impact. Cheryll Glotfelty broadly defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). Refining this description, in “La naturaleza no existe,” Eric Swingedouw deconstructs nature as a concept in three vital ways. In agreement with Timothy Morton, he sees nature as a “floating signifier,” then as a norm or law, and as a projection of repressed fantasies (42-43). Swingedouw critiques these as all essentially empty notions that have been and are employed to fulfill human philosophy, desires, and aspirations. Although nature is certainly used as metaphor and trope in the *La piqueta* and *La trabajadora*, learning to read ecologically includes learning to understand these rhetorical strategies and their affect on the reader, as well as treating nature as a physical reality.

Literary critic Lawrence Buell has written extensively about the evolution of ecocriticism from the first wave in the 1990s to the last fifteen years. During this time, the scope of what qualifies a text to be the subject of ecocritical practice has been extended progressively.⁴ Whereas initially only those texts with a mimetic view, or those that spoke directly of an ecological crisis, were deemed worthy of study, as ecocriticism developed, so did the geographies, cultures, and histories included under its umbrella. Texts about the evolution of landscapes and cities—such as the novels by Ferres and Navarro – are an important piece of a mosaic that helps scholars and readers understand not only the ecological or the urban, but how these processes intersect across space and time. To this end, Buell brings ecocriticism towards urban theory, pointing out how more recent theorists analyze how “postcolonial geographies and archives” are “sophisticating the conception of place and place attachment” (100). Likewise, David Harvey, in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996), brings

³ Prádanos edited a special edition of *Ecozona* on Transatlantic Iberian, Latin American, and Lusophone African Ecocriticism (Volume 8.1, 2017), and an edition of *Letras hispanas* with nine articles dedicated to ecocriticism in Spanish peninsular literature and film (Volume 13, 2017). He is currently editing a special edition of *The Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* likewise dedicated to ecocriticism in Spanish literature (expected 2019).

⁴ For an extended discussion of ecocriticism as practice and theory, read Agymean, *Introducing Just Sustainabilities*; Arnold et al., “Forum on Literatures of the Environment”; Harvey, “Marxism, Metaphors, and Ecological Politics”; Heise, “Local Rock and Global Plastic”; Heise, “Martian Ecologies and the Future of Nature”; and Plumwood, “Inequality, Ecojustice and Ecological Rationality.”

urban theory towards ecocriticism. He comments of both scientific and humanistic literature: “We have loaded upon nature, often without knowing it, in our science as in our poetry, much of the alternate desire for values to that implied by money” (163). First recognizing that revolutionary Marxist politics “appears to perpetuate rather than resolve” abuse of the land (120), Harvey tries to “bridge” the antagonism between socialist ideals and environmental stewardship by converting the discord into a “creative rather than a destructive tension” (121). For Harvey, to resolve and move beyond this issue, we must first understand that in capitalism nature is only valued in so far as it retains its ability to aid in the production of capital. Secondly, we must recognize that language creates and perpetuates our exploitative relationship with the natural world.

Stacy Alaimo emphasizes that part of environmental degradation today rests on the false dichotomy of urban/rural. It is a binary that not only works towards ecological disaster, but also is part of the patriarchal framework that aligns women with the land and permits the exploitation of both (5). As Roberta Johnson points out in the writings of Spanish modernists: “Unamuno and Azorín evoked specific regions via female identifications. When women are associated with a geographical region, their ‘soul’ blends into an eternal landscape” (36). The narrators of *La piqueta* and *La trabajadora* are acutely aware of how this connection between land, city, and gender motivates and influences their female protagonists. Although much of feminist theory has been dedicated to “disentangling” woman from this alignment with nature that has kept her “outside the domain of human transcendence, rationality, subjectivity, and agency,” it is time for a more productive engagement that “undertake[s] the transformation of gendered dualisms – nature/culture, body/mind, object/subject, resource/agency” (Alaimo 5). How the women in the two novels understand their relationship to space is built through established binaries that require landscapes and identities to be destabilized and reassembled as they form part of an operational landscape.

In his essay, *The Hinterland Urbanized*, Neil Brenner breaks down the dichotomy of “city /countryside, urban /rural, interior/exterior”, in a particular type of creative destruction that “transforms non-city spaces into zones of high-intensity, large-scale, infrastructure—operational landscapes” (125). This is directly related to the need to make all space, but especially certain spaces in the periphery, *always-already* attentive to the needs of capitalist growth. Brenner calls on us to “visualize” and understand the “generally invisible webs of connection that link our urban way of life to the silent violence of accumulation by dispossession and environmental destruction in the world’s hinterlands and operational landscapes” (126). Much of Brenner’s analysis rests on Harvey’s theory of accumulation by dispossession, a strategy of capitalism especially relevant during times of debt crisis – the precise context of *La piqueta* and *La trabajadora*—and how it is used to “reorganize internal social relations and production” (78). Simply put, in lieu of imperial expansion abroad, accumulation by dispossession is a sweeping destruction and re-appropriation of properties—intellectual, genetic, environmental, and cultural—from internal communities to central political and economic forces (75). What reading *La piqueta* and *La trabajadora* together illuminates,

then, is the creation and evolution of this operational landscape in Madrid as well as the potential for resistance to accumulation by dispossession.

Landscape and subversion in Antonio Ferres

José B. Monleón echoes Herzberger's discussion of social realism in his analysis of *La piqueta*. Monleón explains how Ferres critiques the idea of the "eternal Spain" and the injustices of the Franco era through an exploration of time and space: "se caracteriza por una recreación de lo que la 'España eterna' implicaba en cuanto medida del presente histórico" (149). Despite his criticism of the dictatorship in the novel, Ferres commented in a 2009 interview with the Spanish newspaper *El mundo* that the text suffered no cuts because the censors "[n]o captaron los símbolos" (no pg). Although Ferres did not specify what these symbols were, this essay understands them to radiate from the natural world that serves, as Swingedouw explains, as a "normative power", where nature is invoked as a transcendental or universal organizer (42). While Swingedouw's analysis sees this use of nature as detrimental to our knowledge and interaction with both the natural world and with each other (43), in the case of Ferres's novel, it functions as the "norm" against which Franco's ideal Spain is measured and shown to be the antithesis of its own ideologies.

The story of *La piqueta* follows the romance between Maruja, living outside the city center, in Orcasitas, and Luis, from the urban core, in working-class Lavapiés. The third-person narrator primarily focuses on Maruja and her family who, like the others of the shantytown where they live, came from the poverty-stricken south and built their own homes in unofficial settlements on the southern periphery. The plot is driven forward by their anxiety and fear of being removed from their home. The official urbanization Orcasitas and other surrounding neighborhoods began in 1953 when the Comisaría de Ordenación Urbana [Commission of Urban Planning] realized that many of the middle and lower economic class homes that had been destroyed by the war were yet to be rebuilt which "dio lugar a un déficit inicial" [gave way to an initial deficit] (Leira, Gago, Solana 144). Although building had recommenced, it could not keep up with the demand, especially from immigrants from the south of Spain who had come to the capital city looking for more stable employment. (Leira, Gago, Solana 144). Much of the construction that took place on this land – the land where *La piqueta* is situated—was illegal, but it was overseen and regulated by "personajes carentes de escrúpulos, propietarios de un suelo situado en aquel momento en la periferia del continuo edificado, muchas veces calificado de zona verde, parcelan ilegalmente su suelo y venden o alquilan parcelas para la edificación de chabolas" (144). This is the moment that Franco began to define this area as an "operational landscape" that would produce capital for the central government. Land is a container of history, identity, ideology, and people, all of which must be exploited, destroyed, and rebuilt in order to maintain the dictatorship's progress towards financial solvency via spatial fixes. In Ferres's novel, the narrator does not pit those who lived in the shantytowns—the *chabolistas*—against the

dictatorship and this process. Instead, the land itself and, recalling Harvey, its “deep continuity” with the people is used as an ironic symbol.

Rather than openly questioning who has a right to the land—the *chabolistas* or the government –, the text approaches the issue through the myth of the Spanish landscape and the reality of a precarious economic situation. Maruja, the main protagonist, is first identified with the natural world and Spanish landscape, and then alienated from it because of Franco’s urban planning. Recalling Roberta Johnson, female figures in modernism were closely associated with the “soul” of Spain where, “women are amorphous and indistinguishable from the landscape,” while the men are connected to the manipulation of the land and with the city itself (43). The conscious repetition of this modernist narrative strategy in *La piqueta* is not a melancholic or nostalgic reference to an eternal Spain, as in the early twentieth century. Rather, the rural landscape as figurative and literal device permeates the core of the text and directs the reader’s response to Franco’s urban planning.

The plot of *La piqueta* begins at the end: the anxious, angry, and distraught community is waiting helplessly for the imminent demolition of their homes. In the opening dialogue, a group of boys express their anger through metaphors of war, “[c]uando vengan, los de arriba que avisen y nos tiramos al suelo, como en las guerras” (13). Extending the comparison, the narrator describes the space where they live as a prison, “[l]a calluja, entre las chabolas y los solares, parecía un redil, una extraña cárcel” (14). The community that lives there, however, is united and aligned, not as soldiers or prisoners of a dictatorship as these images may indicate, but as under a higher power of nature: “Todo el paisaje diríase estar estancado y quieto desde hacía mucho tiempo. La gente parecía haber empequeñecido bajo el peso de la luz, de la lámina pesada del cielo, haberse achicado, disminuido, conforme avanzaba el calor del día, el calor de la estación” (15). From this opening scene, the narrator shifts to the romance between Luis and Maruja. Framing the novel around Luis in *castizo* Lavapiés, and Maruja in the not-yet urbanized periphery of Orcasitas, the narrative intensifies the affective weight of the protagonists’ situations as a way to subvert the government’s exploitation of land and communities.

The narrator establishes the association between Maruja and the natural world in multiple ways. There are simple and direct examples: Maruja does not have a watch and looks to the sun to tell time (24). More compelling strategies align the land with the human body. Early in the text, Maruja and Luis walk through her neighborhood and the narrator describes the newly formed road like a scar, “[l]a calle estaba sin urbanizar; era como una zanja ancha, como una cicatriz entre las filas de casas pobres” (54). In another example, the natural world mirrors Maruja’s emotions. As the young couple is getting to know each other, they are walking through these “scarred” streets and it begins to storm. Running through the rain to find cover, they hold hands and blush at each other’s touch. In the commotion, Maruja reveals to Luis that her house will be demolished in less than two weeks. Perplexed and worried, Luis wonders why; she explains, “Dicen que salió una ley para que no hubiera más chabolas y que nosotros la hemos hecho después” (66). After this declaration, the narrator punctuates the affective weight of the

scene with a description of the landscape in the storm: “El cielo iba poniéndose más oscuro. El humo negro de las nubes ganaba, se extendía. Los truenos recorían el horizonte en lontananza. Los relámpagos encendían brillos en el campo” (66). This almost cinematographic cut from the conversation to the sounds and smells of a storm is a symbol of the turmoil and the fear of the reality of the situation that can be named, but not criticized: Franco’s urban plan that was tearing apart human and ecological communities.

By aligning Maruja with the land and her suitor with the city, Ferres creates a relationship which reflects the urban/rural divide. Luis was born and raised in the working-class neighborhood of Lavapiés, in the centre of Madrid. Their movements through their respective neighborhoods—Orcasitas and Lavapiés—highlight the contrast between their respective spaces. Just after meeting each other, the couple are alone and pondering their future together. Maruja, both hopeful and fearful, walks at the edge of city and countryside. The narrator focuses on the sounds and sights that surround her: “Cantaban grillos. Oyó ruidos de latas en el vertedero y vio, huidiza, la sombra del perro que buscaba algo que comer entre las basuras” (47). When the focus shifts to Luis, contemplation of the rural is succeeded by active movement through the urban: “[a]ndaba solo por las calles, hasta cansarse; llegaba hasta los bulevares de la Ronda de Toledo, detrás de la fábrica de gas; a los solares donde había ido de chico, cuando era alumno del Grupo Escolar” (47). These movements through and between spaces, sights, sounds, and memories motivated by anxiety and fear are essential to how the narrator constructs his critique of the spatial inequalities created and perpetuated by Franco. They produce a vernacular map of the, as Joe Gerlach labels them, “mundane cartographies . . . of as yet untold micropolitics” that the dictatorship tried to silence (11). Moreover, since Franco used the rural land and its “humble” inhabitants as signifiers of Spain’s immutable national identity, its destruction is consequently a destruction of his fascist ideals. Likewise, Maruja’s fate is a powerful indictment of Franco’s “traditional” and Catholic Spain.

Aurora G. Morcilla, in *The Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and the Francoist Body Politic*, articulates precisely how Franco envisioned the relationship between religion, state, body, and economic imperatives, especially at the time of the novel’s publication in 1959. As Morcilla writes: “National Catholicism intended to sustain and strengthen Spain’s eternal mystic body politic. The members must assume their place and duty in the social and political order inaugurated by the new massive culture of consumption” (32). Men and women were the “appendages” of Fascism, and laws were created to promote marriage before the age of 25, an increase in birthrates, and “racial purity”, which was analogous to the Castilian landscape (48). However, while the dictatorship relentlessly promoted the perpetuation of a “natural” (patriarchal) family, as central to Spanish identity, the concerns of capital outweighed those of family. The best example of this comes on the eve of the axe-men’s destruction of Maruja’s neighborhood, when the family unit must ultimately separate. Maruja’s younger brother is sent to live with a different family, and, most ironically of all, Maruja and Luis end up

living together out of wedlock in the apartment he shares with his aunt in Lavapiés, a situation certainly anathema to Franco's ideal Spain.

While Ferres was writing against the conversion of the southern periphery into an operational landscape by Franco, its use as such has continued past the transition to democracy into the present. Noelia S. Garcia underlines the fact that in Navarro's 2014 novel, the fear and alienation as described in *La trabajadora* has its origin in the same economic and political milieu as in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Garcia recognizes how the city's southern periphery has been used as an operational landscape since the 1950s: "el chabolismo no llegó a desaparecer. Esta zona se convirtió en la cara negativa de la ciudad, pues sus condiciones de vida rompían con la imagen que se vendía. La tendencia fue a ocultarla, silenciarla y mantenerla apartada del resto de la urbe" (5). Navarro's rendering of women and anxiety in Madrid is built around the post-2008 economic restructuring and makes clear that the Spanish authorities' reaction to this crisis understood urban and green space as speculative, purely imagined potentialities that served the needs of capitalist reproduction.

The Body and the City in *La trabajadora*

La trabajadora responds to the economic crisis that began in 2008 with a narrative about two women struggling in Madrid in 2011. This is told primarily from the first-person perspective of Elisa. The reader witnesses the deterioration of the protagonist's mental health in a city suffering a severe economic decline. The novel is divided into three sections, the first, "Fabio," is Elisa's retelling of the mental breakdown and sexual escapades of her roommate, Susana, in Madrid of the 1980s. The second and largest part of the novel, "La trabajadora," is Elisa's own experiences and attempts at controlling her anxiety by running, walking, and, finally, use of medication. The third section, "Pesquisas," is one short chapter that recounts a conversation between Elisa and her psychologist. The final sentence concludes that her economic situation "se estabilizó en lo precario" as did her mental health (153). Through the experiences of two women and their mental illness, *La trabajadora* constructs an oppositional politics of the post-2008 crisis. This strategy is based in art—textual and visual—capable of unsettling the binaries of body/city, center/periphery and natural/constructed.

Elisa begins her first-person narration with "Mi situación económica no era buena" (45), which is the motivation for a move from an apartment in the center of Madrid, Tirso, to Aluche on its margins. As her paycheck dwindles even more, Elisa must take on a roommate, Susana. At first annoyed if not mildly hostile to their roommates, the women establish a fragile friendship that revolves around afternoon coffee and discussions of their work as artists. Susana works in multi-media, transforming maps of Madrid into unrecognizable space by simply shifting buildings.⁵ Elisa is a writer and an independent contractor who edits for a publishing company. This is also on the brink of

⁵ For a discussion of how this art form is capable of expressing political resistance, read Larson, "Trash as Theme and Aesthetic in Elvira Navarro's *La trabajadora*."

collapse and, because of its own precarious economic position, gives her less and less work.

Elisa's position as narrator serves multiple purposes in the novel. She tells the story of her life, but she also relates the stories of her roommate in the 1980s, her boss Carmentxu through the 1990s, and her attempt to decipher the edited memoirs of a post-war widow who suffers from Parkinsons. Elisa documents women's work inside and outside of the commodified labor market through different time periods and under different economic structures. In this way, her labor as editor and writer transcends market forces to become both therapy and resistance. However, what is most relevant to the present analysis is how Susana and Elisa's bodies trace lines of crisis while walking or running through Madrid and Aluche.

Both in their own time periods, Susana in the 1980s, and Elisa in 2011, the women walk the city as a way to recuperate mental stability. Rather than regaining equilibrium, city and body are merged: the body with the cartography of capitalism, the city with the veins and neurological lines of human anxiety. Elisa's movements through Madrid create an itinerary of anxiety, a map of collapse, and a metaphor for the body of the city, its nerves as frayed as Elisa's. This creates a vernacular map of Madrid that questions the rationality of capitalism through various "performances" of crisis (Brenner 24). The body/city metaphor unlocks or triggers a series of what Elizabeth Grosz calls "potentialities" (508) between "congruent counterparts", where the urban is "made over and over into the simulacrum of the body" and the body, conversely, "is transformed, 'citized,' urbanized" (507). As Grosz argues, "the city is an active force in constituting bodies" and it "always leaves its traces on the subject's corporeality" (512). Elisa's corporeal crisis is spurned, not only by the city itself, but also by the realization how much her identity was tied to a myth of Madrid's economic solvency. The move from the illusion of a stable urban center (Tirso) to the reality of a chaotic urban periphery (Aluche) required her to accommodate her identity to the new space. Moreover, because this periphery operates as a site to feed the center, landscape and community must be acutely responsive to the needs of capitalism, constantly reforming themselves with the ebbs and flows of creative destruction.

Already anxious about her economic situation, Elisa is overcome by the realization that the Madrid she thought she lived in is not the same as the one she is experiencing. She finds solace for her internal isolation externally in cityscapes that reflect her own mental state: "Durante un mes estuve llegando a Eugenia de Montijo, a un parque desde el que podía observar cómo echaban abajo la Antigua cárcel, ante cuyas piedras me quedaba un buen rato, pues aquella desolación me resultaba consoladora" (47). The Carabanchel prison was built in the 1940s during the dictatorship. In 2011 it was being torn down as part of the post-2008 economic crisis restructuring. In her visits there, Elisa associates her own disintegration with that of Franco's crumbling legacy. This identification does not signal historical alliance, rather recognition of the relationship between her body and the economy's manipulation of space. As time goes on, Elisa becomes aware of the magnitude of the city's decline:

No ignoraba la existencia de viviendas sin permiso de habitabilidad debido a irregularidades, y que había muchos pisos a medio construir porque faltaba el dinero. Siempre pensé que estos proyectos fracasados estaban en mitad de páramos, o a unos reglamentarios kilómetros de la línea de la costa. No imaginaba que tal cosa sucediera en la ciudad. (76-77)

This acknowledgement that the “new” national economic crisis is not only limited to the coast but is part of Madrid is devastating, and exacerbates her own material struggles. Her anxiety increases to the point of her having panic attacks in public spaces. Objects take on facets of what Stacy Alaimo in *Bodily Natures* describes as a “trans-corporeality.” In general terms, trans-corporeality is a way to visualize the varied networks that exist between modes of thought, fleshy bodies, the environment, and the constructed world (3). Alaimo specifically analyzes “particular moments of confusion and contestation that occur when individuals and collectives must contend not only with the materiality of their very selves but with the often invisibly hazardous landscapes of risk society, which require scientific mediation” (17). These moments of confusion between body and city or body and object are at the center of Navarro’s critique of Madrid.

Elisa comes to understand her precarious economic and mental situation as aligned with the disordered urban landscape. This is perhaps most clearly articulated in Chapter 9, where Elisa recounts a series of panic attacks. It begins in the street with “una suerte de pálpito, un presentimiento desbocado un desbarajuste absoluto de mi sistema nervioso” (83). The shuttering of businesses she previously patronized sets off a neurological response: “los negocios clausurados, pensé, eran detalles mínimos de una organización cuyo corazón aún latía a pleno rendimiento, y no debía alarmarme” (83). The city’s heart, like her own, was beating at full speed. One day on the bus, Elisa is witness to urban landscape defined by blight. Suddenly people’s faces become morphed into a “lectura distinta y torcida” that reminds her of monsters (84). These thoughts, visual realities, and mental deformations culminate in a panic attack: “[t]raté de hablar. La sangre no llegaba a mis extremidades” (84). She worries and thinks that she’s crazy: “Pensé que estaba loca. Me lo formulé diez, veinte veces. Caminé. El movimiento me hería. Los coches con sus zumbidos lacerantes. Las voces de quienes chalaban en los portales, altas y crispadas” (84). She returns to her apartment and paces the rooms, pausing in each space to observe objects such as the beds, the oven, the old table, and the bookshelves heavy with books, and thinks, “[l]as cosas desprendían una existencia pesada que me abrumaba” (84). She first self-medicates with alcohol. But as the panic attacks persist, she tries out various anti-anxiety medicines (trankimazines, lextatines), and is injected with tranquilizers that cause her to sleep for 16 hours (86-88). Susana, in an attempt to make her roommate feel better, checks out Elisa’s only published book from the library and brings it home. Rather than improve her mood, “[a]hora todos los objetos, incluido mi libro, despedían un aura de vivos en otra dimensión. Yo ya tenía bastante con esos otros objetos” (88). These trans-corporeal objects, places, and lines have suddenly become active agents in her “desmoronamiento” (88). However, through drugs and writing, she begins to find “orden en el desbarajuste,” reconciling the city she

thought she knew with “la ciudad de crecimiento descontrolado, voraz, exorbitante, pobre” (104).

Integral to her mental compromise between imagined space and preformed cityscape are the paintings of Spanish artist Antonio López García. In the initial move to Aluche, Elisa was told that the view from her window was the same as a landscape painted by López. Elisa commented, disappointedly, that the painting “no concordaba con lo que yo veía desde la ventana” (45). Following this incidental description of place, her meditations on the paintings by López become a leitmotif of the relationship between affective and physical space. Lopez García began painting intimate and realist portraits of Madrid in the 1960s. As with literary social realism, in visual realism, language and time go hand-in-hand. Benjamin Fraser notes in his monograph on the famed artist that “gazing upon Antonio López’s painted urban landscapes, we simultaneously confront both the limitations of spatial representation and the inescapable reality of time” (3).

Although the López painting bears no visual resemblance to Elisa’s lived reality, she reconciles her place in the city via how the painter communicates a sense of place. Later in the novel, Elisa works in the library and is reflecting on those affected by the “fraude de las cooperativas, de las calles céntricas cuyos edificios estaban vacíos, de las urbanizaciones a medio construir, hasta hacía muy poco no había habido protestas” (78). Despite these tragedies and revolutions, from her distant vantage point, the city “permanecía más o menos igual” (78) and she observes “desde sus palaciegos ventanales la densidad soleada del aire, lo que se podía barruntar frente a la M – 30 y la M – 40” (78). However, in this place that is both a location and a mental state, the city seems like a memory, “a un puro recuerdo, y también a una impresión general de la soledad, como si los edificios estuvieran deshabitados o los ocupara el desierto...” (78). These ideas take her back to López and his paintings with their

exactitud delirante, de cuajo echado a la existencia. La ciudad parecía congelada, pero no por el frío, sino por la luz y el calor. . . La soledad de los edificios erguidos, la precariedad tan eficaz con la que se multiplicaban unas cuantas formas, como las amebas y otros organismos cuando un rayo fecundó los océanos, hacía que la vista borrara la vida, y todo funcionaba con un revés de ese origen, pues la tierra se reseca. (78)

In Fraser’s analysis, the landscapes of Madrid are described not as

mere static images to be admired passively. Instead, they are catalysts that move us to reflect actively upon our contemporary urban world. Ultimately, those who view his urban scenes are pushed to reconcile this contemplative, artistic space with their own concrete, lived, everyday spaces. (2)

Elisa reflects and finds a world in opposition to itself, an unreality that exists only in the imagination. In this way, Elvira Navarro’s text, like López’s paintings, recreates these landscapes of Madrid as a way for the reader to experience the destabilization of a series of binaries, especially that of perception and reality, in the post-2008 Spanish economy.

Eventually the anti-anxiety medication allows Elisa to return to her journeys through the city without fear of panic attacks. Her alienation, now mitigated through

drugs, allows for a different observation of the city. While wandering near the hospital Doce de Octubre, Elisa begins to arrive at a realignment of the real and imagined city:

No eran muchos, desde luego, lo que no impidió que retornara la agobiante, por inverosímil, idea de que había movimientos de carácter subterráneo capaces de modificar el escenario mental que yo tenía de la ciudad, y también el que leía en los periódicos o veía en la televisión y en Internet. Se trataba de una idea difusa, o más bien de una simple y desvaída intuición que me inquietaba. Su certeza equivalía a descubrir que éramos marcianos, el sueño de alguien, o un programa informático cuyas reglas cambiaban de un día para otro. Por otra parte, los gitanos y las familias desahuciadas llevaban décadas habitando casas vacías... (118).

Ultimately, in order to find her place in Madrid, she has to imagine herself as from another world. She has to understand the city and her place in it, not as a member of a community or movement, but as an alien. The “Martians” in the city are defined by the nature of the land they inhabit, but they also define the nature of the city, precariously located as they are between their value as laborers and their inconvenience as tenants in operational landscapes where at any time they can become non-human “trash” and be removed. *La trabajadora* reduces the official map of the city to the process of the city itself: accumulation by dispossession. The novel consequently elevates the “natural” corporeal reaction of Elisa to a metaphor capable of finding lines of resistance. The “irrational” body superimposed on the lines and contours of a “rational” Madrid in crisis evokes the unnatural imposition and disorder of capitalism. In this way, Navarro’s questioning and unsettling of binaries on the official map of Madrid opens a space for an ecological practice denuding narrative of its rhetorical devices.

Towards a conclusion

In both *La piqueta* and *La trabajadora*, the entrenched metaphors of landscape as representative of the feminine and the tropes of female mental fragility work ironically. Each narrative is driven forward by the emotional tides of individuals who grapple with their new condition as “placeless” and “refuse” in the city. No matter how different the agent causing the exploitation—dictatorship or crisis capitalism—these novels read together trace the evolution of a project to maintain the periphery as a geography that exploits both the natural environment and the people. The language of social realism unmaskes urban alienation and dehumanization—especially as it relates to women—not as a mental weakness. Instead, the novels reveal a continuity of exploitation of human and natural communities in the landscape of Madrid. Ferres and Navarro document the injustices of accumulation by dispossession, and ultimately, the anxiety of their protagonists becomes the place from which the women recuperate a sense of identity. While Ferres ends his story in pessimistic anguish—what else was possible in the late 1950s?—Navarro’s novel ends with an optimism mediated (and mitigated) by Elisa’s writing and her use of medication.

It has not been easy to do justice to the literary aspects of these novels within a narrow definition of the concerns of ecocriticism, to walk the critical line between open-

mind exploration of a cultural product and examination of it as a representation of ecological crisis. I suspect that this difficulty arises from the necessity of an “unthinking” that must take place to view those stylistic qualities of the text associated with the environment—location and metaphors—as essential elements that structure the author and reader’s understanding of material and social culture. Teasing out these differences and similarities in how two novels treat what remains of the natural environment and landscape opens space for a much-needed conversation. It is one that must include the need to reclaim the city from neoliberal machinations, and ensure that there is still a city to inhabit. David Harvey writes, “[t]he preservation or construction of a sense of place is then an active moment in the passage from memory to hope, from past to future. And the reconstruction of places can reveal hidden memories that hold out the prospects for different futures” (*Justice* 306). In preserving the memory of the shantytowns in the moment of their destruction, Ferres’s novel holds out hope for a better and different outcome. Navarro records the history of the city and its vulnerable inhabitants as they undergo the most severe economic crisis since the Civil War. This paper has sought to contribute to what Alaimo has declared the project of ecocriticism: “to develop modes of analysis that [...] reveal the environmental traces within all texts” (8). In this sense, it is only a beginning—a proposal for an understanding of the metaphorical and affective drives of how space is conceptualized and understood, not only in texts where ecological concerns are explicitly stated as the intent of the text, but also in cultural products where material realities collide and make space for critique and re-imagination.

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