Picking up the Pieces: The Economic Crisis and the Transformation of the Contemporary Peninsular Novel

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
University of Toronto

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2018

Abstract

This dissertation examines changes in the genre of the Peninsular novel resulting from the impact of the World Economic Crisis that deeply affected Spain beginning in 2008. It analyzes how the novels published in Spain between 2007 and 2014 by ten contemporary authors explore the causes of the Economic Crisis and its impact on individuals, social structures, and patterns of relationships. Changes in the genre of the novel occur both on the levels of form and content. Through my initial analysis of novels by Pablo Gutiérrez, Doménico Chiappe, and Elvira Navarro, I argue that the Crisis changed the perception of public and private spaces in Spain. The real estate bubble and mass evictions laid foundations for new forms of participatory democracy such as squatters and later the 15M movement. I then build on the work of Berlant and Butler and explore categories of debt and precarity in novels by Recaredo Veredas, Benjamín Prado, and Javier López Menacho as fundamentals for the new emerging Crisis consciousness. Next, I consider the epic and symbolic nature of the Crisis as it is depicted in the novels of Rafael Chirbes. I contend that through multiple intertexts and an appeal to universal values, Chirbes inscribes the local Crisis in the national literary tradition and global context. Finally, I analyze how the texts by Lucía Extebarría, Cristina
Fallarás, and Marta Caparrós depict the evolution from individual struggle to collective action. I show the transition from a reliance on failed social institutions to the creation of alternative networks of power and the social movements made possible through solidarity. I suggest that the Economic Crisis as reflected through the lens of the novels analyzed has slowly transformed into a continuity in the present with no chronological end point. This shift has transformed the national worldview and resulted in the rejection of the idea of uninterrupted progress and constant development in Spain that rooted the national consciousness from the 1990s through to the early 2000s.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without continuing support of my supervisor, my teachers and my family. I cannot overestimate my supervisor’s Robert Davidson contribution to my professional growth. He equipped me with knowledge and tools needed to write the dissertation starting from critically evaluating ideas, linking them to fundamentals, producing robust results and ending with discussing and presenting the findings. He helped me learn how to lay out ideas and findings in a structured and simple manner. No matter which issues, doubts, concerns, or challenges I had, Robert Davidson was always there to support me. He has been not only my supervisor but also a person who I can trust and rely on. I could not imagine a better mentor!

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my Committee members Stephen Rupp and Néstor E. Rodríguez for their guidance and support. I benefited a lot from discussions of my research ideas with Néstor and Stephen and from their graduate courses. Their knowledge, vast experience, open-mindedness, understanding, and personal involvement encouraged me to work hard and kept me motivated throughout all five years of my PhD. They taught me to crave for big and important research questions, search for innovative ways and apply multidisciplinary methods to support my findings. Néstor was always there to help and provided invaluable feedback on my work. He also advised me many steps and the resources I needed to succeed and was willing to give me advice whenever I asked for it. Stephen shaped my thinking of the theoretical foundations of my research, his brilliant example taught me a lot about professional culture in the Academia. He taught me to never stop learning and improving my skills and to reinforce my understanding of how Academia works through interactions with faculty. I admire Stephen’s and Néstor’s research, their dedication to the success of their PhD students, and their friendly personalities.

I would like to thank all faculty members and my colleagues at the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the UofT and at the Centre for Comparative Literature for insightful discussions, valuable feedback, and encouragement throughout my PhD studies. I feel fortunate to have met at the University of Toronto a vibrant and collaborative intellectual community. At different stages of my graduate work, many professors have advised me, and
inspired me with their classes. Thanks to them, my PhD life was both fruitful and enjoyable. I would like to extend my gratitude to Canadian Association of Hispanists. Its annual meetings helped me to join the professional community here in Canada. I am grateful to my family. Olga and Roman always were a great support and motivation for me to think out of the box and to work harder.
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Introduction

The World Economic Crisis, which began in 2008 made a profound impact on the social, political, and cultural life in Spain. The Crisis marked the end of an era of economic stability and growth that had begun in the 1990s and continued into the early 2000s. The Spanish economy, which was built upon the principles of neoliberalism and tied to global markets, steered the country to recession. At the local level, the Crisis resulted in a bursting of the real estate bubble, the accumulation of vast debt and the unemployment of many Spaniards. From 2008 to 2012 the proportion of unemployed individuals reached 27% of the workforce and among Spanish youth, these numbers reached 50% (Ward). The real estate bubble was followed by the paralysis of the construction industry and all adjacent sectors. Due to this, the landscape of many Spanish towns and villages was for many years adorned by unfinished, abandoned buildings and immobile construction cranes. Many Spaniards lost their jobs and were unable to pay their mortgages.

The flaws in Spain’s political system resulted in mass evictions of debtors and popular protests. The socialist government led by J. Zapatero (2004–2011), followed by the government of the Popular Party of M. Rajoy (2012–2018), continued to follow the recommendations of foreign creditors and issued loans to the banks from public money while introducing unpopular austerity measures in an attempt to save the financial system. The Economic Crisis resulted in large scale precarity and erosion of the former middle class. The logic of prosperity promoted by the welfare state was substituted with the logic of survival. All branches of the economy were impacted by the Crisis. After years of waiting for improvements, citizens started to participate in organized protests. These protests grew and revived old practices of squatting in the abandoned buildings. The protests acquired mass
followings and transformed into movements against austerity, poverty, and failing government policies. These anti-austerity movements were alternatives to the existing political systems and were governed from below. They became pitched as the as 15M movement or “Los indignados.”

Literary production in Spain changed as a result of the Economic Crisis. Novels, poetry, short stories, and essays reflected changes in the economic and social realities of the time. Starting from 2008 until the present, many authors have centered their narratives around the realities of the Economic Crisis and the ways in which individuals coped with the associated challenges. In addition to traditional forms of expression through published books and articles:

…content producers and consumers have used alternative communication channels facilitated by digital platforms and social media…These have channeled the dissemination of a new corpus of novels, which engages with the sociopolitical context of the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath at several levels and directions, i.e., thematic, ideological, and/or aesthetic (Valdivia 163).

The topics and plots of novels written by many authors in relation to the times of the Crisis relate the present conditions of Spain to the period of Transition from dictatorship to democracy. Many problems remaining from the time of Franco’s dictatorship laid the foundation for the current Crisis. These contributed to the global-scale Economic Crisis, and Spain suffered doubly as international economic challenges were multiplied by the local legacy of the dictatorship and the Transition: “…the collapse of the country’s economy in the aftermath of the global Economic Crisis cannot be fully understood without an analysis of
how the foundations of this faulty economic order were laid down during the Franco era and never questioned during the Transition” (Bezhanova 149).

In many novels emerging in the aftermath of the Economic Crisis the action takes place in urban spaces, and the characters suffer from dispossession on economic, symbolic, and ontological levels. Such emotions stimulate nostalgia and a reconsideration of one’s identity under the new conditions. The novels show the transition from the individual stance against the economic challenges to the formation of groups and social structures that parallel government and political parties. These narrative dynamics follow the changes in the lives of Spaniards who initially were left alone to face the difficulties of the Crisis and then later self-organized into mass protest movements. The genre of novel written between 2008 and the present day includes a variety of texts that deal specifically with the Economic Crisis and more broadly with the idea of the Crisis as the defining feature of current life in Spain. Valdivia offers “…a recurrent formula that characterized most of these novels: urban space + nostalgia + identity reassessment = crisis novel” (Valdivia 163). I argue that Spanish “Crisis novels” could be divided into two groups. One group comprises texts published between 2008 and early 2011, with the other including texts created after May 15, 2011, when the massive 15M protest movement was born. According to Moreno-Caballud, the 15M movement reflects a new tendency in social relations that he labels “cultures of anyone.” Beyond something that could seem a populism at a first glance, the decentralized civil movement took the power of legitimation of public discourse away from the “experts” who would profess it through mass media. By “experts,” Moreno-Caballud means politicians, scholars, journalists, writers, and anyone whose voice becomes public and legitimized in official mediatic spaces, political declarations, various talk-shows, “tertulias,” etc. The public
discourse shaped by both left and right-wing experts was in line with the existing bipartite political system (Popular Party and Socialist Party) and was a tool in shaping the political order, the government’s neoliberal austerity policies, and, more broadly, comprised one of the pillars of the Spanish nation-state emerging from the Transition to democracy. Yet this ideological apparatus was unable to deal with reality, altered by the Economic Crisis, as citizens were left without substantial governmental and institutional support to deal with impending poverty, loans, evictions, unemployment, and corruption. The response to the impoverishment within Spanish society was seen through emerging horizontal ties and connections, from individual solidarity to massive mutual support. Squatting in buildings turned into squatting in public spaces, where protestors camped for long periods of time and organized cultural and political events. Slogans demanding the need for efficient participatory democracy, such as “¡Democracia real ya!” appeared and the most famous camp on the Sol main square of Madrid (“Acampada Sol”) lasted for several months together along with massive protests in which millions of people participated. These actions challenged the dominant ideological order of the Spanish state and transformed the climate of the country during the middle of the Economic Crisis. Thus, it became obvious that the political and economic order emerging from the Transition period, during the booming 1990s and early 2000s, was built on shaky ground. The new “cultures of anyone” showed the deep flaws in the historic approach to legacies of Franco’s regime. They highlighted the privileged economic position of the winners of the Civil War of 1936-1939 and their descendants and the higher economic vulnerability of the descendants of the losers — even after sixty years. Thus, the protest movements, in part, required not only a reconsideration of the present-day economic policies but an acknowledgment of the discrepancies in Spain’s earlier
“democratization” that had resulted in uneven development and laid the foundations for the current Crisis.

In my approach to the Spanish novel of the Economic Crisis I consider several aspects crucial for its modifications at the genre level. These modifications reflect the social, political, and ontological changes caused by the Crisis and provide the genre of novel with new dimensions. Although the literature of Crisis in Spain is vast and greatly exceeds eleven texts analyzed in this dissertation, my choice of novels is based on the extent that they are significant in revealing how these aspects of change operate on the level of literary text. Additionally, I apply chronological criteria to the analysis of the novels to establish the relevance of the categories selected to demonstrate changes to the genre. I argue that the novels written before any consolidation of the 15M movement are focused on an individual response to the Crisis — when the characters are independently facing the challenges caused by the economic collapse. The characters struggle with loss of comfortable life that seemed so natural before and remain one on one with their problems. Such are the novels Yo, precario (“I, Precarious”) by Javier López Menacho, La trabajadora (“The Female Worker”) by Elvira Navarro, Tiempo de encierro (“Time of Enclosure”) by Doménico Chiappe, Democracia (“Democracy”) by Pablo Gutiérrez, Deudas vencidas (“The Expired Debts”) by Recaredo Veredas. The texts written after the 15M movements began to depict the newly emerged social structures and focused on the role of solidarity in the present and on problems with historic memory of the past. These are the texts Ajuste de cuentas (“Settling of Scores”) by Benjamín Prado, En la orilla (“On the Edge”) by Rafael Chirbes, Filtraciones (“Leaks”) by Marta Caparrós, and A la puta calle (“Get the Hell Out”) by Cristina Fallarás.
There are several features that I consider foundational to the literature of the Crisis. I begin by concentrating on the spaces of the Crisis as they appear in the texts, and on their function. The choice to start my analysis with the concept of space and its role in shaping the Crisis literature is rooted in one of the main causes of the Crisis in Spain: the real estate bubble.¹

In times of growth, many people purchased mortgaged apartments and houses for prices exceeding what they could afford. The banks were eager to give out loans without substantial guarantees. The construction industry was stimulated by easy money, and the skyline of most Spanish cities and towns in the early 2000s was filled with building cranes as entire new blocks and districts appeared in the suburbs. The massive consumption of real estate inflated prices and public debt and, finally when in 2008 the bubble burst, hundreds of thousands of citizens faced the prospect of eviction. The economic downfall brought unemployment, leading to an inability of citizens to pay their mortgages and the risk of eviction from their newly-built properties. This collapsed the construction industry. For several years after the bubble “popped,” many cities were strewn with ghostly empty streets, unfinished buildings, and immovable cranes. These processes caused a transformation of spaces, including the private space of one’s own dwelling and the public urban space, from prosperity to decay.

Public space has been theorized by many scholars as a powerful mechanism of social impact. In works by Hegel (Aesthetics) and Foucault (Of Other Spaces), public space is a mechanism of repression, a tool for surveillance. It is a way of imposing normality onto the

¹ Known in Spanish as “La burbuja inmobiliaria,” the property bubble was accumulating in various stages starting from 1985 until it “popped” in 2008 and caused the collapse of the construction industry (see Akin et.al. “The real estate and credit bubble: evidence from Spain”).
individual through social structures, and its aggressive nature may provoke and stimulate opposition, transgression, and subversion. It imposes a set of standardized practices of “normal” interactions and values applied to post-industrial society that are defined by Barthes as doxa—a set of features defining normality. The doxa of social consensus in Spain proved to be insufficient with the beginning of the Crisis. I argue that the neoliberalist normality that was defined and imposed by the welfare state, and which promoted loyalty in exchange for consumption and stability, failed with the beginning of the Crisis. Public space, not only as cityscape but also as a realm of social interactions, failed to work as a source of the doxa in the new economic realities. It started expulsing from itself many people through unemployment and marginalization. At this point, public space directly interacted with private as people were evicted—deprived of their dwellings. Heidegger defined dwelling as being itself: “…dwelling is always a staying with things. Dwelling, as preserving, keeps the fourfold in that with which mortals stay: in things” (Heidegger 150). The individual existence inside the space of the house, in a broad understanding of the term, is a tool of individual rooting into material culture through objects that create the intimate universe of private space. Bachelard related private space to the self-identification of the human in the world. Lefebvre suggested expansion of the private space to the public sphere and its impact on shaping social interactions. In the first chapter of the dissertation I trace these processes in three novels written in the first four years, 2008–2012, of the Economic Crisis in Spain. I consider the transformations of space in the novels La trabajadora by Elvira Navarro, Democracia by Pablo Gutiérrez, and Tiempo de encierro by Doménico Chiappe.

The novel Democracia (2012) by Pablo Gutiérrez describes events that happen to a young couple during the early stages of the Crisis in 2008–2009. The main character loses
his job as a designer at a construction company and is about to be evicted from his apartment. Unemployment marginalizes him as he joins informal groups of squatters and becomes homeless. Gutiérrez builds a trajectory of the character who initially was designing commodified apartment spaces prior to the real estate bubble only to then end up losing his own private space. After that he transforms the public urban space by creating protest graffiti on the streets and participates in squatting practices. Separately, Gutiérrez introduces a parallel narration of the symbolic space of the Crisis, where he portrays economic forces as symbolic characters from a fairy tale and the economy as a field of their battles. *Tiempo de encierro* by Doménico Chiappe suggests other ways of treating the public and private spaces in the initial stages of the Crisis. Chiappe creates parallel narrations of a couple, the male protagonist is an immigrant from Peru and the female protagonist is a Spaniard. As both lose their jobs and are at risk of eviction from their cottage, the woman, who is pregnant voluntarily shuts herself in the house and refuses to leave it for several months. As she chooses literal seclusion in the private space, her partner reasserts his nomadic identity as immigrant and moves on to join a protest group that squats in an empty house in Madrid. Both Gutiérrez’s and Chiappe’s novels show patterns of inbound and outbound displacements in space by the characters, either inwards into themselves or in an outwardly direction toward others.

For its past, the novel *La Trabajadora* by Elvira Navarro is more centered on changes in urban spaces in times of the Crisis and their impact on individual consciousness. As the female protagonist is obliged to do freelance work from home, she feels the impact of the Crisis in the form of a growing isolation from the social processes. The city, which was once close to her, now transforms and threatens her. When she goes running or travels downtown,
she spots new signs of the Crisis such as unfinished buildings, ghostly blocks, and the changing cityscape. The hazards of the public space of the city contribute to the character’s depression and her alienation from the community to which she used to belong. Her roommate suggests the way out through artwork. She creates collages and works of art out of old city maps. This artwork grasps the uncanny changes of the city and allows the main character to reappropriate Madrid’s spatial changes and restore her emotional and psychological integrity. The narration of these three novels ends in the middle of the Economic Crisis — somewhere around 2011—while new forms of public protest were in their initial stages. The characters remain alone in facing the unknown and intuitively try to look for answers.

The Economic Crisis in Spain was not solely the result of global economic forces. One of its main causes was the accumulation of debt both in the corporate sector (especially in the construction industry) and by citizens. The real estate bubble happened mainly because the debts formed a pyramid that suddenly lost its foundation, as real estate was no longer affordable and, consequently, the repayment of debts became impossible. In my view, the idea of debt and indebtedness as the leading cause of the Crisis reshaped people’s consciousness. It became one of the main topics in literary works of the early Crisis. I interpret debt through the critical lens suggested by Berlant and Dienst, who consider the internal symbolic and spiritual nature of the phenomenon and argue that debt changes an individual’s worldview (Dienst 56). The texts Deudas vencidas by Recaredo Veredas and Ajuste de cuentas by Benjamín Prado deal with the emerging debt crisis, with their foundations laid as far back as the time of the Transition from dictatorship to democracy. Additionally, the novels by the two authors explore how economic debt obtains an ethical
dimension and impacts the choices made by the characters. The concept of debt is no longer purely an economic category for the Spanish authors, it acquires broader dimension as an ethical category. The two novels offer different points of view. *Deudas vencidas* concentrates on an unscrupulous debt collector who exploits the victims of the Crisis, while Prado´s *Ajuste de cuentas* portrays the choices of an unemployed writer commissioned to write the biography of a construction mogul who was directly involved in the creation of the Crisis.  

Debt is part of the foundation of the Economic Crisis and one of its major consequences is wide-spread individual precarity. I approach the categories of precarity and emerging class of precariat as defined by Judith Butler. Individuals are excluded from a society that fails to provide for basic needs. The impact is especially strong on younger generations. In the novel *Yo, precario* Javier López Menacho portrays the general conditions of young people struggling for stability and employment, and failing to find inclusion in the existing models of social interaction. Such conditions of abandonment stimulate radicalization and a search for ways to fight the Crisis and its consequences beyond traditional schema. The new precariat is consolidated as a new political actor and in the later stages of the Crisis forms a base for the emerging mass protest movements known as 15M through horizontal interactions of “cultures of anyone,” as defined by Moreno-Caballud.  

The distribution of wealth after the Spanish Civil War was always biased to the side of the winners and their descendants; meanwhile the descendants of the vanquished who did not emigrate were subject to political and economic discrimination. In this context the nature of the Crisis is intertwined with the problem of historical memory and its unresolved challenges. The uneven booming growth that led to the bubble also had its roots in the economic politics of the Transition in which the main players were the heirs of the Franco
regime. This complex entanglement of the current situation and its reasons, and the boom and the collapse are brought to light by Rafael Chirbes in his epic novels *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* which I analyze in chapter three. In *Crematorio*, Chirbes creates the fictional universe of a Valencian coastal town in the early 2000s ruled by the construction frenzy and spiraling growth. Through internal monologues the characters articulate the complex problems facing Spain at that time. The central event of the novel parallels the growing construction bubble amidst unresolved contradictions of the legacy of the Civil War. The events in *En la orilla* happen several years later as the town is paralyzed by the Crisis. The owner of a small carpentry business gradually loses everything and ends up committing suicide. In my analysis, I approach the way the Crisis impacts individual relations between characters in different social groups, by applying the concepts of biopolitics and deteritorrialization suggested by Foucault and Deleuze. Chirbes creates a picture of Spanish communities inundated with the flow of human migration, displacements, and nomadism. The writer shows Spain being changed by influx of immigrants from African, Latin American, and Eastern European countries. The growing and bursting “bubble” creates a certain ideological background and changes the physical and spiritual landscapes which I analyze through the concept of the ideoscape suggested by Appadurai. Unresolved challenges of historical memory bring an inability to move forward and allow Chirbes to use multiple metaphors of decay, putrefaction, and stagnation. The main topos of the *En la orilla* novel is a marshland that acquires mythical dimension, attracting and destroying the characters. Flesh in decomposition as a metaphor for relations between humans and for political processes allows me to approach the novels through the lens of biopolitics where the biological nature of humans is subject to impact by capital flows. From the textual scenes,
Chirbes attempts to build an atemporal universal picture of Spanish identity moving through unresolved historical, political, and economic problems. He alludes to the symbolic nature of the material objects and spaces connecting the present-day Crisis to the general discourse of Spanish culture through multiple literary and cultural intertexts. The presence of medieval intertexts by Jorge Manrique and François Villon, and ancient Greek and Roman mythology transform his texts from realism to symbolism. Chirbes gradually shifts his attention from the local processes to the nature of the human being and its place in the universe. That expansion of the narrative scale allows me to suggest that these texts exceed the socio-economic context, moving to the level of epic narratives.

The texts *Liquidación por derribo* by Lucía Etxebarría and *A la puta calle* by Marta Caparrós focus on the shift from an individualistic perception of the Crisis to a collective perception through participation in networks of social interaction and mutual support. In the fourth chapter of my dissertation I consider how these texts balance the genres of the essay and the novel, with a strong autobiographical component. I approach generic modification of these texts as they include traits of documentary and fictional genres. Strong female characters in both acknowledge the need for creating new means of solidarity in social space. New protest movements also reshape the understanding of solidarity as compared to times before the Crisis. Boshammer defines solidarity as an operational feature of the welfare state: “Welfare states are often seen as institutional embodiments of social solidarity” (Boshammer 381). In the case of Spain, after the Crisis the state failed to implement what I consider as “institutionalized solidarity.” With existing institutions unable to resolve the economic and political challenges posed by the Crisis, solidarity shifted from the institutions to the level of interaction between citizens through their informal cooperation. Fallarás and Etxebarría trace
this process in the earlier stage of the Crisis. The micro novels in the book *Filtraciones* by Marta Caparrós written in its later years (2014–2015) demonstrate the formation of a new generation who grew up in difficult times and who enact in their lives this new type of solidarity separate from formal institutions. Individuals in Caparrós´s stories participate in social microstructures. I argue that as the author´s focus is moved away from the individual struggle to collective interactions, the text does not require the author’s strong ego or first-person narration. Her characters move away from neoliberal values. Instead of looking for corporate careers and building long-term plans, young people invest their time and effort into collective cultural practices such as art and gardening, etc. The generational portrait by Caparrós shows a renewal of the idea of solidarity in Spain during the later years of the Economic Crisis.

The authors I analyze in this project display multiple approaches to the ongoing reality of the Economic Crisis and the concept of the Crisis in a broader sense. The Economic Crisis has had a strong impact on the content and form of contemporary Spanish novels; often depicted in these novels are the complex patterns of economic transformations in Spain and their influence on interpersonal relations. The variety of ways in which the Economic Crisis has affected Spanish novels allows me to engage the emerging genre of Crisis Literature in a new way. The definition of genre according to Derrida is “a coded set of formulas and conventions which indicate a culturally accepted way of organizing material into distinct patterns” (Derrida 61). I argue that Spanish novels dealing with situations happening in the middle of the Economic Crisis exhibit a set of features and conventions that can be recognized by readers. Situations around evictions, financial speculations, construction bubble, indebtedness, precarity, and emerging protest movements have allowed several
researchers to group the texts into one generic group. For example, Olga Bezhanova makes a claim for the existence of an entire “genre of Crisis literature” in Spain stating that:

Despite the ideological, generational, and stylistic differences between the writers who have contributed to the literature of the crisis, their work relies on shared imagery, concepts and concerns. That allows one to posit the existence of a genre of crisis literature, as opposed to isolated works of art that discuss the crisis (Bezhanova XXXIV).

Pedro Valdivia suggests another formula to define Crisis literature in Spain based on its topics: “The term “literatura de la crisis” mainly privileged literary representations of, first, urban spaces; second, the tragedy caused by the loss of certainty; and, finally, the present as a process of identitarian dispossession” (Valdivia 163).

In contemporary British Literature, also affected by the Economic Crisis, another critical term has been coined by Sanghera and Shaw referring to texts dealing with the Economic Crisis. British authors began using the concept of Credit Crunch and defined narratives dealing with the impact of the Crisis as “Crunch Lit” (Shaw 7).

These multiple attempts to interpret and categorize literary texts of the Economic Crisis point to the fluidity of the newly suggested genre and its occasional balancing between traditional generic boundaries. This generic fluidity is caused, according to Bezhanova, by the unstable reality itself. As liquid modernity gives birth to liquid capital, the Crisis loses its temporality and becomes a permanent human condition. This shift from

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2 In his book *Liquid Modernity* (1999) Bauman examines how we have moved away from a ‘heavy’ and ‘solid’, hardware-focused modernity to a ‘light’ and ‘liquid’, software-based modernity. This shift affects economic and political structures and relates to the idea of the Capital that becomes for Bauman and Bezhanova the “Liquid Capital,” whose unstable nature contributes to further credit crunch and defines the current crisis as something permanent and ongoing rather than a finite process.
the Crisis as something temporary to an ongoing reality is present in the Spanish novels that I analyze here. The complex challenges of the time require from the individuals depicted in the texts complex and non-standard responses that result in the creation of new social models, alternatives to the neo-liberal social order in Spain.
CHAPTER 1

Spaces of the Crisis

The World Economic Crisis of 2008 has had an impact on the genre of the novel in the literature of Spain on multiple levels. Those influences and interactions include transformations of the narrative form and dealing with new problems and challenges. Society and models of interaction between people changed in times of Economic Crisis because of multiple economic factors. Decrease in income, unemployment growth, evictions, an inability to make a decent living – these are but a few of the traces left by the Spanish Crisis, seen on both a micro and a macro level. The consequences of the Economic Crisis in Spain were most arguably present between 2008 and 2012. During this period industries were collapsing and the unemployment rate was hovering around twenty-five per cent of the active population. Several writers had dealt with changing economic realities of the time and their multiple manifestations in their recent novels.

The Economic Crisis spread through numerous aspects of the public and private realms causing political, social, institutional, and even territorial crisis in contemporary Spain. I suggest that respective spaces had been changed by the Crisis. Space – is one of the important concepts defining individual and social life. In the following pages, I will attempt to show the changes that crisis brought to the notion of space in Spain manifested in novelistic texts. Of course, the idea of space is not a simple one and its interpretation in literature is wide and multifaceted. Space can be seen through its physical dimensions, and this is its primary meaning. However, in relation to literary texts, space long ago became the field for exploration by numerous philosophers and literary scholars, who considered it as an active component of the discourse shaping both human life, and the genre of novel. In
addition to physical, mathematical and geographical dimensions, space may be viewed as a set of social practices (Lefebvre) or the realm of individual expression (Bachelard). There is also a traditional division traced by Foucault between public and private space, family and social space, cultural space and useful space, space of leisure and space of work (Foucault 230). These spaces interact with each other and determine different layers of reality. Many theorists considered the interactions between different manifestations of space. Walter Benjamin, for instance, showed in his Arcades Project the dialectics of public and private. In particular, he explored how the private space of the XIX century bourgeois home expanded outwards and became public though the complex reality of Parisian Arcades. For Jürgen Habermas the whole archeology of modernity is based upon the conceptualization of public space in his Structural Transformation of Public Sphere (1991). Space in Hegelian terms is the power of the state with all its rationality, programs and techniques; it imposes normality and becomes mechanism of repression, it provokes opposition, subversion and permanent and inevitable transgression. On the other hand, there is a private space theorized by Bachelard or Heidegger. The realm of private space manifests through the place of dwelling for the individual – the house or the home. Heidegger considers the whole idea of the being as determined by process of dwelling, through dwelling, the individuals keep up with being in his Building dwelling thinking (1951). Individual private space for Bachelard is the source of objects that become symbols defining relations between an individual and the reality. His concept of material imagination suggests that the human is rooted into the private space of the house that anchors individual consciousness to the being through material objects like elements of furniture, décor etc. From the individual interior of the house or the apartment,

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3 More detailed concept of dwelling is revealed by Heidegger in his Building dwelling thinking.
the space expands outside to the exterior of the collective and the social. It becomes a form of social practice and psychological phenomenon reshaping the reality of human existence. Private houses, apartments or other individual spaces thus become the part of relationships in the society, its economic models and mechanisms of the state. Possibility to own personal space or to have access to it is a powerful economic engine stimulating the individuals to participate in economic production. The house as individual and private space fits in the triadic model of conceptualizing the space suggested by Henri Lefebvre where the space is divided into “spatial practice,” “representations of space” and “representational space” (Lefebvre 38–39). “Spatial practice” is the meaning of a spatial location as it is popularly perceived; “representation of space” is, instead, a conceptualized type of space, official and deliberately conceived, while the ‘representational space’ is “linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life” (Lefebvre 33). Therefore a place where a person lives takes part in complex social processes and relations.

In this chapter, I suggest that the complex economic, social, and institutional Crisis in Spain that started in 2008, changed both the understanding of living space in everyday life and ways it shaped different individual and social realms. Such changes resulted from the interaction between the public and the private, as massive foreclosures of mortgaged properties happened and new forms of horizontal social protests emerged (the 15M movement⁴ and “okupas”⁵). The political structure of Spain with its traditional bipartite

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⁴ The anti-austerity movement 15-M (Movimiento 15-M) is a series of demonstrations in Spain that started on May 15th 2011 in multiple Spanish cities. Their origin lies in social networks. Participants tend not to support any of the existing traditional political parties. They reject unemployment, welfare cuts, corruption and bipartite political system. For more details on the movement see Taibo.

⁵ The movement “okupas” (squatting) is a phenomenon with long history in Spain dating back to late 1970s and early 1980s when in times of the so-called “movida madrileña” many buildings were occupied without permissions and transformed into social and cultural alternative spaces. After the real estate crisis in Spain in late 2000-s the movement of squatting the uninhabited spaces grew much bigger again being a way of anti-
system also proved to be unable to respond to the situation as new civil movements transformed in new political powers such as the Podemos political party. The massive impact of the Crisis in Spanish life has appeared in several recent novels by multiple authors. In terms of the modification and reshaping of the idea of space the texts *Tiempo de encierro* by Doménico Chiappe (2013), *La trabajadora* by Elvira Navarro (2012), and *Democracia* by Pablo Gutiérrez (2012) are particularly relevant. I argue that these texts trace the breakup of previous pre-Crisis models of space-related social practices and try showing the foundations for the new post-Crisis individual and social space creation.

**Space Dynamics in *Democracia* (Democracy) by Pablo Gutiérrez**

The novel *Democracia* by Pablo Gutiérrez (2012) recounts the beginning of the 2008 Spanish Crisis as well as pointing to some of its origins. The text has two parallel narratives – one is realistic and another one is symbolic. Gutiérrez writes them in alternating chapters, creating a secondary plot. On a realistic plane, the text describes the life of Marco, who grew up with a single mother and had a talent for painting and the arts. Nevertheless, as his artistic career was not successful, Marco chose to work in the modest position of a designer for a small company dedicated to urban planning. He represents the typical Spanish middleclass young man who obtained all the benefits of the welfare state without much struggle. Marco marries, purchases an apartment with a mortgage and starts thinking of having kids. When in **austerity protests.** See more details in López, Miguel A. Martínez. "The Squatters' Movement in Europe: A Durable Struggle for Social Autonomy in Urban Politics." *Antipode* 45.4 (2013): 866-87. Web. 8 Apr. 2016.
August 2008, the US based bank Lehman Brothers collapses, and the World Economic Crisis begins; Marco’s company goes bankrupt and he is laid off.

The narrative follows the changes in the life and character of Marco who is not ready to confront these new harsh realities. Suffering from depression, he marginalizes himself from society by becoming an illegal street graffiti artist. The symbolic space of the novel unfolds in a parallel manner to the realistic plotline and depicts world economic structures as mythical constructs. Gutiérrez introduces characters such as Leh-Bro (evokes of Lehman Brothers) who personifies the development of speculation in the financial markets. Another mythic figure is the character of the old Wiseman called George Soros who mysteriously dwells somewhere in Asia on the shores of the fictional Nung river. Soros is a mentor and a kind of guru for the small Leh-Bro who comes to him in order to study how to make money. Gutiérrez expands the philosophic parable with vast passages on economic events from the real history of the World Economic Crisis. The pages combine paragraphs resembling a textbook on economics and allegoric tales. The plotlines develop in a parallel manner; Gutiérrez repeatedly connects the symbolic space and its grotesque mythical figures to the real life of Marco who suffers a variety of challenges on his way to self-awareness.

Mythical space is intertwined with the realistic space in the novel. Well-organized middle-class life becomes chaotic and undetermined as shifts from the real to the surreal occur in the novel. Marco transforms from a bourgeois to a rebel. He makes revolutionary friends, participates in riots and produces engaged street art according to Jean-Paul Sartre’s

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6 The fictional Nung river appears in Coppola’s Apocalypse Now movie, Gutiérrez compares his Soros to Coppola’s Kurtz character who also lived in the jungle up the river.
ideas of engaged literature.\textsuperscript{7} The narrative takes Marco out of the realm of market economy, as he becomes homeless and paradoxically independent from post-industrial economic mechanisms.

Spatial transformations affect the novel on various levels. The main character is a failed painter who consciously chooses a secure career in a small company where he creates 3D urban planning models:

- Tomaba los planos incomprensibles de la nueva promoción de adosados – a tan solo hora y media del centro – y a partir de aquel galimatías de cálculo de cargas, basamentos y puntos de luz elaboraba prodigiosas simulaciones con aceras limpísimas, elegantes marquesinas, jardines de ajedrez, perros esponjosos y niños comiendo helados (23).

He thus substitutes the act of creation with the act of commodification. The results of his work are endless miniaturized models of a commodified space. They operate as a machine of desire and encourage people to reproduce the empty value of mortgaged properties that will eventually become the real estate. This is the same bubble that destroyed entire construction sectors in Spain and became the enduring symbol of the 2008 Crisis. Marco’s personified approach to his 3D models results in a creation of illusionary spaces of desire, that attract naïve customers to voluntarily surrender to the logic of usury and inscribe themselves into the simulated welfare of the commodified space:

\textsuperscript{7} For Sartre the engaged literature (\textit{Littérature engagée}) is the literature of commitment. It revives the idea of the artist’s serious responsibility to the society. The latter defines himself by consciously engaging in willed action as opposed to art for art’s sake.
—...además si el cliente que salía de la agencia con la carpeta llena de plazos de usura observara detenidamente el tríptico de la promoción, habría podido ver a una chica de quince años mordiendo un bocadillo detrás de los cristales de la cocina, a un anciano removiendo con nostalgia infinita un vaso de Nescafé, los ojos sofocados de un chaval que siempre viste de negro, escucha repetidamente discos de Cradle of Filth, lee con arrebato a Lovecraft y escribe poemas interminables donde aparecen palabras como plexiglás, cuervo, soma (27).

As Bachelard states: “The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it” (160). Miniature virtual models enforce the desire to appropriate their future referents, and Marco reproduces this space of desire. The desire is to own the simulacrum of private space that could be achieved through the commodification of the surrounding reality. This phenomenon was described by Lefebvre in 1960 when he wrote about new pavilion life “la vie pavillionere” (Lane 24) – that substituted the old-fashioned bourgeois home in postindustrial France. Pavilion is a name for new type of suburban cottages built in France in the 60-s. It is a new space adjusted to the technological realities, a cell of the multiple suburban structure. The house is a combination of the townhouse and the cottage, where all the advantages of urban space go together with the inclusion of semi-rural conditions of the suburb.

Throughout the novel Democracia the reader may observe how the idea of private space as the object of desire is destroyed and transformed by the Crisis. For instance, the flat where the protagonist Marco lives with his wife Julia is a mortgaged property. They had bought it tempted by the idea of owning a home as a symbol of prosperity. Desire to own one
made Marco and Julia follow an easy path, buying the mortgaged property under unfavorable conditions:

Marco terminó la carrera cuando la hélice financiera se encontraba en el cénit, lo contrataron a ciegas en la oficina, vivieron juntos en un piso de alquiler hasta que aprovecharon una de las promociones que Marco ilustraba y firmaron una hipoteca a pesar de las protestas de su mamá, enemiga de cuanto sonara a anclaje y componenda (41).

The illusion of prosperity brought the protagonists of the novel towards the real estate bubble (la burbuja inmobiliaria) that was one of the cornerstones for the Crisis in Spain. Its foundations lay in the construction industry and many authors describe different aspects of it in their novels. In case of Democracia it is the company of urban planning, Marco’s workplace, is one of the forces, responsible for the real estate bubble. The company is created and managed by the character called The Young Director (“El joven director general”). This character is important for Gutiérrez in his creation of a panorama of the Crisis. He is the typical Spanish “yuppie,” the metrosexual who builds his business within the booming construction industry. His life is as if cut from a fashion magazine. The origins of the Director’s prosperity are the speculations and manipulations of finances in the construction industry. They are as illusionary as the pre-Crisis prosperity of the “welfare state” in Spain. His lifestyle combines exotic hobbies such as surfing and a hipster’s accessories, like his manually-restored vintage Italian scooter.

Marco’s illusionary private space of the mortgaged apartment is his hearth and home (el hogar) shared with Julia. It is the symbolic universe of dwelling as defined by Heidegger (Heidegger 343). This space has traces of the modern welfare dream, where a young couple
might spend their Friday nights watching the stars on the patio: “…él la amaba como un
fanático y dibujaba blocs enteros donde ella aparecía fumando todos los cigarrillos de hachís
y bebiendo todas las coronitas con las que los viernes celebraban la llegada del fin de
semana” (42). At the same time, it is the space of nostalgic, yet illusionary values of the past:
in an attempt to stick to the cherished family values Marco and Julia travelled the world
together with Marco´s mother and tried to live as their ideal imaginary parents would have:
“Marco siempre volvía a casa para comer con Julia como un matrimonio de los sesenta” (30).
Yet this is one more instance of simulacra that accumulate one over another, as Julia´s
parents had been disastrous, and Marco was the son of a single mother. The contradictions
between the reality and the imagined operate in a same way as the economic simulation of
the speculative capital. What is imagined is not real both in a life of the protagonists and in
the collapsing economy. So the contradictions end up exploding during the Crisis in both the
private and the public for Marco, Julia, the Director (who lays Marco off) and the other
characters as well.

The Crisis starts for Marco when he suddenly is laid off from his position of city
planner. The loss of routines and pre-established models of life and planned future result in
his own personal crisis and depression. The beginning of the Crisis for Marco was marked
when the public space where he applied his creativity was lost. With the real estate
construction speculation over, no one needed the sort of designs that he provided. The
character finds himself enclosed in the private space of his apartment. His wife leaves for the
office and there is nothing to do. First, he tries to keep up the illusionary harmony of the nest
by thoroughly cleaning the house every morning, but it only takes part of his time along with
a daily search of the want ads in such a time of economic collapse. Next, he tries to find
psychological counselling from a celebrity psychologist he once saw on TV, but it turns out to be senseless waste of time. When he tries to escape from the apartment, in order to leave his wife, suddenly he meets her at the stairs and she stops his emotional flight attempt. These moves point to a breaking of the affinity that existed between the character and his previous space of desire for well-being and its material symbols of apartment and family.

Furthermore, in a series of flashbacks, Gutiérrez depicts scenes of Marco’s childhood and the reader learns that his mother dreamt of making an artist out of him, but that he opted for a safe and more secure path in life. The situation of being symbolically enclosed in the private space of the apartment fails to give Marco the answers to his future. The private space remains an illusion, a simulacrum on account of its mortgaged nature.

The house or the apartment that impersonates the intimate universe, as per Bachelard, suffers a curious transformation after its commodification through the mortgage. It may continue existing only under the condition that its owner remains the part of social and economic mechanisms of material reproduction. While an individual works, he continues enjoying the “universe” of private space as long as the mortgage is paid on time. The Bachelardian “house” becomes commodified and loses its immanent symbolic value while acquiring exchange value. However, its owner remains under the illusion of possessing a private space, a micro-universe that serves as the stage for his “daydreaming.”

But the symbolic meaning of the illusionary immanence of the mortgaged apartment is quickly withdrawn, as soon as there are no more resources to keep on paying the mortgage. The result is the semantic and ontological rupture for the individual who suddenly realizes their

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8 Bachelard relates Intimacy of the house to the state of daydreaming of the individual who lives in the house. For instance: “the house...even more than the landscape is a “psychic state” and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside it bespeaks intimacy. The state of daydreaming for him “contemplates grandeur…through its intimate inmensity” (183).
inability to ground themselves in being, attaching themselves to the “reality” of the “house.” 
Such a commodified space is characterized by only constant: the subject of the entropy, because its own physical and symbolic acquisition (mortgage acquisition) contain grounds for its imminent loss and withdrawal under an unstable economy. This “shaking grounds” under the feet of the character of Gutiérrez’s novel lay a foundation for Marco’s further transgression from the traditional and comfortable symbolic space of the bourgeois (middle-class) life towards an outer social space that induces necessary social action.

A similar process happens to the characters of Doménico Chiappe’s novel Tiempo de encierro or in the text A la puta calle by Cristina Fallarás. The Economic Crisis is a field of negativity causing impacts on the subject. This negativity works through the invasion of private space. It pushes the individual to perform acts of transgression in order to cross previous social boundaries. It is, in a sense, an “enabling negativity” (Budick, Iser XIII). This transgression from inner space to the outside world is made possible in the novel when Marco reinvents himself as an illegal graffiti artist. He gets a bag of red paint, and every night he paints random phrases from economic magazines on the city walls. These fragmentary messages underline the absurdity of the economic situation he is in. His wife Julia abandons him and the apartment. The crossing of boundaries of the previous-comfortable individual space of the apartment and the social space of the middle class causes transformation in both of them:

Ahora la supervivencia consiste en pasear del salón al dormitorio, escuchar el fluido de la cisterna como un silbido humano, comprar arroz y salchichas, alimentarse de arroz hervido, salchichas fritas y programas de televisión. El abandono es hercioso, comida de rancho, casa-zoo (158).
The city walls display messages by the new artist, and Marco´s graffiti become a local attraction. He does not look after the apartment anymore, so it becomes a shelter of protest as opposed to a commodified reality. The bills are no longer paid, the cleaning no longer gets done. A new symbolic order expels the previous one. At this point Marco is spotted by a group of marginalized individuals who cherish extreme left-wing ideas. Together they form a sort of commune in Marco´s neglected apartment: “El baño muy sucio, nunca faltaban comida ni cerveza, definitivamente aquel era el buen lugar para metamorfosearse en Amadeo Modigliani” (187). They establish a “committee of protest” and join the actions of different social groups against government austerity measures. Their activity can be seen as a representation/reflection of the well-known cultural phenomenon “Movimiento de okupas”. Paradoxically, the occupation of the space in case of Democracia is made by its ex-owner himself. Marco keeps on living in his apartment and squatting it at the same time. As he joins other people who are planning activities to undermine social order who call themselves “el movimiento antisistema,” he transcends the realm of the previous private space towards a public space of collective action. This move takes place in the novel in three stages. The first is when the character is still in his apartment and does not know what to do after the loss of his employment. The space of the home then loses meaning for him while taking care of the apartment becomes senseless. The second stage begins with Marco’s theorizing his condition, and creating graffiti of random phrases. At this point Julia – his last anchor to the previous illusion of middle class stability, abandons him and the apartment. The third stage signals a significant return from the space of street protest to the space of the apartment. As Marco meets his new marginalized leftist friends, they decide to form a clandestine group (“el comité”) and participate in illegal protests. They share the values of the movement that
will later be known as “El movimiento 15M” and “okupas,” standing against forced evictions and unemployment. The space of the apartment is transformed by the group into a “Piso franco” where what once was a private environment now helps enable collective action. The welfare of the individual is substituted by the chaos of the collective space. Marco’s creativity, previously set aside by his illusions of wellbeing, is unleashed within these new conditions of living on the edge. His mother’s failed aspiration to make an artist begins to be realized. The totalizing negativity of the Economic Crisis overwhelms the individual and enables a creative reenactment of reality by him through his art and social protest. There is no return to previous ways, as observed by his wife, who tries to enter the apartment: “Julia asomó la nariz gritó dio media vuelta trotó por las escaleras, probablemente ni siquiera llegó a ver a Marco sino el desorden y las astillas de los muebles, los cartones, la pintura, la mirada desafiante de Alicia” (187).

In his classic triad Lefebvre divides space into three dimensions depending on the social function fulfilled. These are spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces. A spatial practice “…denominates the meaning of a spatial location as it is popularly perceived; “representation of space” is instead a conceptualized as a type of space, official and deliberately conceived, while “representational space” is “…linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life” (Lefebvre 33). As we go back to the dynamics of Gutiérrez’s main character, we observe that the apartment where he lives corresponds to the first two spatial definitions. In the beginning it is just a common dwelling place, a form of the accepted spatial practice of private space or home. Yet, as it decays along with the transformations of Marco’s character, it changes. The conceptualization of the apartment as a passive opposition to the Crisis and global economy transforms it into representation of
space. The representation gives it a new name. Gutiérrez refers to it as to *piso franco del comité* in several occasions. Although the “anti-system committee” is ephemeral, the conceptualization of the space allows Marco to move further and transgress from this ex-private to the public space. As he starts making graffiti using random phrases from economics magazines and newspapers, the street becomes a representational space. His alternative art, which is a form of protest, turns the street into a site that, according to Lefebvre, shows “underground or clandestine form of social life” (ibid). The social reality of the Crisis is omnipresent because of its powerful mediatic discourse. Marco’s random phrases, written on the city walls, disclose the collective unconsciousness of the society in times of economic decay.

The idea of a Crisis as a symbolic happening shattering Western civilization also is present in the novel in a series of episodes that are inserted alongside the main narrative line. These vignettes employ the genre of parable and the symbolic characters impersonate economic processes. These parables are a curious form with which to approach the Economic Crisis as a totalizing force that moves from global scale to individual level of a middle-class Spaniard.

The second narrative line developed by Gutiérrez in *Democracia* depicts symbolic space and mythical characters. The chapters that alternate with Marco’s story describe the mechanisms of the Crisis in the form of a parable referring to multiple intertexts. In that story the characters are symbols of economic processes. The main figure of this alternate reality has the same name as the famous Wall Streeter and philanthropist George Soros. In the novel the fictional mogul reigned the global markets but ultimately decided to retire in the Asian jungle and live as a humble hermit. His retirement brings up the intertext of the F.F.
Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* movie as Gutiérrez directly compares him to Kurtz. Soros as Kurtz moves up the mysterious river Nung (prototype of the Mekong river in Coppola’s movie): “… después desapareció como Bobby Fischer el comandante Kurtz o J.D. Salinger, río arriba. En el bolsillo llevaba píldoras arcoíris” (151). Further on, his comparison to Kurtz has a double referent as Coppola borrowed the plot and the character from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In both texts the figure of the mysterious Kurtz who lived up the river is the source of the secret knowledge and aspiration of the young protagonists that wish to reveal his mystery and get to his place as the result of a quest. Gutiérrez does not deviate much from this pattern and turns Soros into the bearer of the universal knowledge of the financial world. His figure becomes a source of seduction and attraction for the young symbolic character named Leh-Bro (abbreviation of Lehman Brothers). As the reader knows from Marco’s chapters, the fall of the Lehman Brothers initiated the World Economic Crisis, eventually resulting in Marco’s unemployment. Another repeatedly-used comparison to describe the seductive power of Soros is with Tom Bombadil from the *Lord of the Rings* by J. Tolkien. Bombadil is a supporting mysterious character. He is one of the oldest beings in the Middle-earth:

Soros era cada cosa del bosque y cada cosa del bosque era el maestro Soros, *Tom, Tom Bombadil*. Prestad atención amigos míos: *Tom estaba aquí antes que el río y los árboles. Tom recuerda la primera gota de lluvia y la primera bellota. Abrió senderos antes que la Gente Grande y vió llegar a la Gente Pequeña. Estaba aquí antes que los Reyes y las tumbas y los Tumularios. Conoció oscuridad bajo las estrellas antes de que apareciera el miedo, antes de que el Señor Oscuro– Greenspan viniera de Lejos y antes, mucho antes de la traición del ambicioso Leh-Bro* (153).
Using the language of the parable Gutiérrez shows the mechanisms of the emergence of the 2008 Economic Crisis. He details the relations and betrayal between master and disciple: Soros and enlightened Leh-Bro. The latter seeks wisdom regarding the global economy in the master’s jungle hut and subsequently starts his own venture after this. However, he neglects the teaching of his master and relies on multiple speculations that end up in an accumulation of debts. His structures collapse one day creating chaos in the financial world. This chaos subsequently ruins the company where Marco works and deeply transforms his life. In such a way, Gutiérrez intertwines the two plotlines creating the dialectics of the general and the particular. The symbolic space where Soros dwells at the shore of the fictional Nung river (that could be viewed as the archetype of The River as the Being itself) are a metaphor for the impersonal economic powers that impacted daily Spanish life with the Crisis of 2008. Within this realm of the symbolic, Marco also does “the pilgrimage” to the master Soros in search for the answers. After their imaginary dialogue, he decides to come out of the space of his apartment that had been a private space of daydreaming. The Crisis, however, put an end to it and enabled the move from the private into the public.

The parallel narration of the parable on economic structures impersonated by symbols has an important aesthetic function in the novel. It both reflects and emphasizes the dialectics between the individual space of Marco’s reality and the collective space of economic processes within the global economy of the XXI century. The expulsion of Marco from his initial home-apartment happens logically when the police want to arrest him for his participation in violent street protests. So Marco detaches, from his initial space and commences a pilgrimage through the city that brings him to an abandoned basement: “…dentro del sótano hay un cubo, un mueble de oficina, un colchón, columnas de papeles,
revistas, tebeos, una casete del siglo pasado, suciedad de quince años…” (231). There he lives secluded, while some unknown benefactors leave him food. At the time of his walks through a neighboring park, he figures out that the benefactors are the family from the house next to his who have an autistic seven-year old daughter. The family also escapes from the established social processes and occupies the empty house. They consciously marginalize themselves from the society of welfare in that building: “Todo estaba lleno de juguetes y muebles viejos. La nevera rebosaba de comida con el sello de Cáritas y Cruz Roja, aquel lugar no formaba parte del mundo sino del Nuevo Mundo naciente” (229). Gutiérrez compares their house to a living organism. Space acquires the dimension of an organic entity as opposed to the commodified spaces of the Crisis. This is an alternative suggested by Gutiérrez – to move away from social space and its agencies of information and ideology (texts and mass media propaganda): “…no había ni televisión ni radio, ni más libros que lo que la niña traía del colegio, los objetos aparecían y desaparecían, sillas, mesas, lámparas. …. La casa se llenaba y se vaciaba como el pulmón” (229). The family invites Marco to live in their house where he discovers an alternative mode of living on the margins of society. This lifestyle is practiced by the autistic girl, who does not fit within the ordered world of commodities. The realistic narration transcends to the symbolic one as the parents of the girl move out themselves and leave the child with Marco. In the final paragraphs of the novel, Marco and the girl move from the real to the poetic space created by Marco’s imagination and manifested in his paintings, breaking the ties with the objective reality torn apart by the Crisis. This pattern of escape from the troubles of everyday life to a world of the imaginary, is reminiscent of the XIX century literary Romanticism, in which an ideal poetic space becomes the real one and substitutes the commodified reality of everyday life.
After the Crisis begun, the phenomenon of the so-called “okupas” (squatters) appeared again in Spain. People whose houses and apartments were confiscated because of unpaid mortgages moved into abandoned buildings and occupied once empty spaces. This movement was a part of a wider civic campaign called 15M (also known as “movimiento de los indignados”) that was a public protest against the austerity measures of the government and unfair policies amidst Crisis. In our context, the movement of “okupas” is interesting, because it appeared because of the deprivation of private spaces and evictions (“los desahucios”). People organized groups and occupied empty apartments and entire buildings through mechanisms of civil society. Thus, they suggested an alternative to the state’s ideological apparatuses and reigning economic discourses. It is relevant to mention, that they were opposed to ideas of an “open society” expressed by Karl Popper in the book of the same title. In it he proclaims the necessity of liberal democracy as the most efficient way to organize social mechanisms. These ideas inspired the real George Soros to create a system of open society foundations in order to promote these concepts. Gutiérrez places his fictional Soros in the center of the symbolic plotline as an impartial observer and assessor to the main character on how to overcome the Crisis. In the case of Marco’s private apartment, it becomes the place of “okupas” without Marco (the owner) even leaving it. He consciously allows the decay of the once commodified and comfortable space. He does not clean it, he invites his marginalized friends to live in it and transforms it into a half-abandoned secret apartment, the so called “piso franco.” From this place, he and the others come out to violate the public space either with protest graffities or through violent clashes with police.
Claustrophobia of the Crisis in *Tiempo de encierro* (Time of Enclosure) by Doménico Chiappe

*Tiempo de encierro* (Time of Seclusion) is a novel by Doménico Chiappe, a Spanish writer born in Peru and raised in Venezuela, who immigrated to Spain in 2002. The plot centers on the life of a middle-class couple in their thirties who decide to buy a cottage in one of the new suburbs near Madrid. The woman, Igrid, is a freelance expert in digital media and her husband Maelo is a high school teacher on contract. Igrid is pregnant and she talks to her unborn baby about the world. They make mortgage payments in a timely fashion, but, as the Economic Crisis looms, they miss one and Igrid receives a notice of eviction. As she processes the imminent loss of their private space, she decides not to leave their house as a form of protest. She commences a voluntarily seclusion in the house while pregnant, with this becoming the main plotline of the novel.

*Tiempo de encierro* has two storylines told in alternating chapters. The first is comprised of monologues by Igrid to her unborn daughter inside the house. The second is the story of Maelo, who emigrated to Spain in times of economic growth (as Chiappe himself did) and witnessed its move towards the Economic Crisis. The story of Maelo is written using only infinitive constructions. Such unusual grammar points to the inability to finish or conclude any process in his existence as an immigrant in Spain; life is thus duration as opposed to process with specific goals:

Emigrar, llegar.

Pero, antes, partir.

Renunciar el trabajo.
Vender el automóvil.

Empacar.

Escuchar, como una sentencia: Regresarás, ya lo verás.

Abandonar un país sin despedidas (Chiappe 47).

The space of the novel is mostly confined to the rooms of the cottage, thus creating a hermetic text. On one hand this setting limits the author to the claustrophobic space of the mortgaged house in the empty village of similar buildings. On the other, it opens more opportunities to explore the inner world of the protagonists, a world reshaped by the reality of the Crisis. It is the principal driver of the novel in a broader sense. The secluded setting of Igrid is enabled by starting of the process of eviction, which, in turn, was possible because of the shattered economy of the family and strict mortgage policies. The text references real life; the multiple evictions took place in Spain between 2008 – 2013 (events of Tiempo de encierro take place in summer 2012).9 Space is also a fundamental category for understanding the text as the protagonist addressing her unborn baby speaks about it as about the habitat: “Este es espacio que habitamos – yo habito esta casa, tú me habitas a mí” (10). This declaration made even before she gets the notice of eviction reveals the figure of myself in abîme crucial for her storyline. One space is contained inside the other, from the outside world to the house, to Igrid inside the house and finally to the baby in the womb. The text is aimed inwards from the spatial point of view. On the outer side exist Spain and Madrid in times of Crisis (summer fires in the woods around the village). Then, there is a village of abandoned and unfinished cottages on the outskirts of Madrid. This is the ghost village

9 The numbers of the evictions in the first years of the crisis were big: «Los desahucios en España se disparan hasta los 517 diarios», dariojurídico.com. 29 de agosto de 2012.
where almost no one lives because of the Crisis. Inside this centripetal structure exists the house that becomes Igrid’s place of seclusion. Then there is the female protagonist trapped inside the house and finally the baby growing inside her womb:

Pero quien observa esta actuación cotidiana que sucede en el útero ocupado por un feto, también podría entender que el inquilino comienza a reclamar espacio, comodidad libertad. Sin embargo, para construir esta idea se requiere acordar que la criatura tiene razón suficiente para intuir que afuera de lo único que conoce, esa burbuja de líquido, hay algo más: un territorio capaz de acogerlo con suficiente hospitalidad para garantizar su supervivencia, y que debe colonizar en cada acto hasta que deje de vivir (187).

The story is narrated to the baby. It moves in the same direction from the outside reality through intermedial spaces of the village, the house and Igrid, in order to reach the baby who is the main audience of the narrative told by the mother.

The unified typology, standard layouts and impersonal character of modern suburban neighborhoods may result in the desacralization of the private living space as an individual’s sacred space. This structure stands in opposition to the following understanding of the house by Bachelard: “…a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability” (Bachelard 17). So, Lefebvre tries to sketch a concept of dwelling that in such standard urbanizations would preserve the possibility of poetic dwelling understood by means of the Greek term poiesis, – a human creation. Such an idea of dwelling should address “the technical demands and modern agglomerations yet without sacrificing the qualities, differences and spatio-temporal appropriation” (Stanek 88). Chiappe’s protagonist Igrid together with her husband have the unconscious aim to create such metaphysically
appropriated dwelling out of their mortgaged house before the eviction notice arrives. She states in her monologues for several times these attempts of spatial appropriation: “Vivimos aquí en esta casa grande, quizás demasiado grande” (11). They attempted to “…grasp the dwelling as a poetic practice, a possibility of shaping space as an individual work (oeuvre) within the overarching cultural and social reality” (Stanek 89). Both are representative of the creative middle class; Igrid and Maelo tried to establish themselves within the private space in a belief that it would become for them an intimate poetic reality after years of instability: “Hablamos de poner el jacuzzi aquí o ponerlo arriba, en la buhardilla, para ver las estrellas, para usarlo incluso en invierno. Pero preferimos dejarlo para después. Más urgente, más necesaria, más visible era la piscina” (34). However, that was their misconception, as by including their private space into economic mechanisms of the mortgage and the idea of middle class prosperity, the family adapted to the order of the system (as defined by Baudrillard in his book The System of Objects). The attempt to reach a private sacred space in objective reality was, in effect, an attempt to achieve the social functionality of the family within the system of production and consumption. The house was the unit of consumption hidden under the illusory mask of space designed for intimate dwelling. The aspiration for intimacy is, in fact, the aspiration of the protagonists to achieve social functionality, represented by the idea of ownership of the comfortable space (the house). The eviction notice is a continuation of this logic of capital flow that is unstable by definition in the postindustrial world and foresees a constant movement of assets. This logic of moving goods and values from one “owner” to another (in this case from the evicted homeowners to the banks) came to contradict the expectations of the protagonists to reach stability as well as their belief in the economic system. The illusionary property of the mortgaged house (the
private space) gives the illusion of dwelling within the symbolic space, grounding oneself to an ontological relationship with the world based on the place one lives. They want to see the house as “…the concentration of intimacy in the refuge, in its most simplified form” (Bachelard 37).

Yet this feeling of being rooted in a space or territory is shattered when the space is taken away from the protagonists. As the house remains the only physical space, in which Igrid stays throughout the novel it is worth approaching its centrality from the point of view suggested by Bachelard. For him, the house is the realm of the private, a cosmos and the space where an individual is able to create the world of his dream (5). He states that “the house allows one to dream in peace” (6), and compares it to the large cradle where the main possible state of mind is daydreaming (6). It is not incidental in Chiappe´s novel, that the house serves as a sort of cradle for Igrid, who matures in her attitude towards reality after the eviction notice and, at the same time, inscribes her pregnant body into this symbolic cradle. Her body itself is the cradle for the baby who is the receiver of the messages from Igrid’s monologues. The tone of the narration set up in the claustrophobic space transcends the limit between the reality and the dream. Igrid lives there as if she were daydreaming in the setting of changing nights and days. As Bachelard puts it: “…the oneiric house is more lasting than the scattered memories of our birthplace” (17). The setting of the text and the structure of the chapters related to Igrid and her reclusion in the home create a hermetic discourse. The claustrophobic space of the house where she stays voluntarily, although technically it does not belong to her anymore, changes the narration of the novel and its perception by an
implied reader (as defined by W. Iser). The text becomes a hermetic space encompassing not only the protagonist and her unborn baby, but the consciousness of the potential reader as well. It happens through limiting Igrid’s narration to the monologues she records on her iPad or writes down:

Presiona el botón rojo. Mantiene gacha la cabeza. Baja las manos, las entrelaza bajo su barbilla y apoya el mentón sobre los dedos…

“Quiero recordar siempre mi cuerpo, la elasticidad que tiene ahora y que nunca creía alcanzar. ¿Te molesta que te hable como lo hago? ¿Que te amargue la existencia tan temprano con tanta realidad? Solo registro los hechos, y pregunto (178).

Such a discourse, limited to only one voice, Igrid’s, in turn creates a specific textual atmosphere inside the house. The reader may identify himself with the voice of the narrator in the course of reading and feel trapped inside the textual space. In a way, Igrid herself is voluntarily trapped in the house. However, this hermeticity is a simulation or virtuality as well. We know that the house will be taken away from the protagonist, although she tries to ground herself in the reality by not leaving. Another strong motive for this seclusion is a fear that her future baby will be homeless.

The idea of family property for Igrid and Maelo (later on transformed into a mortgaged house) was in fact the implementation of several fetishized concepts imposed by the pre-Crisis economy of illusionary prosperity. The dominating social discourse and desire “to keep up with the Jones” was in fact a projection of social space onto individual lives.

That social space was, according to Lefebvre, the materialization of a social being that in

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10 See Iser for the broader definition of the concept.
turn took on the fetishized and autonomous characteristics of things (the house, in this case) (101). Yet, when the house reveals its disappearing nature, becoming a sort of elusive object, one sees two different modes of attitude towards it. In the case of Igrid, she inscribes herself deeper into the house by refusing to leave it and finds an opportunity to expand her identity. She transforms her everyday life into a form of poetic dwelling understood by means of the Greek term *poiesis*, that is to say, as a human creation. As Heidegger puts it: “when we come to our senses and reflect on ourselves, we come back to ourselves from things without ever abandoning our stay among things” (359). The elusive house, herself and her unborn baby become a joint poetic space of self-questioning on the nature of the Crisis, its economic dimensions and impact on the ontology of the individual being. At the same time, the husband, Maelo, opts for another way to approach the Crisis. He voluntarily joins the protest movement of the “Okupas” and, step by step, moves away from the house. Finally, he goes to one of the illegally occupied apartments downtown and joins the squatters who form a commune, similar to one that existed in Marco’s apartment in the Gutiérrez’s novel *Democracia*: “Entonces tu plan es que vivamos de okupas” (176). For Maelo, who represents the male storyline of the narration, the important space is the political space that, according to Lefebvre, “seeks to impose itself as a reality despite the fact that it is an abstraction, albeit one endowed with enormous powers, the locus and the medium of power” (Lefebvre, 94). So, even before the house where they live is under the threat of eviction, it is his private political space. In the house, Maelo stores artifacts related to his emigration to Spain from Peru and his personal collection of protest banners collected several years ago after the first protests. When the house is almost taken away from him, Maelo moves to another context that attains its realism precisely because of the Economic Crisis. This other context is the
public space of the “okupas” protest movement that manifests its materiality through unity and political action. Therefore, we may assume that throughout the novel Igrid performs a journey or a quest inbound or in centripetal direction, and Maelo is aimed outbound. The third narrative line is inscribed into the chapters of Igrid who is secluded in the house. The performance artist named Bi, for whom Igrid edits, advises her to watch “The Cannibals.” She states that it reflects what is going on outside the house. In order to deliver the narrative of the show to the reader Doménico Chiappe makes his protagonist retell it to the baby in her womb so they could share experiences. The series is narrated by Igrid in various instances, every time she watches a new installment. It is about a dystopic city under siege during a harsh winter. Action takes place in a fictional space, somewhere in Eastern Europe. Food supplies are scarce and the protagonist, a female police detective, is commissioned to investigate some cases of cannibalism and trading of human flesh. Chiappe in such a way multiplies the myse en abîme structure that he had created by placing the protagonist into the hermetic and claustrophobic space of the house within the empty village outside of Madrid: “Lo que Igrid vocaliza es la traducción a palabras de las imágenes que especta. …un filme, seriado, con una trama afectada por la técnica del folletín de suspenso con ciertas dosis negras y especulativas. Una distopía, un holocausto, una serie de prime time de canal de pago” (191). Her situation is reflected and exaggerated in a grotesque way within the TV series. The settings of the show, as depicted by Chiappe, are the gothic spaces marked with scarcity and suffering, without logical explanations, as they are in Kafkian universe. Multiplication of the novelistic space of the house to the cinematic space of the TV series, results in the creation of absurdist setting. Igrid’s being in the house on her own loses traits of realistic narration and approaches the symbolic being-into space: “Enemigos invisibles
que cercan el país, la población con hambre y las autoridades locales ineptas que reprimen. Como aquí” (202). Chiappe draws several obvious parallellisms bewteen the TV series and the Economic Crisis: “Cinco meses después de que comenzara el implacable cerco a la ciudad, muchos edificios públicos solo tienen un uso, el de almacén de cadáveres” (192).

Igrid’s voluntary seclusion ends when she is ready to give birth. She exits the closed space of the house towards the hospital, so the baby can exit the closed space of her womb. Chiappe ends the novel with the opening of the concentric circles in an optimistic way as the life of the baby will begin outside the multiple traps of the Crisis that enclosed her mother in the house.

**Urban and Psychic Landscapes in *La trabajadora* (The Female Worker) by Elvira Navarro**

Yet another example of urbanistic prose taking place during the World Economic Crisis is the novel *La trabajadora* by Elvira Navarro. It is a narrative in first person by Elisa, a freelance editor for a major publishing house. In her case, economic precarity stipulates uncertainty and a psychological crisis leading to depression. This novel is deeply attached to the urban spaces of Madrid and to the attempts of Elisa to dwell in the cityscape, to appropriate the urban reality in times of Crisis and to complement her inner self with urban spaces. The story unfolds as she loses her permanent position and becomes a freelancer. Her income therefore diminishes, and Elisa is obliged to move from her downtown apartment to a cheap rental space outside Madrid. As the economic situation worsens, she must search for a roommate, eventually finding Susana, who, in her mid-forties, is trying to resettle her life
upon returning from the Netherlands where she lived before the Crisis started. The story evolves between Elisa exploring her inner self at the streets of Madrid while jogging and walking, and the dynamics of the relationship between Elisa and Susana narrated by the former. The protagonist’s evolution in the novel moves from a slow submerging into depression and panic attacks inside the city of looming Crisis to her slow recuperation from this pathologic condition. Elisa’s consciousness is inseparable in the text from the spaces she occupies. These include the private areas of her apartment and social spaces of different outskirts of Madrid outside the circular route of M-30. Precarity in terms of a place to live is one of the immediate consequences of the Crisis in Spain. Although Elisa is not in the situation of the characters by Gutiérrez and Chiappe (she does not own the mortgaged property at risk to be taken away from her), her life patterns and emotional conditions are subject to change in times when she is obliged to leave the publishing house and become a self-sufficient freelance editor. Her move away from downtown and the individual specifics of her work isolate her from society as Elisa only has to show up at the office once a week. This individual existence transforms the text into a hermetic one, and, as with Chiappe’s novel, we see a claustrophobic narration. Yet while Chiappe’s protagonist Igrid was secluded inside the house, and for Elisa the place of her seclusion is the urban space of the remote blocks, almost desolated, and full of unfinished structures, themselves victims of the Crisis. The narration of the novel is enabled by the transformation of the inhabitable space inscribed into the cityscape. In the introductory chapter written on behalf of Susana, relating her story before she moved in with Elisa, Susana recounts that the small apartment she had rented twenty years ago was a sort of premonition for the upcoming real estate Crisis: “…Ahora pienso que las condiciones en las que habitaba mi buhardilla preconizaban lo que iba a pasar
veinte años después con las viviendas. Mi renuncia a un espacio más amplio y cómodo se debía a mi fobia con el dinero” (19). The dialectics of the exterior and interior are the driver of the plotline in the novel. Both categories can be divided into two subcategories. The exterior urban environment, like the streets where Elisa walks and the exterior as a complex of social relations (her precarious work, relations with the publishing house):

“Hacía más de un mes que no tomaba interurbano para volver a casa, y vi que habían cerrado algunos de los boutiques en cuyos escaparates me fijaba. Al llegar a Cibeles y a la Gran Via tuve la impresión de que había menos estatuas coronando las fachadas. No habría sido capaz de precisar qué estatuas faltaban” (62).

The category of the interior follows the same pattern of division into two subcategories and encompasses the interior space per se – the small rented apartment shared by Elisa and Susana and interiority of Elisa’s consciousness submerging into depression along the novel and slowly coming out of it. As Elisa loses her permanent position and becomes a freelance editor, she is obliged to change the exterior of the central district she used to live in for the marginalized suburban neighborhood beyond Madrid’s M-30 circular road. Even the scene as she comes to this place for the first time is depicted as something provisional and unstable:

“…y me apeé en una parada provisional junto a una calle de casitas bajas y modestas que resistían a la demolición” (46). She unconsciously perceives the threat to her mental health as a result of this change and because of feeling trapped into this new space. The challenge for the protagonist is to find a way to put into harmony the new claustrophobic residential space (reminding her on failure) and the exteriority of the world: “Yo desempeñaba constantemente los cristales, movida por un deseo compulsivo de que el exterior penetrara en la casa tal
como se me ofrecía desde la ventana: con un cielo enorme (49).” It is precisely the critical economic condition fostered by the feeling of isolation in this new apartment that force Elisa to look for a roommate. Her friend Germán suggests Susana who is just back from the Netherlands. The interactions between the two women are the key part of the narration, as Elisa’s internal monologues around Susana transform her into the Other, enabling both the introspection of the protagonist and dialogue.

I argue that there is a complex relation between the urban landscape of Madrid and Elisa’s consciousness in the novel. I trace two levels of such interactions that are related and deserve detailed consideration from the prospect of their interaction. The first level is manifested in Elisa’s regular night jogging through the remote blocks of town, previously unknown to her. Her jogging and strolls that she takes late at night are a way to escape from the routine of being a freelance worker. But, as she runs alone, Elvira Navarro traces interesting ways that the protagonist interacts with the spaces of marginalized districts in the city. She runs in random routes and always returns differently: “…Tenía una rara capacidad para orientarme…cuando consultaba el mapa siempre me extraviaba. …si me quedaba sin aliento, me detenía, y entonces escudriñaba…luego regresaba por las calles y avenidas distintas a las que me habían llevado hasta allí” (73). At this point the urban landscapes of empty streets that she runs through at night start to affect her perception of the world. The reader observes as the city is deprived of human presence and becomes a gothic landscape of poverty and desolation fostered by the Crisis. This empty urban space acts on Elisa’s mind as something uncanny;¹¹ the hidden menace of the Crisis and instability that slowly penetrates

from the outer space of the streets into her mind resulting in depression: “No me gustaba enchufarme el iPod, las canciones se convertían en una muralla de ruidos que me aislaban, y era como caminar en el interior de una cápsula a la que no llegaban sonidos fundamentales” (74). The city slowly shows Elisa signs of the Crisis that had been invisible to her before. Among them, there are several stores that closed down and are no longer present in usual spots as well as illegally occupied buildings:

…era una casa ocupada y los maderos estaban ahí para disimular. A la semana siguiente observé en una calle cercana unas cuantas casas más allanadas de esa misma forma discreta con tablones que disimulaban mal y ventanas forradas con cartón. De algunos pisos cuya construcción no estaba rematada salían cables hasta las farolas cercanas para robar luz (76).

The habitable space of residential buildings is transformed in its own double simulation. Officially, the buildings are abandoned or not finished – so they are presumed to be empty. Yet there are subtle signs that somebody has occupied them and lives there illegally (cables stealing electricity, sporadic light behind the windows covered with wooden shields).

However, the new residents apply lots of effort to hide their presence in the buildings, so the houses would still seem dishabitated in spite of people’s presence in them. This double simulation or false appearance invades Elisa’s mind as she is never sure whether there are people in those places or not. This creates a paranoiac insecurity in the protagonist; she understands that these illegal occupations (“okupas”) are the result of total economic and ontological uncertainty that she has become a part of it. The absence of the usual sights of the cityscape she had been used to and their substitution with such simulated reality create the
effect of the abandoned city similar to fictional TV series “Los caníbales.” Navarro writes: “La ciudad permanecía más o menos igual, con su apariencia de caos ordenado, de hecatombe asumida” (78). The hidden menace of the city blocks gets stronger and stronger everytime, as she walks deeper and deeper into the desolated areas: “Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, el silencio hacía pensar en viviendas desocupadas, en edificios en trance de ser desmantelados. Cuando me interné por una de esas calles de nuevo vi que de algunos balcones salían cables que robaban la luz” (117). The author creates a parallel inward movement into the depth of the city streets by Elisa and into the depth of her unconscious full of suppressed fears and phobias. These are taken on the surface in times of her walks. The accumulation of tension results in the character’s panic attack that Elisa experiences on the bus on her way to the publishing house. The Economic Crisis transforms common and familiar images of the everyday city life into the threat to Elisa through subtle and uncanny displacements:

…me fijé en que habían cerrado la tienda donde hacía un año encargué una bicicleta estática …a pesar de que la estampa era rutinaria, la forma como hervía el bullicio tenía algo inhabitual, algo que recordaba a bulevares franceses de la periferia, donde las tiendas reúnen una clientela dudosa que se arremolina largo tiempo frente a los escaparates…(48).

These slight spatial modifications happen because of the Crisis. Familiar shops are closed and are no longer in their usual spots. The distorted city space invades Elisa’s consciousness and provokes her panic attack and visions: ”Durante algunos segundos aquellos viejos se tornaron monstruos que me miraron con sus sonrisas marullentas. Tardé en formularme esta percepción de manera adecuada, en reconocer que eran visiones…me mantuve un tiempo
más al borde de desmoronamiento (49).” The city spaces of the Crisis gradually contribute to Elisa’s transgression from the condition of the socially acceptable normality to marginal mental condition of paranoia resulting in panic attack and her breakdown.

Elvira Navarro creates a liaison between two female characters sharing a room through the concept of their relation to urban space. As Elisa walks around different marginalized neighborhoods every night, Susana dedicates most of her free time to the creation of bizarre collages that resemble city maps. She cuts out miniature pictures of the buildings, cars, streets from the ads and newspapers and creates unrecognizable maps of Madrid out of them: “Le pregunté para que hacía aquello, y me dijo que quería cambiar los edificios de sitio. Su pretensión era que el mapa permaneciera igual en estructura pero con todos sus elementos traspuestos. Iba a componer varios mapas” (79). Going back to Lefebvre’s triad of spatial practice, the representation of space and representational space we may observe parallel structures in women’s approach to the city. As Elisa walks around different streets among occupied buildings and desolate landscape she perceives the displacement of the city into the realm of the uncanny. The spatial practices of inscribing herself to the city prove to be destructive. Conversely, Susana creates multiple representations of displaced city spaces where the uncanny shift from everyday life to the fear of unrecognition is shaped in the form of many maps-collages that she wants to exhibit: “…hice lo mismo con otros mapas, examinarlos con cuidado; me costó aún más reconocer algo. Susana parecía haber excluido lo evidente, como el edificio de Gran Via con el cartel de Schweppes o La Cibeles. Tal vez, yo no los localizaba” (121). As this changed city becomes the representation of space on Susana’s map it also comes to Elisa’s consciousness as a representational space – the bearer of the signifiers born by the Crisis: “…estos últimos además me recordaron a mis paseos, no
porque yo tuviera una imagen clara de la ciudad sino por el caos” (122). Susana’s bizarre maps complement Elisa’s perception of the town as she helps her find an art gallery to exhibit her collages. After the opening of the exposition they both walk home on foot and images of the maps coincide with Elisa’s perception of the city becoming a solidified representational space. She manages to rebuild her picture of the world shattered by the Crisis and depression by combining her mind’s representations of the city and Susana’s collages into one representational space in which she gets her integrity back:

En ningún momento decidimos regresar al piso caminando, y solo cuando ya estábamos a mitad de trayecto, comenzamos a decírnos “ya falta menos para llegar a casa” …Todo era como siempre si bien lo que se desplegaba ante mi no parecía la ciudad que veía a diario, sino los planos de Susana, que creí habitados de manera subrepticia, y que ahora que la ciudad se descubría como otra cobraban sentido (131).

This reacquisition of the city is pictured by Navarro in a symbolic scene on the balcony where Elisa observes the city, this time feeling a part of it. It becomes a space of dwelling and intimacy once again. The urban landscape harmonizes with the psychological landscape in a symbolic reappropriation by Elisa: “…seguía interrogando inadvertidamente el paisaje, de la misma manera que él se había hecho presente de un modo que no era posible calibrar desde mi balcón. Desde allí todo cabía en la palma de mi mano, extendida hacia un aire ilusorio” (136). This overcoming of the spatial rupture is also a move to regain personal integrity and overcome depression for the character. Navarro concludes with a decisive move of Elisa to the new apartment when she goes to live with her boyfriend and finds the connection to the city once again, restoring, at the same time personal psychological harmony.
As I have stated through the chapter, the spatial dimension of the Economic Crisis is reflected in the contemporary novels in multiple ways. The space is changed in its various manifestations. The texts considered allow me to trace several ways in which the Crisis modified the space in contemporary narrative. The private space of the characters is changed through evictions and forces them to become an active part of public and social spaces of protest, as seen in the novels by Gutiérrez and Chiappe. The Crisis also changes urban space and impacts the psychology of the characters, seen with the protagonists of Tiempo de encierro and La trabajadora. Separately, the symbolic space of the novel Democracia by Gutiérrez should be mentioned as the attempt to fictionalize economic processes and give them universal dimensions. Space operates in the novels within the oppositions of the private and the public, the individual and the social, the realistic and the symbolic, urban and psychological (the cityscape and the psychoscape).
CHAPTER 2
Debt and Precarity in the Novels of the Economic Crisis in Spain

Many novels published in Spain in the late 2000-s and early 2010-s reflected social change resulting from the economic difficulties. The change happened as the Crisis impacted everyday life by different means and mechanisms. Those mechanisms of impact require a closer look to understand their specifics. In this chapter I will analyze several categories important to the World Economic Crisis and their manifestation in contemporary Spanish novels. One of the reasons for the Economic Crisis was the system of debts, including the real estate bubble in Spain. The bubble resulted in hundreds of thousands of foreclosures, leaving families on the streets and with a debt load on top of it all. The problem spread all over Spain, from tiny villages in Extremadura to the suburbs of Madrid. People affected by the bubble had common interests and developed strategies to defy the situation. They faced the failure of the state and social mechanisms of protection and looked for alternate ways to move on. The existing social and community structures proved unable to deal with the current challenges (Moreno-Caballud 3). The foundations of the social contract (the term coined as far back as by Rousseau) that should have shaped democratic Spain (post-transition to the Democracy, EU-member, emerging leader of the Ibero-American world) were shattered. The state could not resolve the social problems by merely following the old pre-Crisis laws and patterns of coexistence. The debts owed by the majority of Spaniards resulted in a precarious existence, a decay of the middle class, and gloomy prospects for the younger generation. The unemployment rates for people under twenty-five years of age reached fifty per cent (Burgen). The failing social treaty resulted in emerging civic movements and
protests. Evicted citizens formed clusters of the reborn movement of “okupas” (squatters) living in the abandoned houses. Self-organization and non-institutionalized civic society formed horizontal structures independent from the official Spanish state. Later, they became known as “Movimiento 15M” (May 15th Movement). The aim of the new protest groups was to fight policies of the state and the corporations, including the banks. These social movements contributed to the creation of a political space parallel to the official politics, and they even tried to substitute the failed governmental structures and political parties with alternatives. The clusters of the protest movements created a prospect for the new political reality. The discourse around the new reality inevitably reshaped the language used to express new ways of protest and new forms of self-organization. The language of protest was a landmark for the organization of communities around it. These processes took place mostly in the latter stages of the Economic Crisis. However, its start in 2008 was preceded by massive accumulation of debts. The idea of general indebtedness by the middle class for the sake of well-being and individual prosperity was widely accepted. The failed or expired debts (as Recaredo Veredas called his novel Deudas vencidas) were the result of the prosperity fantasies shared by the middle class that had no evident economic foundations. Illusions of comfortable and even luxurious life seemed to be realistic and easily achievable through the system of accessible loans and mortgages. I argue that the fantasies of total prosperity were part of the pre-Crisis frenzy with its construction bubble, common belief in the endless prosperity of the nation, and accumulation of massive debts. The result was growing precarity and a Crisis of trust in the institutions which were partially replaced by the horizontal structures of the civic society.
In this chapter I will analyze three novels in a way that will demonstrate how the pre-Crisis “happy” life laid the foundations for massive debt, which in turn acted as the driver of the Crisis and the resulting precarity. The novels, *Deudas vencidas* by Recaredo Veredas, *Ajuste de cuentas* by Benjamín Prado and *Yo, precario* by Javier López Menacho, deal with the debt phenomenon. The reader sees how debt reshapes the consciousness of the borrower. The inability to settle the debts results in economic, social, and institutional bankruptcy. Even the titles point at the process of the failed debt settlement and consequent impoverishment. The three novels also describe the responses to the challenges of the Crisis, which occurred on the level of social structures (new movements). Within these responses, new languages of protest emerged, while the old discourses failed. The texts illustrate collective resistance and individual ethical or unethical responses to the Crisis reality. The precarity, or even its threat, impacted on the choices made by the characters, and the texts explore possible moral or immoral outcomes of those choices. The analysis of these phenomena (categories of debt and precarity, collective response to the challenges, and individual ethical choices) will help me to explore the changes in the genre of the novel in response to the changing reality.

### Indebtedness and Ethics in the Novel *Deudas vencidas* (The Expired Debts) by Recaredo Veredas

The very title of the novel, *Deudas vencidas* (Expired Debts), points to debt as the key problem. Debt is generally considered to be financial or monetary; however, there are also emotional, moral, and social debts. The sense of indebtedness, when an individual feels obliged to do something to another individual, to the group, or to the institution, is related to the
category of debt as well. As we can see further in the analysis, the debts placed by Veredas in the title of the novel incorporate every possible meaning of the concept.

The novel *Deudas vencidas*, published in 2014, is a text about the atmosphere of the Economic Crisis in Spain at the end of the 2000s. The novel is written as a fictional diary with elements of parody and the grotesque. The first-person narrator begins every chapter with the words “Querido diario” (“Dear Diary”), which create the sense of an intimate discourse. The narrator does not reveal his name right away, instead he describes his current situation and the problems he experiences. From this first-person perspective, the reader discovers the plot as it unfolds. Therefore, the generic structure of the novel could be considered a fictional diary. This organization of the text already sets boundaries and expectations for the reader and creates various aesthetic advantages for the author. The diary combines traits of both the epistolary genre and that of confessions. Both genres have a strong tradition in Spanish peninsular literature. Epistolary comes to mind as we may consider the reader as the narrator’s fictional addressee. This tradition goes back as far as the Spanish Enlightenment with *Cartas marruecas* by José Cadalso. The other side of this narrative technique, the confessional, is rooted deeply in the Catholic traditions and style emerging from *The Confessions* by St. Augustine. The third element of this textual structure is its double ficticity. The fictional narrator confesses to the diary. The challenge of this generic approach is the level of truthfulness of the character-narrator, as his confessions may be filled with exaggerations and fictionalizations of the events. As Philippe Lejeune states, an author creating autobiographical texts performs self-fictionalization by concluding a so-called autobiographical pact.\(^\text{12}\) The fictional narrator cannot be completely objective toward himself; he does participate in self-fictionalization and

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self-idealization. However, the real-life Recaredo Veredas creates contradiction in the text. He shows a lack of continuity between the narrator’s point of view of the events and the reality in which the narrator finds himself. This creates a double exposure to the reality of the Economic Crisis. The subjective viewpoint by the fictional narrator is counterweighted by the objectivity of the events mentioned by the author’s voice of Veredas. This was also the case in Doménico Chiappe’s novel *Tiempo de encierro*, analyzed in the previous chapter. In Chiappe’s novel, the mother-to-be was telling her story to her unborn baby and recording on her iPad. Veredas also chose the form of the fictional diary to use the element of confession. Yet in the novels by Doménico Chiappe, Pablo Gutiérrez, and Elvira Navarro, the reader could see the victims of the Economic Crisis and their search for ways out of the problematic situation. In the case of the novel by Veredas, the booming economic Crisis is the background for the action. The main character here is on the other side of the “barricades.”

He is a direct beneficiary of the critical situation as he is the lawyer who collects problematic debts in the middle of the Economic Crisis. Also, as it is very common in Spain, the lawyer has literary ambitions and identifies himself as a half-lawyer and half-writer who has published a novel and wishes to publish another one. The limit between “leyes” and “letras” (law and humanities) had many things in common in Spanish tradition. Veredas mocks this tendency of lawyers to also become writers.13 The structure of the fictional diary implies self-reflexivity on the part of the character as one of the main narrative strategies. There are several ways of these reflections and they complement the development of the plot. The most important line of the narrator’s reflection is the description of the reality of the Economic Crisis. The character faces it on a daily basis as he deals with work problems. The narrator

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13 One of the most famous examples could be the bestselling author (and the lawyer) Ildefonso Falcones, whose novel *La catedral del mar* (2006) was very popular nationwide. See Falcones.
gives a gloomy picture of the falling economy and impoverishment of the people who used to be successful, but who have now become debtors. Their debts have expired, and they do not want to repay them. Recaredo Veredas recounts stories of failure that result from the accumulation of these financial debts which are now impossible to be paid out.

The law firm of the narrator is the intermediary between the banks, who order the collection of the problematic debts, and the debtors themselves. Survival of his business depends on collecting debts from people who are already bankrupt due to the Crisis. The lawyer must work at the boundaries of legality. He is in doubt, whether it would be appropriate, ethical, or in line with his lifestyle to hire the Russian gangster Ivan. The gangster would help him to collect debts by using threats of violence. This dilemma is based upon the belief that the debtors have the funds accumulated in cash (“dinero negro”) and don’t want to return them to the banks: “Por algo en España hay un veinticinco por ciento de los billetes de quinientos Euros de Europa” (Veredas 10).

According to the main character, this stockpiling of cash happens because many Spaniards consider the banks to be the reason for the Crisis as well as its main beneficiaries. Later in the novel the lawyer’s assumption finds more proof. In the diary he also mentions the complex relations he has with his wife, Miriam, and their social environment. This group of people defines themselves as a circle of intellectuals of the Lavapiés district in Madrid and call themselves the Collective (El Colectivo). The confessions of the narrator in the diary reveal his troubled marriage and the lack of respect he feels from the other members of the group. Veredas creates a grotesque situation inscribing the bourgeois family of Osmundo (whose name also sounds pathetic to the people around him) and this “intellectual” circle. The group pretends to be a left-wing theoretical movement, and organizes panels and discussions,
prepares reports, and hosts lectures by some left wing theorists: “...y allí sobretodo hablamos y hablamos de Badiou y de Žižek, del futuro de la izquierda y de la capacidad de los intelectuales para transformar la sociedad. O sea, de nada” (19). The author builds up a triangle of oppositions between Osmundo, his wife, and the leader of the group – a rich and exquisite “aristocrat” of the leftist movement named Borja Ortiz-Echague.14 Throughout the novel Osmundo’s wife leaves him for Ortiz-Echague and becomes his lover. The narrator is a contributing member of the left-wing group, yet his job looks more like the nineteenth century usurer (el usurero). This contradiction creates many grotesque moments resulting from the character’s inability to face his reality. On the one hand, he wants to create novels and be a prolific writer, while keeping a strong unbiased ethical stance. On the other, he becomes the “shark” of savage capitalism and ends up working with the gangster to collect debts. Veredas consciously increases the contradictions between the ideas professed by the characters and their actions to the point that they become overtly grotesque reminding the reader about the aesthetics of esperpento. Miriam is used to a luxurious life and consumption, yet she continuously talks about class struggle and secretly adores radical female revolutionary Ulrike Meinhof.15 Borja Ortiz-Echague, whom Miriam falls in love with, leads the left theory group but simultaneously lives the life of an aristocrat: “...la izquierda de España siempre fue patrimonio de señoritos” (39). Finally, Osmundo combines his left-wing and right-wing impulses. He is the biggest financial donor of the Collective, although his funds proceed from hopeless victims of the Crisis: “Como soy el que más cobra, también soy el que más paga, y

14 The last name reminds the reader about the real prominent photographer and engineer, founder and the president of the SEAT automotive company José Ortiz-Echague, supporter of the Franco regime. Ironically the character with the same name in the novel combines contradictory traits of the aristocrat and left-wing thinker.

15 Ulrike Meinhof (1934-1976) was a West German left wing militant and terrorist, founder of the extremist Red Army Faction.
encima debo ocultar mi trabajo. Como afirma el viejo dicho, además de puta pongo la cama” (14). Veredas exaggerates to expose the failure and insufficiency of traditional mechanisms to regulate both the public and the private spheres within the new reality of the Crisis. Models of dialectical thinking on the traditional fight for the rights of the working class, left-wing and right-wing worldview, and old-school social and political groups prove to be insufficient in the new reality. Through the monologues of Osmundo, the style of Veredas’s novel is on the edge of satire, and is the means through which the author makes his claim. I argue that Veredas attempts to overthrow the traditional dialectical view of economic and social realities of the Economic Crisis in Spain by means of hyperbolizing to the point of absurdity. The narrative technique of the grotesque dismounts “serious” dialectical attempts to explain the world and life. The exaggerated seriousness becomes comic and carnivalesque as Bakhtin proved in his work on Rabelais.16 Therefore, the conscious application of these techniques by Veredas becomes an alternative mechanism of powerful deconstruction of old ways, that have turned out to be insufficient and faulty in times of the Crisis. For example, when Osmundo prepares the report for the meeting of the Collective, the value of this intellectual product is exaggerated: “…un borrador podía originar un comunicado…esa obra tan magna como una encíclica papal, que luego es difundido por Lavapiés, nuestro pequeño planeta” (48).

Similar to Gutiérrez and Chiappe, Veredas mentions on many occasions the informal civic movements of 15M and “the okupas.” These two ways of participatory democracy are very different. However, they both try to react to the situation of total indebtedness, economic disaster, and opposition to the system as “movimientos antisistema,” so to speak. In the case of Gutiérrez, the committee consists of marginalized individuals who live in Marco’s destroyed

16 See Bakhtin, M M. Rabelais and His World.
apartment and do not have an organized plan for their protest. It is an anarchic group whose protest manifests in random clashes with police, chaotic street art, occupying the empty buildings, and enjoying life free of social commitments. The protest against the situation in the case of the group created in the *Democracia* novel, is an opportunity to live life free of social constraints. On the contrary, the protest group depicted in the novel *Deudas vencidas* is deeply structured and institutionalized. They invite to their meetings top notch left intellectuals who are friends of the leader of the group, Ortiz-Echague. The grotesque of the situation is that the impact of this group is even less than the protest actions of the “El Comité” by Gutiérrez. “El Colectivo” by Veredas refuses to participate in violent protests: “¿…perderíamos nuestro compromiso intelectual si nos dedicáramos al fervor del combate? La respuesta…es sí. Ninguno de los presentes tenemos intención de ser detenidos o golpeados” (41). They prefer to gather in nice restaurants and generate claims, declarations, manifests, and reports that do not spread further than the walls of the pubs in Madrid’s district of Lavapiés. The main character is involved in this group, and he pays the biggest participation quotas proportionate to his income. The real reasons that push him to spend time in this absurd organization are his remorseful conscience and his attraction to Miriam, his wife, who actively participates in these meetings. However, Osmundo’s spouse is involved with the “Colectivo” because of her affair with the leader of the pub intellectuals, the professor and “left-wing aristocrat” Ortiz-Echague. One of the main reports of this Collective is prepared by Miriam and Ortiz-Echague jointly and is dedicated specifically to the housing market during the Crisis. Both “El Colectivo” and “El Comité” depict ways to react to the new reality of the Economic Crisis, and, as the reader may see, both of them are catered through the use of irony by the authors: “Nuestro segundo lugar es elegante…nada de cutreces okupas…” (43). This mission statement of the “Colectivo”
puts it into opposition and isolation from the new ways of participatory democracy. In my opinion, the failure of such social groups to provide an adequate response to the Crisis both through action (in the novel by Gutiérrez) and through the discourse (in the novel by Veredas) is a result of the failure of their dialectical methods to approach reality. The traditional binary dialectics, in their structure, foresee the starting point of thought and/or action from the concept of opposites, creating the binary categories for the mechanisms of thought (life–death, black–white, left wing–right wing, crisis–normality, etc.). In the postindustrial, globalized, and post-Crisis reality, the approach to the Economic Crisis as a temporary condition that needs to be fought in some ways (protest, discourse, etc.) is based on this binary logic. Yet the nature of the processes started by the precarious Crisis reality makes definition in binary terms inadequate. As opposed to temporality, I would argue, the Crisis creates foundations for the new post-critical worldview. It creates a new modus vivendi with challenges that may not be approached through the application of dialectical structures of the temporal versus the permanent. Pre-Crisis expectations of “having and building a life” (Berlant 7) prove to be obsolete. The idea of Crisis as something temporary, as the characters of the novels perceive it, does not work to resolve their situation. The style of the novels, the hyperboles, and the grotesque situations of the characters show that they are unable to resolve the dilemma between the good life and precarity (Marco in the novel Democracia), or usury and ethics (Osmundo in the novel Deudas vencidas). Thus, I assume that the Crisis of the conscience is not something exceptional or opposed to the “normal.” It does not even subdue to the logic of the binary oppositions. Agreeing with Berlant’s definition, the Crisis is the process embedded in “…the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what’s overwhelming” (10).
The protest, as part of a dialectical structure “crisis – protest” in a working model, would be a productive reaction to the Crisis. The results would be the adaptation of the individual or a diminishing of the consequences of the Crisis and their impact on one’s life. The protest would work as productive stress mobilizing the resources of the individual. It would create a reaction to the demanding situation and result in productive output. In short, the protest in a working dialectical model would be a productive factor in the same way that stress can be in the human body. The novel *Deudas vencidas*, as I argue above, reveals the failure of such a dialectical model based on binary oppositions when applied to the Crisis. The members of the protest group produce a logical discourse of the left-wing protest movement, but from the point of view of the narrator their discourse lacks common sense. This occurs because of the contradiction between the declared values and the way of life lived by the protestor. An obvious example is the narrator’s wife, Miriam. She is addicted to a luxurious lifestyle and elite brands of clothing, perfume, furniture, etc. This weird combination of leftist ideas and luxury is present in her discourse against Ikea furniture and in favor of artisanal luxury brands:

> Muchos nos dirán que somos unos snobs, unos pijos dilettantes que encima quieren tener buena conciencia, pero mentirán. Somos trabajadores concientes. Y por eso debemos tirar nuestros muebles de Ikea, construidos con la sangre de los niños chinos, y comprar antigüedades nórdicas, elaboradas con mimo por trabajadores bien pagados…es una obligación moral. (101)

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17 American Psychological Association defines stress as: the pattern of specific and nonspecific responses an organism makes to stimulus events that disturb its equilibrium and tax or exceed its ability to cope. (http://www.apa.org/research/action/glossary.aspx?tab=18) From Gerrig, Richard J. & Philip G. Zimbardo. *Psychology And Life, 16/e*. Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright (c) 2002 by Pearson Education.
This contradictory worldview makes it impossible for the narrator to confess the criminal origins of his money to his wife, so instead he increases his contributions to the “Colectivo” to counterbalance the ethical remorse he feels and as a vain attempt to regain her love.

The debts (especially unpaid) were powerful stimulants for the World Economic Crisis and its Spanish equivalent. They became the implicit drivers of social, economic, and psychological changes that occurred in Spain in the late 2000s. These changes marked the transition from the epoch of careless consumption, and security of the future and life for middle-class Spaniards, to a time of insecurity, imminent precarity, and an uncertain future. This change in the worldview is something that could be defined as the spirit of the time (Zeitgeist). The novels of the Crisis in Peninsular literature are indicators of this shifting Zeitgeist. I argue that the overwhelming debts found within Spain’s economy by 2008 were not only part of the economic mechanisms founded on principles of crediting, but that the fantasies of welfare shared by many people were also stimuli for the accumulation of debts. For consumers who invested borrowed money into non-existing or virtual housing markets, this was more than just economical exchange. After years of supposed transition (Período de Transición) from dictatorship to democracy, relative political and economic stability came, and people unleashed their vision of an idealistic upper-middle class life for everyone. As Veredas shows in his novel, people voluntarily stick to the models that potentially threaten their lives in order to keep on existing within the space of fulfilling fantasy:

…una generación que creyó que el mundo sería siempre azul celeste y que en España habría lugar para cientos de miles de abogados, ingenieros de caminos, ingenieros forestales, biólogos, periodistas y filólogos. Millones de puestos de trabajo que correspondieran con su formación germánica, licenciados suficientes
The novel works with the ambiguity of the main character who tries to reconcile debt collection and socialist ideas in his life. This impossible blending results in frequent grotesque situations for him all the time. In the morning, Osmundo sends out the gangster Ivan to collect expired debts in cash, and in the evening he participates in meetings of the leftist “El Colectivo.” This ambiguity can be analyzed through the idea of debt. Declaring his aspirations to become a writer or a person engaged in the socialist movement, Osmundo tries to pay out his ethical debt to his education and to the tradition of thought he was brought up with. Ultimately, he wants to regain the love of his wife. Thus, the text is built upon the antagonism shaping the personality of this character. The structure that is in the background of this antagonism is the debt. It is no wonder that the novel’s title is “Expired Debts.” Debts of all sort including financial, moral, and ethical expire within the text in the life of the character. Moreover, debts define the nation: “The only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into collective possession of a modern nation is – their national debt” (Marx 919). This becomes a constant process. Osmundo lives in the situation of a crisis that is permanent. The Financial Crisis creates the expired debts of the debtors, and motivates Osmundo to reconsider his attitude to work ethics, morality, and his previous values. The Crisis makes him face the dilemma of whether to hire the gangster to provide for his financial survival. Therefore, his own ethical commitments and self-imposed obligations of corporate honesty become outdated too. The expired commitments, both financial and moral, always put an individual at risk of precarity with bankruptcy imminent. Precarity and bankruptcy could be easily transferred from the world of finance to the realm of personal values. Language demonstrates the relation
between the concepts of debt and ethics in structures such as “moral bankruptcy” or “moral obligation.” I define the path of Osmundo throughout the novel as avoiding the phantom of physical bankruptcy, and instead embracing moral bankruptcy. The physical debts are collected by Osmundo with the help of Ivan, yet his moral debts or deeds gradually expire through the range of grotesque situations. It is the story of individual decay reminding the reader about the traditions of the XIX century realist novels. The style of the grotesque and the humoristic depictions of the settings put the text in line with its modern zeitgeist.

In my opinion, this ambiguity of the debt in times of the Crisis is grasped rather well by Richard Dienst who states:

A more fundamental and permanent type of crisis, one that makes it just as impossible to start over as to carry on as before. We will call this situation a crisis of indebtedness, operating in at least two dimensions. … a debt crisis in the classic sense ...in a broader and more elusive sense this is a crisis in the social and psychic relations that make economic debts possible – the various forms of economic belonging, selfhood, responsibility and mobilization that make indebtedness of any kind durable and binding. (13)

Dienst suggests that the crisis in social and psychic relations enable economic debts and transform individual feelings of belonging, selfhood, and responsibility. Those factors are at the forefront of the transformations described by Veredas in his novel. However, the individual transformations of the character are imposed not only from within through existential imperatives, but from without, as well. Work and criminal methods of collection of the real expired debts are the triggers that create a new attitude free from previous ethical constraints.

18 In particular, I refer to the tetralogy by Benito Perez-Galdós called “The Torquemada novels,” on the usurer named Torquemada from Madrid.
This new life strategy of the main character is aimed at pure hedonism and egotistic prosperity, that, in turn, is fictional and fed by the fantasies imposed by the society. I would like to point to the dynamics present in several Spanish novels dedicated to the years of the World Economic Crisis. The tendency is that the Crisis survived by the protagonist is embodied by the character antagonistic to him or her. The ways for the main characters to deal with the Crisis are inscribed in the relations with the antagonists who represent the Crisis both economically and individually. These parallel relations to the antagonist and the Crisis result in similar outcomes within several texts. In the novel *La trabajadora* by Elvira Navarro, for instance, the antagonist who impersonates the Crisis is the roommate of the narrator, Susana. She accompanies Elisa in hard times, assists her in overcoming her depression, and helps her to deal with the precarity of a freelancer and her catastrophic worldview. At the point when Elvira is recovering from her personal crisis, the Economic Crisis around her also slightly declines, and she decides to get rid of the antagonist by asking her roommate to move out. In *Democracia* by Pablo Gutiérrez, the antagonist and the impersonation of the Crisis for Marco is his young metrosexual boss riding a shining vintage scooter. Gutiérrez resolves this antagonism in a similar way by means of creating an oneiric scene. In the end of his voluntary seclusion within the apartment, Marco takes LSD and under influence of the drug notices the director riding his scooter. Within the edges between reality and the dream, he hijacks a construction van and starts chasing the scooter. For the director the anonymous chasing van becomes the impersonal sign of doom perceiving him. This scene is a clear reference to the early Spielberg movie “Duel.” This oneiric chase ends with the director falling off the road and dying. The protagonist involuntarily kills his antagonist. The antagonist for Osmundo in the novel by Veredas is somebody smarter, nobler, and more successful than himself. Ortiz-
Echague is Osmundo’s wife’s lover and the president of the intellectual circle. Thinking about his methods of debt collection, Osmundo comes to the conclusion that he will get revenge by beating up Ortiz-Echague. Similar to the case of Marco, who involuntarily caused the director’s death in a traffic accident, Ortiz-Echague also dies because Ivan accidentally succeeds in his efforts to beat him up. In the novel *Ajuste de cuentas* by Benjamín Prado, the antagonist and the impersonation of the Crisis is the old businessman Duque, well-known for his real estate speculation. He tempts the protagonist-writer to write his fictional biography for money in the time of the Crisis. The main character accidentally reveals an assassination plot and reports the businessman, who then ends up in jail. The removal of the symbolic antagonist happens here as well. All these representations of the Crisis disappear from the life of the main characters in the novels. Elisa starts a new life in a new place, and the writer in Prado’s novel finds inner peace. Marco, from the novel by Gutiérrez, moves out of the apartment to the new world, and escapes from the police. Osmundo, written by Veredas, solidifies his hedonistic decay and declares his intent to enjoy the death of his rival, as his wife returns to him. Moreover, his funeral speech for Ortiz-Echague helps him to publish his novel and get reaffirmed in his new unethical and hedonistic worldview. Accidental events in the novels that remove the antagonists are also the mechanisms by which the Crisis is removed from within the conscience of the main characters and assumed by them as ongoing reality.

Osmundo’s fantasies are the consequence of exploiting the mechanisms of debt within the Crisis and taking others down to the conditions of precarity. Personal satisfaction and economic mechanisms combine inside the fantasy. Similarly, to compensate for the humiliation of his wife staying with another man, Osmundo wants to throw himself a luxurious party in a hotel with prostitutes.
The indebtedness of the people owing money, the holders of expired debts, become for Osmundo the regime of social power as defined by Deleuze who defines “enclosure” and “indebtedness” as two major regimes of social power, two programs of domination, each combining specific kinds of state authority with distinct economic imperatives and logics.\(^{19}\)

While the enclosure encompasses limitation of physical freedom including imprisonment, the indebtedness creates invisible bounds. I argue, that in the novel by Veredas, indebtedness supplements and overtakes enclosure to become a crucial apparatus of control.

Economic imperatives and logics that subdue the debtors to the banks through mediation of the lawyer-collector, exercise the program of social domination. That program is the way out of ambivalence for the main character. After the death of his ideological and personal rival, Osmundo is free to delight in the world of private welfare fantasies and dreams of future wellbeing in times of the Economic Crisis. His prosperity is of a parasitic nature; Osmundo prefers to go with the system.

The Ethical Debt in the Novel by Benjamín Prado Ajuste de cuentas (Settling of Scores)

The novel by Benjamín Prado, Ajuste de cuentas (Settling of Scores), follows the conventions of the genre of the hard-boiled detective story (la novela negra). The writer sets the detective plot amidst the realities of Spain in the early 2010s, in the middle of the Economic Crisis. As with the other two novels that I analyze in this chapter, this is a first-
person narration. The narrator is a middle-aged writer from Madrid named Juan Urbano. He is in financial crisis, losing all sources of income one by one, and additionally he is suffering from writer’s block. His name is not random, as Juan is one the most common Spanish first names, and his last name, Urbano, clearly indicates the character’s affiliation with the urban realities. In this case those are the urban spaces of Madrid. On the other hand, giving the character a name of “everyman” is a clear sign of irony, applied by Prado. The plot of the novel intertwines several parallel lines. The writer and professor Juan Urbano becomes one more victim of the Economic Crisis. Without a job and with a mortgage pending he finds himself at the limit of poverty and marginalization. At this point he suddenly receives a tempting proposal – to write a biographical novel about Martín Duque. Duque is the corrupt construction businessman who just came out of prison and represents Spain’s real estate bubble. Duque wants the novel to justify his actions. The writer will have to face the dilemma to either remain in peace with his own principles or to accept the dubious offer. He tries to postpone the choice and to reconcile himself with this contradiction, but failure to do so will draw him inside the complex intrigue shaped by the conventions of the thriller genre. The characters correspond to generic conventions – the indecisive intellectual as the narrator, the femme fatale Isabelle, Duque’s secretary who acts as intermediary between the writer and the businessman, and finally, the construction mogul, Duque himself. He combines epic and sinister traits in the novel that Urbano writes. In some ways he is the representation of the Economic Crisis, resembling the character of fictional George Soros in the novel *Democracia* by Pablo Gutiérrez. Prado’s text is the combination of the two alternating storylines. One of them is the story of Urbano writing the novel. The other line includes parts of the biographical novel about Duque, written by Urbano. This part refers the reader to the
past times during which all the economic and political backgrounds of the Crisis built up. The novel by Prado becomes a consideration of the conditions for the Crisis. The premises were created in the past, but their effects impact the present and the life of the characters. The text becomes “un meritario primer intento de novelar la oscura realidad de la crisis en España,” (Estruch).

The freelancers, who constitute a large part of the working middle class in the global economy, were affected by the Crisis even more than full-time workers. This was one of the topics in La trabajadora by Elvira Navarro. The main character of Prado’s novel, the writer and part-time teacher Urbano, also slowly loses his weekly interviews, newspaper column, paid lectures, and the possibility to win prizes in literary contests. The high school where he used to work is reluctant to rehire him due to shortages. At this point, he gets the offer to write a biographical novel about the sinister businessman. His growing mortgage debts and utility bills push him to accept the offer that under any other circumstances he would have considered unethical.

As I already mentioned, the condition of shared debt and common precarity resulted in new and reborn forms of civil society, like the “okupas” or 15M movement. The feeling of sharing something in common propelled the affected citizens to create informal structures as a way to oppose the political-economic system of expropriation. The premise for such unification was sharing the lack of something. It could be the lack of a job, the lack of funds to pay the mortgage, or the lack of a living space as a result of eviction. These movements contributed to a new sense of the idea of solidarity. In this case it was not the solidarity of the working classes as it was in classical industrial society of the nineteenth century. This contemporary solidarity was made possible by the active middle class which had lost its
traditional privileges. Once again, using the Lacanian terms, the Symbolic spaces of the
desire embodied in images of welfare for everyone (like owning a house) were common
before the Crisis. As the system changed from prosperity to its opposite, one thing that
became common for everyone affected and that substituted the Symbolic of desire, was the
Real of indebtedness. As Dienst states:

“Indebtedness marks the Real of solidarity in several distinct senses – in the
way it sustains material production, in the way it signifies a domain of dependency
and sharing otherwise inaccessible, and in the way it seals our belonging to the
world through our being with others.” (57)

This emerging solidarity is determined by the Real of common indebtedness that brings the
threat of potential precarity for the subject. The novel by Prado takes a closer look at these
emerging horizontal ties between individuals at risk. The writer Urbano always goes to the
small restaurant maintained by Marconi, an immigrant from Uruguay. When he meets
Duque’s secretary Isabel there, he orders the most expensive dishes so that somebody else’s
money will support Marconi. Similarly, when he is out of funds he goes to the restaurant of
his ex-wife, who motivated by the same reason of mutual support for an acquaintance in
need, gives him free lunches. Urbano’s mother repeatedly uses the same rhetoric of
supporting someone from their own community. She states: “…para qué dar dinero a los
ajenos si se puede dar a los tuyos…” (91). Urbano reflects on this phenomenon saying:

“Sociedad empieza a manejarse…con una solidaridad selectiva” (92). Solidarity at the
community level is reinforced greatly by the Crisis. Solidarity at the nation-wide level is
shaped in new forms of social and protest movements depicted in all the novels analyzed in
this dissertation. I want to recur to Alain Badiou’s position on solidarity. He uses Lacanian
terms and suggests that equality takes the Imaginary position “since it cannot come about as an objective figure” (Badiou 102). The majority of the ex-middle class affected by the Crisis and by the threat of upcoming precarity, look for new substitutes for the desired welfare that has vanished. They find themselves in the position of equality leveraged by the Crisis. The embodiment of the Real for people affected by the situation is solidarity. New ways to unite within the anti-systemic movements, instead of being unified by the pre-Crisis commodified reality, transform solidarity into the ultimate “Real” within the Crisis. Solidarity operates in the “here and now,” creating the updated mode of being, the realm of Dasein, that unifies those affected. I suggest that such Real modus of solidarity appears in different ways in the texts by Gutiérrez, Chiappe, Navarro, and Prado. In all these texts informal groups and ethics of participatory democracy and solidarity change the life of the characters and help them to oppose the challenges of the Crisis. In the novel Ajuste de cuentas, community values are opposed to neoliberal values. The conflict between Urbano and Duque works partly through this opposition. Prado claims the ethical stance of the writer as opposed to the immoral practices of the businessman.

It is curious how Spanish authors recur to the concept of usury when talking about debts of modern times. Originally, usury was a practice of giving unfair loans with high interest rates resulting in unfair enrichment of the creditors. Historically, it was condemned by the major world religions, but still had a long history in European culture. This phenomenon was reflected in numerous literary works. Cervantes, in his short story “El celoso extremeño” for instance, depicted a usurious conscience of the main character. He compared his passion for usury to his exaggerated jealousy, writing on both as obsessions.20

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20 Cee Cervantes, El celoso extremeño.
Usury, as the practice of unfair exploitation, resulted in many violent events in history. No wonder Dante Alighieri places usurers in the inner ninth ring of hell. The concept itself still bears negative connotations in Spanish as DRAE defines “usura” either as “Interés excesivo en un préstamo” or as “Ganancia, fruto, utilidad o aumento que se saca de algo, especialmente cuando es excesivo” (“Usura”). Both primary definitions point at the idea of excess. In analyzing this further, it is relevant to use Derrida’s thoughts on the matter. He employs the metaphor of usury to describe a process of abstraction in philosophical discourse where figures, signs, and metaphors become abstracted through "a progressive erosion, a regular semantic loss, an uninterrupted exhausting of the primitive meaning" (215). The original meaning is lost in interpretation when some common words are used as they have great potential for precision and abstraction. The added value of meaning appears as the act of conceptual usury happens. The loss of a meaning becomes a promise of an abstract conceptual gain, unrelated to the reality. The usury works more for the sake of its self-multiplication than for material production or for economic purposes. This conclusion is derived from the authors’ use of the concept. The range of examples from the novels supports the view that the economic mechanisms, according to the writers, become destructive usurious mechanisms. These mechanisms produce both empty signifiers (as Derrida assumed) and meaningless unproductive accumulation of commodities through exploitation. Gutiérrez describes the real estate mortgage as “…carpeta llena de plazos de usura” (26). He condemns the transformation of the system within the Crisis with a bold statement: “Y donde dije letrado digo procurador, digo abogado, digo asaltante. Dije usurero” (256). Benjamín Prado issues a series of similar rhetoric statements about the current state of things: “El famoso Estado de Bienestar se había resquebrajado por completo
y hacía aguas sin que pudiesen ni quisieran evitarlo los políticos que lo manejaban, que se habían convertido en una mezcla de usureros, atracadores y sanguijuelas cuya función se reducía a explotar a los ciudadanos.” (114)

Both Gutiérrez and Prado blame usury directly. They take position of the “letrado” in Spanish discourse who determines “the diagnosis” of the society as if he were a doctor and his patient was Spain in crisis. Gutiérrez also emphasizes the transformation of the previous “letrado” (a lawyer or a businessman) into a usurer. The text by Veredas, Deudas vencidas is a picture of this transformation. Its main character is the lawyer and aspiring writer, a typical “letrado.” Yet his main occupation is unfair usury (debt collection with the help of the gangsters). In the other episode, Prado blames the usurers directly for the situation in Spain and for the destruction of community spirit, saying that the Crisis is a result of their acts: “Así fueron él y otros pocos engullendo el pueblo. Ya lo dice el refrán: devora más la usura que la oruga” (143). Motivations for the writer Juan Urbano to write a novel on a suspicious character are obvious to the reader, as shown by Prado. Urbano’s motivations are the loss of income, having a mortgage and other bills to pay, and the impossibility of finding any employment in times of the Crisis. Also, these conditions enable the narrative to happen. Under a normal economic situation, Urbano would not have assumed this task. As this ordeal is an existential dilemma for him – how to write not a eulogy, but something truthful and still get the money from the businessman – this is a balance between the ethics of the writer, as Urbano perceives it, and the external circumstances. The developing internal conflict is a motivator and the driver of the narrative and the plot. It stimulates Urbano’s constant

21 Letrados are seen as highly educated men who shape cultural and ideological agenda in the society through published critics defined by Rama. More on the concept of “Letrado” and its cultural impact see Rama, *La ciudad letrada.*
introspection and internal monologues. Urbano is afraid to lose the way of life he acquired before the Crisis. However, through the novel this attitude changes gradually as the writer knows more about the story of the construction mogul and ways that he contributed to the current Economic Crisis. The fear that motivates him to engage in this type of activity is a fear of precarity: “Cuando no tienes elección, tampoco puedes tener demasiados escrúpulos” (82). But the precarity he is afraid of is not a risk of hunger or death. The biggest loss that Urbano may face is losing his apartment and moving back to his mother’s house, which would be a move from the middle class to the lower middle class. As his investigation for the book proceeds, Urbano’s internal ethical conflict grows stronger and lets him discover new languages of the Crisis. Berlant determines these languages as “languages of anxiety, contingency and precarity – that take up the space that sacrifice, upward mobility and meritocracy used to occupy” (Berlant 17). I mentioned that these new languages of Crisis, together with selective solidarity and community values, become for Urbano the “crutches” that would help him to climb through the Crisis. Languages and senses offered by the “other side,” by Duque and his secretary, are the languages of usury that are redundant and self-multiplying. As Derrida stated, those languages are vicious to discourse, as usury and its codes work for the sole aim of self-multiplication and produce only empty signifiers. Those are illusionary monetary and speculative values that lose their meaning during the Crisis. This constant internal dialogue of trying to convince himself of the ethical backgrounds for writing the commissioned book is similar to the doubts of the main character in Deudas vencidas. Urbano, in Prado’s novel, finds an alternative to the threat of precarity in the end. He commits financial and symbolic “self-sacrifice” with the book project, and sends the results of his investigation on Duque to the newspaper. In this way he rejects writing the
book any further. On the contrary, the character Osmundo, written by Veredas, is overwhelmed by the idea of usurious self-multiplication of assets. He is the modern usurer, recurring to violence. So, his constant internal dialogue on ethic foundations and possibilities results in his path as a usurer. He wants to accumulate resources and hedonistic pleasures through ripping off his victims.

Throughout the text, Benjamín Prado includes passages on the social environment and causes of the Economic Crisis. Those passages are arranged in varying ways and help the reader to create a panoramic and comprehensive understanding of the Crisis and its multiple impacts. In some instances they are related to the main character, Urbano, and how the Crisis impacted his life: “…los taxis circulaban por el pasado, pertenecían a la época de abundancia” (14) or “El día en que todo comenzó seguía en busca de dinero fácil con el que combatir las dificultades” (27). From his individual perspective, he shifts to the situation of the country and the society as a whole:

La situación general era desesperada, el mundo vivía en poder de los mercados y sometido a la ley de la usura; y en España había ya cerca de siete millones de personas en paro, los especuladores nos tenían con la soga al cuello, las empresas y los pequeños comercios iban quebrando uno tras otro y la ruina amenazaba al país. (29)

For Prado, debt and the individual and collective insolvency are the main reasons for this critical situation. He is pushed to make a deal with his conscience, and to write Duque’s biography due to his own debt situation: “Ya empezaba a recibir cartas intimidatorias de algunos de mis acreedores, y amenazas de embargos, multas, juicios” (29). The condition of indebtedness undermines ethical principles of coexistence in the society. It also becomes an
individual challenge for the writer, Urbano, who does not want to sell the mortgaged apartment and prefers to conclude the dubious deal. While he gathers materials for the book, he discovers more about the crimes and misdeeds committed by Duque on his way to prosperity. In the chapters written as abstracts from Urbano’s future book, the reader sees how the construction mogul becomes a sort of debt-creating machine. Based on speculation, Duque’s enrichment is depicted as a mechanical process, a never-ending production of production. In that vicious circle of wealth accumulation, the desires produce the illusionary wealth of real estate, which in turn creates new desires for power and for further enrichment. Duque’s, never-ending desires resulted in his trial and further conviction in the late nineties. This was the reason why he commissioned Urbano to write a book – to clear his name after leaving jail. The writer attempts to create the myth of Duque:

Y su perfil de hombre joven, irreverente, audaz, hermético y seguro de sí mismo empezaba a tener rasgos de ícono: ya no era una persona sino el emblema de los nuevos tiempos. ...Personificaba las aspiraciones de un país que después de treinta y ocho años de dictadura y subdesarrollo quería huir de su pasado sombrío e instalarse en la prosperidad. (83)

Benjamín Prado creates multiple parallel structures in his novel. One of the most visible is the story of Duque and the situation in Spain. As Duque travels on the path of accumulation and speculation only to end up in prison for fraud, the country follows the same path. Accumulation of speculative debts results in imminent collapse, and one of the victims is the fictional writer Urbano himself. Prado describes scenes of previous real estate boom in multiple occasions: “La tentación del dinero fácil era irresistible y las familias daban todo lo que tenía a cambio de diez o quince millones de pesetas y tres pisos de cien metros
cuadrados – uno para el matrimonio y dos para los hijos” (Prado 54). The author tries to oppose ethics to the Crisis. In the end, when Urbano finds out about another of Duque’s crimes, he goes to the press and refuses to continue cooperating with Duque. According to Prado, that would be a step towards liberation from the fear of precarity. In a ritual gesture Urbano sells his apartment and moves in with his aging mother where he feels a stronger sense of community spirit. In this suburban area he wants to reinvent himself by digging into the real causes of the current situation of the Crisis around him:

Nunca terminé …la novela que Martín Duque quería que escribiese. …pero acababa de empezar una distinta, contando su historia a mi manera, cuyo fin era explicar cómo los cuchillos que ahora cortaban en dos el país los comenzaron a afilar personas como él treinta años antes, en la época en que eran considerados estereotipos, modelos a imitar. (259)

As I observed, in the novel for Prado debt is a main driving force of the Crisis. On the other hand, the threat of precarity is the motive for people to give in to the Crisis. The voluntary inclusion of precarity in one’s life is the ethical choice, resulting from the character’s evolution. Urbano becomes a new post-Crisis man, as he does not give into the temptation. He senses that the Crisis and the precarity are not temporary, and therefore, can no longer be defined as a Crisis, but instead are the new modes of life. When we say “Crisis” we automatically assume a violation of the presence of the norm, by a condition that is called “critical.” Urbano in his choices celebrates a new norm and a new approach to the present, defined by Berlant a “cruel optimism.” It is:

…a mode of analysis of the historical present that moves us away from the dialectic of structure (what is systemic in the reproduction of the world), agency
(what people do in everyday life), and the traumatic event of their disruption, and toward explaining crisis-shaped subjectivity amid the ongoingness of adjudication, adaptation, and improvisation. (54)

The Crisis loses its opposition to the “good life” and becomes the ongoingness. This is why there are clear dates for the beginning of the Economic Crisis in Spain, but there are no established dates or years of the end for the worldview it brought with it.

Post-Crisis Precarity: *Yo, precario* (I, Precarious) by Javier López Menacho

The Spanish critical tradition has long been attached to the concept of “generations.” Generations were understood as groups of intellectuals expressing ideas and topics characteristic of a particular historic, political, and social context. The generational approach to the history of national literature and culture was also questioned on multiple occasions. However, as a cultural referent, it still persists within the interpretations on the everyday level. It is still easy to see in newspapers or on TV that some writers or artists belong to the generation of, for example, 1927 or 1936. The last one of these social, cultural, and literary “generations” was defined in 2005 by the article in *El País* called “La generación de mil euros” o “mileuristas” (The Generation of One Thousand Euros). At that point in Spanish history the young lower middle class in Spain felt stuck at the psychological and economic barriers of an average income not exceeding one thousand euros per month. That amount was sufficient to maintain day to day life, but any financial planning for the future was
impossible. The transition to upper levels of income seemed very difficult to achieve.\footnote{Espido Freire provided a detailed prospect of this social group in her book \textit{Mileuristas – retrato de la generación de los mil euros} (Barcelona 2006).} That “generation” of young people seemed to personify the conformism and feeling of being stuck in time without prospects for prosperity, or economic and personal development. What seemed to be a dead end in the reality before the Economic Crisis turned out to be a blessing in comparison to the economic situation that was experienced by the youth after the Crisis began. In contrast to the stable prospect of easily finding one thousand-euro jobs, young Spaniards faced the reality of youth unemployment rates of more than fifty percent. The problems gradually increased from the impossibility of moving out from one’s parents’ house, to the impossibility of buying groceries and clothes on a regular basis. Precarity became the main feature defining the life of young people in times of the Crisis. As I assumed earlier, the Crisis gradually transformed from something temporary and opposed to prosperity, to the permanent mode of being, a new reality of the era. I agree with the definition that “the present proves profoundly precarious for the majority of people who remain in servitude – kept physically weak by poverty and rendered invisible by hegemonic structures in service of a wealthy elite” (Botha 6). Precarity of the individual is deeply entangled with politics, economy, and culture, inscribing the person in permanent post-Crisis \textit{modus vivendi}. According to Susan Banki, “precarity suggests the potential for exploitation and abuse, but not its certain presence. Thus, precarious work is not the fact of consistent unemployment, but the looming threat, and perhaps frequent fact, of it” (Banki 450).

The term “precariat”\footnote{Contemporary Crisis challenges transform the precariat, that, according to Guy Standing, is “in the process of becoming a self-conscious class with the transformative potential to fight for a new system of progressive} becomes more relevant in relation to multiple social manifestations: “…to name a new emerging social class that despite agglomerating different
social groups—from immigrants to young, educated locals—holds certain traits in common, such as job and identity insecurity” (Casas-Cortés 225). This feeling of permanent instability without any temporary character of the Crisis is described in the novel by Javier López Menacho titled *Yo, precario* (2013). In the novel the young author gives fictional dimension to a series of temporary jobs that he had to take in the summer of 2012 in Barcelona in order to pay rent and buy groceries. The text is a confession, or interior monologue, describing all aspects of his work life. The narrator never concentrates on topics unrelated to precarious temporary jobs; on the contrary, he provides epic dimensions to the ongoing precarity.

Returning to the concept of generations mentioned earlier, it is interesting to note that in his prologue to López Menacho’s novel, the famous writer Manuel Rivas states that this narration of precarity is “intrahistoria.” Intrahistoria as concept was suggested by Miguel de Unamuno. According to him it refers to traditional life that serves as decoration and background to the more visible “official” history. It is another popular concept of the national history and culture in Spain, almost inseparable from the idea of cultural “generations.” Unamuno is also known as the member of the “Generación de 1898.” Rivas writes: “La historia que nos cuenta es intrahistoria. El precario…se desplaza en un suelo que puede ceder a cada momento” (Rivas 10). These unstable grounds in the novel are related to the realm of jobs and their impact on the main character. He introduces himself as a male, in his late twenties, who is unable to find a stable job in spite of having solid educational and social backgrounds: “Pese a tener una carrera, un máster y varios cursos de especialización, no conseguí ningún empleo estable, sino que fui deambulando de trabajo en trabajo, todos
Once again, the reader is able to see the radical change in perception of the idea of welfare (el bienestar) for youth in Spain since the times of pre-Crisis and the “generation of 1000 euros,” to the current situation of being on the edge of survival. The character tries to find types of jobs that could be called survival jobs. They do not require previous experience, they are temporary, and offer compensation of minimum wage or even less. The reasons for such a decision by the character are more related to the logics of survival rather than ordered life: “el pago de alquiler no admitía aplazamientos, y la dignidad no me permitía más dinero prestado” (17).

In the novel, López Menacho describes three types of precarious jobs he had to take in the summer of 2012, and the journey from one unstable and unpleasant activity to another creates curious parallelisms. López Menacho’s nameless narrator repeats the way of instability and humiliation traced by the unknown author of Lazarillo de Tormes more than 500 years ago. Both for ancient and contemporary “Lazarillos,” precarity and survival are inevitable and the only possible ways of life, although the character of the XVI century is doomed to this life due to his non-aristocratic descent. López Menacho’s character, on the contrary, has everything he thought was needed to thrive in modern society, even dignity which Lazarillo could not have due to not being an aristocrat (hidalgo). Yet the economic system and the social order place him in the hopeless position of the contemporary Lazarillo. The general tendency that López Menacho points out coincides with my earlier assumption that the after-Crisis precarity is not something temporary, but a constant state. The uncertainty becomes institutional and the feeling of being “suspended in the air” due to employment and welfare is unavoidable for a new generation. López Menacho states: “…terminé dándome cuenta de que esa clase de trabajos no era una cosa meramente circunstancial, sino ya que se estaba convirtiendo en mi
forma de vida, y que probablemente había mucha más gente subsistiendo así” (12). The first of the temporary survival jobs that López Menacho’s character takes is a mascot for the promotional campaign of a famous chocolate brand. He has to wear an uncomfortable and huge costume of a giant chocolate bar and distribute chocolate bars to kids in a Barcelona mall. This illustrates the position of being “inside the box” as the gaze of the character is aimed out of the rectangular costume, while he hides inside the costume. The reader shares the worldview of this giant fake chocolate bar that hides the main character inside. The narration describes in detail the work process, its difficulties and various complications in getting paid on time: “Y ese mecanismo de intermediarios explica no sólo mi ridículo sueldo, sino también la enorme dilación a la hora de recibirlo” (28). In addition to the literary topic of Lazarillo who is doomed to seek ways for survival, López Menacho’s character is obliged to wear the heavy weight of the chocolate bar costume for many hours a day. In a grotesque way the suffering and thinking subject inside the heavy and smiling mascot is a rather obvious allusion to the image of the Christ wearing his cross towards the final destination.

As the character takes one temporary job after another, he participates in the type of production that could be called “just in time production.” This way of life and work requires him to develop a capacity to live in conditions of total instability. It gradually becomes the default condition for the neoliberal citizen, which is not only observed in the precarity within the workplace, but also in the creation of a new mindset. This work-precarity may impact other types of precarities. The inability to develop relationships, and the lack of social infrastructure
and networks result in a lack of confidence and resources required for socializing (Goldring and Landolt). As a result, a specific mindset emerges. From the point of view of the system, the subject would ideally be transformed into a non-thinking machine, needed only from time to time and exploited mercilessly. The narrator understands these dynamics and opposes this logic through constant reflection in his work, its principles, and its impact on his conscience. The narrator’s reflection on his worldview from inside the box (the costume) becomes unrealistic and blurry: “Se distinguen sombras, lo que parecen ser personas. ...sombras que vienen y van. Sombras estáticas. Sombras que se vuelven más sombras. Lo mismo es todo lo que somos: sombras” (23). As his primary audience are the kids, the narrator tries to build up in his mind structures explaining the world around him. The self-reflection is needed by the character to justify what he does and to find peace within himself for being obliged to become precarious: “Los niños son los títeres de sus progenitores. Como nosotros lo somos de la coordinadora, la coordinadora de la agencia, la agencia de sus dueños, y los dueños de la economía global y de su propia vanidad” (26). In the middle of the book there is a chapter dedicated exclusively to self-reflection. It’s called “Intermiedo,” which phonetically resembles “intermedio,” and could be confused with such by an inattentive reader. The presence of the “miedo” (fear) component reveals the existential monologue on the following two pages. There the narrator compares himself to the markers and features of the welfare state gone after the Crisis. He claims:
Tengo casi treinta años y siento que me han robado la esencia. Tiene que ver con el trabajo. En algún momento interioricé que sólo es hombre quien trabaja y puede hacerse cargo de sí mismo… Yo no tengo trabajo estable y ni siquiera he aprendido a cuidar de mí. Mi único activo es no poseer nada. No tengo hipoteca, no tengo familiares a mi cargo, no tengo coche, no tengo piso, no tengo trabajo. (83)

Thus, self-sufficiency is inseparable from the concepts of the remunerated labor and the commodities he could have achieved if he had been inscribed to the system. The claim that his essence had been stolen and that it is related to the job indicates that the discourse of precarity and unemployment is overwhelming and crucial to his identity. As I claimed earlier, the text expresses the situation of the young generation that follows the “generation of one thousand euros,” and that unwillingly becomes the generation of the precariat.

While the narrator performs as a mascot, his abstraction allows him to concentrate on several critical issues that give his precarious role some deeper sense. One of them is his interactions with children who truly believe that under the suit there is no person, and that the giant walking and talking chocolate bar is their friend. The perception of the living chocolate as something real by the children provides the narrator with emotional support: “Una mascota sólo tiene sentido cuando los niños se creen que eres mascota y los mayores actúan como si de veras lo fueras” (49).

In her book, Precarious Life, Judith Butler defines the impact of precarity on self-sufficiency and self-identification, as well as the relation of precarity to the nation-state. López Menacho covers these aspects in various chapters of his novel. Self-identification of the narrator as precarious subject (subject-mascot) first bears a negative connotation. Further in the text the narrator is trying to achieve self-sufficiency within the costume. He finds
positive aspects such as his relations with the children, and he enjoys the opportunity to perceive the world from a new angle: “Solo borrones que actúan como personas. Una rejilla lo codifica todo, así que he ido aprendiendo a interpretar este gran teatro de sombras que es la vida” (69).

Blurry vision caused by the mask substitutes the reality outside the mascot’s costume with an illusion. The space where the narrator works (malls and amusement parks) is an obvious carnival scene reflecting his precarious being. Sometimes, other mascots appear on stage, some of them from the competitors, and others to support the job of the giant chocolate bar. The reader finds a description of the dance by the Chocolate Bar and the Milk Sandwich. One day a giant Sponge Bob joins them. Dances of clumsy mascots with the children inside the crowded mall are contrasted with the narrative line on precarious being. The other mascots deprive the narrator of the agency he gets through his communication with the kids. The narrator claims: “No hay nada más triste para una mascota que ser reemplazada por otra” (57). As children prefer other mascots to him, the illusion of happiness disappears. As well, the scenes with the giant dancing costumed characters occur inside the malls where half of the shops are closed because of the Economic Crisis. These contrasts of form and content, joy and suffering, convert the dancing scenes into a Dance of the Dead (Danse Macabre), known in the literary tradition from the middle ages.24

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24 The Catholic Encyclopedia defines this phenomenon as follows: “…Dance of Death, also called Danse Macabre (from the French language), is an artistic genre of late-medieval allegory on the universality of death: no matter one's station in life, the Dance of Death unites all. The Danse Macabre consists of the dead or personified Death summoning representatives from all walks of life to dance along to the grave, typically with a pope, emperor, king, child, and labourer. They were produced as mementos mori, to remind people of the fragility of their lives and how vain were the glories of earthly life.” Herbermann, Charles, and George Williamson. "Dance of Death." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 19 Nov. 2016 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04617a.htm>. 
In her theory, Butler postulates two questions: “...how the nation-state is structurally linked with the production of stateless persons and how those who are stateless nevertheless can and do exercise rights even when, precisely when, those rights are nowhere guaranteed or protected by positive law” (Butler IV). These theses resonate very well with the last part of López Menacho’s novel where the narrator takes the job of the animator in a promo campaign of a sponsor for the national soccer team. As Spain’s team participates in the 2012 European soccer championship, the character has to attract the spectators into the old cinema where the games are projected onto a big screen. He has flags of Spain painted on his cheeks and shouts “España” through the megaphone: “Soy una bandera humana. El emblema de un país que intenta ignorarme, pero se ejemplifica de mí, haciendo caso a su naturaleza contradictoria” (129).

The paradox is that the action takes place in Barcelona and the public does not have much support for Spain’s national team. The individuals who he does manage to attract to watch the games are mostly work migrants, especially from former Spanish colonies in Latin America. These people from outside Spain are more eager to understand and support the idea of Spain as something unified and represented by one team, whereas the people inside the country rely more on their autonomous, provincial, and local identities. Following Butler’s idea we can clearly see how a nation-state produces stateless persons. From the other episodes the reader already knows that the narrator is a son of labor migrants from the south of Spain who came to Catalonia in the 1970s:

…Más de la mitad son extranjeros que han venido a apoyar a la selección. Y de ellos, más de la mitad son sudamericanos de países como Ecuador, Chile,

25 This migration process and its cultural variations constitute the subject of the brilliant novel by Juan Marsé El amante bilingue. See Marsé.
Venezuela o Paraguay. La Sudamérica pobre apoya a la selección; la Cataluña rica no. El resto de los asistentes son catalanes de ascendencia andaluza. Se sorprenden de mi acento y se refieren a nuestro nexo común. – Mi padre habla igualito que tú – me dice una mujer de unos cuarenta años. (132)

The character who is the mascot of the Spanish state, is this time concerned about the victory of the national team. However, the reason for his engagement in the tournament is that the longer the team continues, the more shifts of the promo campaign he will get, and the more money he will accumulate to be able to pay his rent next month. In this case only the stateless people (illegal immigrants or the animator himself) support the team that represents the nation-state. López Menacho builds the structure of this chapter in the form of a description of the games from the point of view of the narrator. The intrigue builds up with each game as Spain advances further in the tournament, until it wins. Although the character is a “mascot” of the nation-state, he is still the personification of the state-less person. The word play by Butler is clear – the state produces the identity of the state-less individual. He has no stability, no “state,” as the condition that he lives in is one of precarity. As the narrator relates directly the ending of his precarious existence with getting a “real” job, in the end of the novel there is a scene of an expected phone call with a job offer: “Sonó el teléfono a una hora imprevista del día menos pensado. Sí, dijo la voz metálica en el teléfono, al final empiezas mañana, sí” (164). The author builds up the readers’ expectation for the relief of the character’s situation, but the next few lines reveal the true intention of this narrative move. The job turns out to be a temporary summer office job. Even this move results in the exaltation and the emotional monologue concluding the text:
...Tendré trabajo, por fin. No uno, ni dos, ni tres días. No una ni dos semanas. No solo un mes. No dos horas, ni cuatro ni seis horas al día, no. Todo el día. Ocho horas, puede que incluso más. Puede que incluso un día me toque hacer horas extras, echar la noche entera, que un día llegue a casa de mala gana y diga que estoy cansado de trabajar. Cansado de trabajar, sí, ¡qué bien suena! (164)

Thus, the economic reality remains truly unstable and the only small advances it may bring to the representative of the youth generation post Economic Crisis are temporary inclusions in its mechanisms. The narrator’s escape from the temporality and the precarity is a self-conciliatory illusion that continues the circular within the Economic Crisis that eventually became constant.

The novels by Recaredo Veredas, Benjamín Prado and Javier López Menacho trace the emerging Economic Crisis in Spain and its grounds of debts and the illusion of prosperity. First the Crisis unfolds as something temporary as opposed to the stability. It results in the threat of precarity for the novels´characters. Later the precarity becomes permanent rather than temporary, and the Crisis transforms into a regular way of life. Novels by Spanish authors show the way the economic and social reality of Spain has changed as the Crisis slowly became the ongoingness. That is why I assume that in case of Spain the Crisis had the beginning but has no foreseeable end as its structure changes. Social and economic structures evolve towards coping with the new post-Crisis reality with the precarity and instability as its inherent part.
CHAPTER 3

Epic and Symbolic Dimensions of the Crisis in

*Crematorio* (Crematory) and *En la orilla* (On the Edge)

by Rafael Chirbes

Two novels written by renowned Spanish writer Rafael Chirbes (1949–2014) – *Crematorio* (Anagrama, 2008) and *En la orilla* (Anagrama, 2012)\(^2\) constitute a dilogy dedicated to the multiple aspects of upcoming economic, political and social crisis in Spain (*Crematorio*) and its devastating results (*En la orilla*).

These two texts are connected to each other through the narrative universe of fictional towns located on the Valencian Mediterranean coast. Both texts are ample novels focused on the Spanish reality of the beginning of the XXI century as experienced through eyes of multiple characters. The novel *Crematorio* describes a single day in the beginning of the 2000s, showing a panoramic picture of the welfare society with multiple signs of the upcoming catastrophe. The second work, *En la orilla*, is, in a way, a continuation of *Crematorio* but the events take place somewhere around the year 2009 when the Economic Crisis shatters all aspects of life of the fictional coastal towns and villages.

In *Crematorio*, Chirbes recurs to multiple conventions of the realistic genre. Thirteen chapters of the novel combine internal monologues and free indirect speech to grasp the general sense of time and place (*Zeitgeist*) in Spain during the period of economic growth in the first decade of the XXI century. In the text, he intertwines several individual

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\(^2\) *En la orilla* was published in English translation as *On the Edge* (Harvill Secker, London 2016).
stories with the stories of the families. From the private realm of the families Chirbes expands further to the level of a town and, more broadly, Spanish society. This convention of going from the individual story to the general social trend or to show the society through a family history has been used since the XIX–XX centuries in realistic novels by Balzac, Thomas Mann, and others. The value of Chirbes’ two novels in approaching the phenomenon of the Economic Crisis and its role in reshaping Spanish society and changing novelistic patterns cannot be overestimated as they seek to create a comprehensive picture of the pre-Crisis and Crisis periods in Spain. These two texts relate the emergence of the Crisis to historic and political processes that determined life in Spain long before the economic fall of 2008. Chirbes presents the line of events before the Crisis dating back to such crucial factors of Spanish identity as the Spanish Civil War, the postwar years of misery, the fall of the dictatorship, and the transition to democracy in Spain. Through the narrative voices of his characters, Chirbes approaches life models that have formed throughout the XX century and resulted in a neoliberal attitude to life, uncontrolled economic and social consumption, and speculative growth of the economic “bubble.”

Talking about the “bubble” in this context I do not refer solely to the bubble in the real estate sector (La burbuja inmobiliaria) which resulted in the collapse of the industry, the mortgage crisis, evictions, and social unrest. The metaphor of the bubble explored indirectly by Chirbes in his novels is a creation of the shaky ideological, political, and economic foundations of the modern welfare society that was deeply affected by the Economic Crisis not only on the level of the economic “production-consumption” chain, but on that of interaction between humans. The insecurity fostered by unemployment and precarity once again defined the identities in Spain and reshaped ethics and social values.
Novels by Chirbes attempt to create this massive picture of the economic, political, and moral devastation, which is why I argue that *Crematorio* and *En la Orilla* could be considered epic works as they aspire to cover the totality of the Crisis in its multiple manifestations. In the sequence of these two novels by Chirbes, the reader may see the premises for the upcoming major economic, political, and social crisis in Spain in *Crematorio* and its devastating consequences in *En la orilla*. In a closer approach to the nature of the Crisis I suggest analyzing several aspects of it as they appear in the novels by Chirbes. First, I will focus on the political foundations of the upcoming Crisis as shown in *Crematorio* that date back to the years of transition from dictatorship to democracy and the unsolved legacy of the Spanish Civil War. Its analysis will enable me to determine the ideological background for the further development of the Crisis in Chirbes’ fictional universe. From the general political perspective I will move to particular individual situations that contribute to the formation of the Crisis and react to it.

Next, I will conceptualize one more important aspect of the novels related to the ideas of biopolitics as expressed by Foucault and their enhancement in the concept of deterritorialization of the subject by Deleuze. Economic and social contexts are closely related to the individual characters in the novels. The microcosm of the family transforms itself to the macrocosm of the business, town, country, or nation. Chirbes’ approach to the characters in his texts is carried out through the concepts and images of the body, flesh, food, artefacts of material and spiritual culture. The author portrays humans as bodies of flesh in constant decay on the way to entropy or death. I will relate the images of the individual bodies in the novels to the social mechanisms of the Crisis. Finally, I will analyze the language of crisis used by Chirbes and explore what stylistic traits are used by
the author to convey the feeling of the upcoming catastrophe in *Crematorio* and the devastation in *En la orilla*.

I will analyze the aspects of the pre-Crisis society as depicted in the novel *Crematorio* and their role in formation of the neoliberal consumerist society dependent on economic and political speculation. I argue that the growth of the speculation spiral depicted by Chirbes results in the collapse and devastation panorama traced by the author in the “sequel.” Tracing the political aspects of the forming Crisis, their roots in the recent history of Spain, unresolved divisions in Spanish society, and narrative techniques applied by Chirbes transmit the sense of the coming catastrophe not only through the plot, but also by way of the narrative techniques and language of the novel. Furthermore, changing social dynamics arise from this new precarious reality.

*Crematorio* has thirteen chapters, each of which is the internal monologue of one character; some characters have more than one chapter and thus their narrative voice take on more importance. The text’s central figure is the unscrupulous construction mogul Rubén Bertomeu, whose confessions and thoughts occupy three chapters of the story. This figure’s presence shapes the text and the experiences of the other characters, with different monologues always returning to him. He is the driver and center of the novelistic universe. In an interview Chirbes points out his intention to create social types inside the novel:

Pues, si he terminado una novela ahora que se titula *Crematorio* que sería un poco el final y está ambientada aquí. Y, es ¿quién ha sido el único alfarero del mundo? Es decir, esa generación que quiso transformar el mundo. De esa gente mayor, el único que ha cambiado es el especulador inmobiliario que, precisamente, ha
The novel occurs over a single day, during the funeral of Rubén’s brother, Matías. On this day, different characters present their internal monologues that constitute the plotline of the novel. Matías is Rubén’s elder brother and an ex-militant socialist who gave up his ideas and became a farmer, while Rubén thrived in building multiple houses in the time of “España del pelotazo”.27 The antagonism between the brothers is complemented by other multiple points of view. The reader meets Rubén’s daughter Silvia, who is a restoration artist, his young wife Mónica, ex-partner Collado, and Russian gangster Traian. Also we encounter aging writer Brouard, who was Rubén’s friend during their youth. Free indirect speech applied to the creation of the discourse sometimes makes it difficult to understand who is speaking and whose point of view the text conveys. Chirbes builds the narration in a way that the reader perceives the point of view of the character, central to the chapter, but at any moment the text may become impersonal and deviate from the narrative position of the character to the impersonal narrative voice when it is already unclear who is speaking at any given moment of time. I argue that such oscillations between the subjective narration and the impersonal depiction of events turn the text into a polyphonic entity. In my opinion, the Crematorio novel follows the narrative tradition established by William Faulkner in his The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! Both Faulkner and Chirbes shape fictional universes in their multiple texts – Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha and Chirbes’s fictional town

27 “La España del pelotazo” is an informal definition of the period of economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s. The word “pelotazo” suggests fast and often illegal enrichment based on speculation on unfair practices. The quick accumulation and redistribution of capital took place following the fall of Franco’s dictatorship. In my dissertation I concentrate more closely on the analysis of the period as depicted in the novel Ajuste de cuentas by Benjamín Prado.
of Misent and its surroundings. They write chapters in the form of internal monologues attributed to certain characters and build the narrative on the grounds of polyphony as defined by Bakhtin (Bakhtin 6) and narrative multiperspectivity. Both authors convey in their text the Zeitgeist, – a mix of socio-political realities and individual perception proper to historic time. In the case of Crematorio, we are talking about the complex reality of the early 2000s in Spain, characterized by booming economic growth and an increase in both material and spiritual consumption, yet with signs of the upcoming drawback that inevitably came with the Economic Crisis beginning in 2008. Multiple views and the complex and detailed narration by Chirbes undermine the foundations of the welfare society in Spain, reveal its shaky foundations, and warn about the possible dangers. In this context, the novel with the outspoken title “Crematory” is the premonition and the warning, showing the unstable nature of the visible prosperity and the contradictions that remain hidden but undermine social and political structures leading to the future Crisis.

The protagonist Rubén Bertomeu is the narrative center of the text and Chirbes tries hard to present the internal complexity and contradiction within this character to move from Rubén’s personality to the society of the town and, more broadly, to the panorama of life in Spain. Rubén is the aging architect and owner of a construction business who built his wealth on speculation in real estate on the Mediterranean coast. When he was young he was interested in leftist ideas and was a friend of the future writer Brouard and painter Montoliu. The three friends tried to make an artistic group similar to the German “Bauhaus.” Throughout his life, Rubén preserved his love for the arts and travelled around

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28 In the context of the impact of the polyphonic narration on the Chirbes’ text I should mention such significant texts of Latin American literary tradition as Pedro Paramo by Juan Rulfo and La casa verde by Mario Vargas Llosa.
the world to see masterpieces of art and architecture. At the same time, he was the
dispossessed child of rich landowners who gave their inheritance to his rebellious brother
Matías, whose cremation is the central event of the novel. Rubén had to combine his
passion for arts with developing a semi-legal construction business. He engaged in drug
trafficking from Mexico, worked with Russian mafia on the Mediterranean coast, and
corrupted local politicians to get better land permits. These brief details depict the
ambiguity of a character who is in a position of power yet lacks the ability to live in peace
with his contradictory impulses towards the arts and the power. After the death of his wife,
and to the contempt of his children, Rubén married a woman forty years his junior from a
poor family. Each of the characters mentioned – the old writer Brouard, Rubén´s wife
Mónica, his daughter Silvia, his ex-partner Collado, the Russian gangster – express
themselves in lengthy internal monologues.

Chirbes presents Rubén, his dead brother Matías, and his ex-friend, writer Brouard,
as the characters who witnessed the epoch in Spanish history and contributed to the current
state of events. They were born immediately after the Civil War and were active
participants of political and economic life in Spain in the later years of the dictatorship and
during the Transition. Constant reminiscences to the past and narrative flashbacks allow the
author to trace the roots of a current situation on the verge of catastrophe over the previous
decades. The construction on the lands of the old Mediterranean town is a powerful
metaphor applied in the text to show the reader the constant replacement of cultural and
historic layers. Rubén obtains permission to develop parcels in dubious ways and replaces
old orchards and traditional rustic ways of life. The excavations made to lay foundations for
the new condominiums literally reveal the ghosts of the past. Chirbes shows how the
carcasses of dead horses used by Rubén in his young years to smuggle drugs emerge from
the ground on the new construction site of the future resort properties: “Llevan tres días las
palas excavando en el lugar donde tuvimos la cuadra, y han empezado a aparecer los
esqueletos de los caballos” (409).

Chirbes plays with the quote by Balzac “Behind every great fortune there is a
crime”29 on the pages of the novel: “…cómo no adivinas que lo de tu casa es como en las
novelas de Balzac, lo mismo: también en el origen de la fortuna de tu casa hay una sombra
oscura… Detrás de la fortuna, el crimen, ¿no es eso lo que dice tu querido Balzac? (386).

The growth of the construction empire belonging to Rubén is an example of the primary
accumulation of capital. The dynamics of the character’s internal story resurfacing through
his monologues is in constant relation to external circumstances that reflect Balzac’s
intertext from Études des Mœurs.

**Politics and Deterritorrialization in Crematorio**

In the novel, Rubén is the personification of the speculative development in Spain
on the shaky foundations that would inevitably result in the Economic Crisis. Rubén clearly
identifies himself as a developer: “Yo soy constructor. … Siempre he creído que estaba
dotado para este oficio. … como constructor soy el dueño de mí mismo, propietario de mi
otro yo, del arquitecto” (Crematorio 201).

The construction industry in Spain is deeply related to the impact of the World
Economic Crisis on the Spanish economy and society. The first strong impact of the Crisis
in the country occurred precisely through the real estate bubble, that occurred due to large-

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29 The original phrase by Balzac found in his *Le père Goriot* states: “Le secret des grandes fortunes sans cause
apparente est un crime oublié, parce qu’il a été proprement fait” (Balzac, 136).
scale speculation on the real estate market, resulting in overpriced properties and mortgages impossible to pay out. The construction industry, which was founded on speculation, was a powerful driver of economic destruction. Through the example of Rubén, Chirbes shows this economic growth based upon the primitive accumulation of speculative capital. Rubén’s business is founded on the production of desires and converting potential customers into personified desiring machines, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari. In their *Anti-Oedipus*, the French philosophers describe a desiring machine as a productive force that is a driver of production of material values. At the same time, it produces the flow of desire from itself (Deleuze, Guattari, 8-9). The new houses created by Rubén are inscribed into the logic of production and consumption of empty signifiers by the Spaniards:

“…vende paz como los sepultureros. Toda la calma del Mediterráneo, proponen a los compradores los folletos de sus promociones inmobiliarias, en las que indefectiblemente se ven pocas construcciones y mucho verde y azul” (Chirbes 118). Construction of material objects (housing) paradoxically results in its opposite— the destruction of the foundations of well-being and prosperity. Foundations for the future Crisis are inseparable from construction of the new buildings. Here, we see how the construction enters into dialectical unity with future destruction. The objects aspired by the customers shape their consciousness and, as I stated before, enable the exterritorialization of the subject from its roots into the condition of being aimed at the illusionary space of desire, transforming the subject into the desiring machine. Chirbes shows the reader the subject aspiring to the real estate dreams of the Mediterranean coast:

Convertirlo en masa. Hacer que no tuviera ninguna importancia lo que un pobre hombre pudiera pensar personalmente, porque lo que valía era una opinión
distinta, que salía unánime de la multitud. Lo mismo puede decirse de toda esa arquitectura de casas iguales de la costa. Han creado un personaje colectivo, que no sé si llamarlo el jubilado o el eterno veraneante… un ser fantasmal, único y vacío, intrascendente, que no aspira a nada, ni espera nada que no sea retrasar la muerte lo más posible. Un ser invernal y peligroso al que le preocupa un rábano el futuro de nada. (Crematorio180)

The reproduction of desire for material objects is the goal for such a subject, himself becoming a desiring machine. The illusion of calmness and stability promoted by structures made of concrete also provides the illusion of being rooted in a certain space. As is evident, the “collective character” or the perennial vacationer has no expectation other than to exist in confluence with the masses gathered through the architecture of the Mediterranean coast. The fact that the process of construction already lays the foundations for the future Crisis in creating an inflated, unrealistic value allows me to use the metaphor of entropy.30 The concept is borrowed from statistical mechanics and was used as a literary image by Thomas Pynchon in a short story of the same title. The look-alike concrete structures produced in series by the companies of Rubén Bertomeu are the anchors of the entropy attracting the subjects who multiply the entropy through their desire of meaningless existence of the “eternal vacationers.” The metaphor of implied entropy, or “death-in-life,” is used by Chirbes multiple times throughout the novel in relation to the construction on the coast. The comparison of the peace sold by Rubén, “…vende paz como los sepultureros” (118), to the peace of the grave underlines the death-driven aspect of construction in the novel once again.

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30 I use this term in a sense as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary: “the degradation of the matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of inert uniformity.”
The novel is titled *Crematory*, which is a powerful image of structure, often made of concrete, built to fulfill functions related to death. Rubén is selling images that are deprived of material value although they claim the opposite. The amount of residences grows exponentially before the Economic Crisis and Chirbes’ style reflects this increase through multiple enumerations:

…fotomontajes, vistas retocadas por ordenador, trucadas, sesgadas, convenientemente corregidas y puestas a toda página en los periódicos, en las revistas de viajes, en las revistas de coches, en las de vela, en las de golf, en las que se dedican pura y simplemente a la promoción inmobiliaria, sirven como señuelo para atraer más y más compradores… (118)

The image of the promotional materials used to attract more customers is also employed by other authors whose texts I analyze in this dissertation. In the novel *Democracia* by Pablo Gutiérrez, the main character Marco is a designer who creates these ads and leaflets, the imaginary spaces of desire.

Another powerful engine for the future Economic Crisis is political and economic corruption, together with the multi-level speculation. Chirbes does not take sides in his realistic approach to the decay of traditional political parties and the Spanish bipartite system. According to him, ideology becomes the mask to cover materialistic aspirations of the politicians.

…Por los relojes sabes de qué pie político cojean: un Rolex gordo con muchos cronómetros y barómetros, si son tirando a pepé, gente de derechas; y si lo que les llama es el pesoe, un estilizado Patek Philippe, que es el que usa Felipe
González…Felipe, el más consecuente: al fin y al cabo, el socialismo es riqueza, bienestar, pasta para todo el mundo. (*En la orilla* 433)

*Crematorio* was published in 2007, before the new forms of participatory democracy resulted in the creation of new parties and platforms. Political movements, like Podemos or Ciudadanos, became important players on the political scene in Spain several years later. At that time there was no *15M* movement, it appeared as a reaction to the Crisis. Yet Chirbes grasped the profound disillusionment in the political system and its support of corruption. His image of the corrupt businessman is related to any of two alternatives of the political parties of the time:

…él tiene apoyo de los políticos, nadie le va a mirar nunca los calzoncillos. Ni pesoe ni pepé, apoyo de los socialistas que han mandado hasta ahora en Madrid, de los peperos que siguen mandando aquí. … a ambos les financian campañas, vicios o lo que haya que financiar. (*Crematorio* 60)

Corruption and construction are inseparable, and the main character of the novel is in a position to justify the former as the engine to legitimize the development of the latter during the “España del pelotazo.” Bertomeu compares himself to the second empire French architect Haussmann who created contemporary Paris. The new Paris became possible through speculation in the construction industry. In a way, pre-Crisis Spain is repeating its ways: “Siempre han crecido ciudades a golpe de corrupción… frutos de la especulación. Hoy, como en tiempos de Haussman ¿a quién no le gusta el París que nació de la corrupción?, ¿quién se acuerda del París de callejones estrechos y casas de vigas de madera con los tejados de punta?” (*Crematorio* 366).
The construction business in Spain, especially on the coastlines, was often related to political scandals. For example, in the 1990s the municipal powers of the coastal town of Marbella (Province of Malaga) were the center of the construction scandal related to the allotment of plots on the coast and multiple illegally-constructed houses (Snelling). This is one of the markers of the corruption that resonates in Spain’s society today to such an extent that it appears reflected in multiple art forms. The similar setting of the overwhelming corruption and Mediterranean coast construction industry is shown in the satirical form by Bigas Luna in his movie *Huevos de oro (Golden Balls)* (1993) in which the main character tries to thrive in the construction industry of the booming market to build a giant skyscraper, an implicit phallic symbol. In *Crematorio*, political malfeasance is inseparable from economic corruption:

…aunque la batalla más despiadada es la que se lleva a cabo en los despachos, la guerra de los despachos, se dice así, ¿no?, la más cruenta, esa por la cual, si compras tú, has comprado un terreno no edificable, una parcela rústica, una parcela de uso social, de uso terciario, lo que sea; y si compró yo, mañana por la mañana tengo permiso firmado por el arquitecto municipal, siete u ocho plantas, un ático ilegal, pero sobre el que el ayuntamiento hace la vista gorda, garajes, comerciales.

(23)

Chirbes creates a complex connection with the topic prevalent to national literature in late XX century – historical memory. He connects the problems of historic memory to the new economic order in times of neoliberalism. Lorraine Ryan suggests a description of this dynamic:
…writers previously committed to the two issues that have dominated Spanish literature during the past twenty years—namely, gender and historical memory—are now producing either nonfiction works dedicated to assessing the vortex of greed, indiscriminate credit, moral bankruptcy, and macroeconomic mismanagement that culminated in the crisis or fictionalizing its depredations. (84)

As Ryan determines, the current vortex of greed was a powerful stimulant to the neoliberal vulgarization of Spanish identity and to its catastrophic implications for social relations. Chirbes shows the evolution from the period of questioning the Spanish identity in times of transition to democracy towards the suspension of human values stemming from the social endorsement of market imperialism. In my approach to this process I follow the argument of Daniel O’Dunne, who points to the strong presence of the Deleuzian concept of deterritorialization in the language and style of texts by Chirbes:

…Chirbes is Deleuzian in that he effectively points to careful experimentation in fashioning ways out of the neo-liberal order. Chirbes, through his narrative production, joins forces with numerous other artists and thinkers in rejecting the emphasis on production and accumulation. He remains open to the sort of robust “thinking otherwise” that Deleuze and Guattari continually call for in their works. (197)

The French philosophers suggest the concept of deterritorialization in their work *Anti-Oedipus*. The concept may be related to individual “…freeing desire from established organs and objects” (Holland 19) or to the social mechanisms. The social aspect of deterritorialization comprises freeing labor-power from specific means of production. In the post-industrial neoliberal economic order, production forces and capital become
deterritorialized and transnational. While discussing the current application of the term
deterritorialization and reterritorialization, Holland argues that:

…the terms deterritorialization and reterritorialization thus presuppose and
reinforce the notice of a “common sense…of desire and labor” referring without
distinction to the detachment and reattachment of the energies of “production in
general” (including “consumption”) to objects of investment of all kinds, whether
conventionally considered “Psychological” of “Economic.” (20)

I argue that the process of deterritorialization is traced in both the Crematorio and En
la orilla novels. Approaching this process and its different manifestations in the texts enables
one to see the narrative mechanisms used by Chirbes to depict Economic Crisis and his
general idea of crisis. In an economic sense, deterritorialization is possible because of
migration driven by economic processes. Also, it depends greatly on the mediatisation of the
socio-political discourse in the global world and a subsequent commodification of reality.
The movements, both real and symbolic, to leave the territory are impossible without the
accompanying political or economic agenda. Thus, deterritorialization is related to the
concepts of ideology and biopolitics.

Deterritorialization implies someone leaving a territory. In their book A Thousand
Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between relative and absolute deterritorialization,
where relative is accompanied by reterritorialization (return to the abandoned place) and
absolute acquires the state of immanence (Deleuze Guattari 55). As I stated in previous
chapters, the worldview created in Spain by the conditions of the Economic Crisis tends to
divert from the temporality of the Crisis. The critical condition of both the economy and
one’s own identity has become permanent rather than temporary (opposed to the idea of
Crisis that implies temporality in relation to something permanent outside the Crisis). The permanence of the Crisis and the corresponding worldview in Spanish texts correlates to the concept of absolute deterritorialization that acquires traits of immanence. In both novels Chirbes manages to grasp this subtle shift in perception of reality as an immanent and atemporal Crisis, not as a temporary condition. I consider that such a vision of the Crisis, which shifts to the plane of immanence, is performed in both texts on different levels. One is the common deterritorialization related to cultural, economic, and spatial globalization. It is expressed through the images of migration, impoverishment, precarity of the characters. Also this deterritorialization includes ways to deal with historical memory and its substitution with the neoliberal order. Memory of the past conflicts is expulsed and replaced by illusions of prosperity “here and now”. The second level would be ontological deterritorialization, in which the individual is alienated through the Crisis and becomes unattached and dispossessed. And, ultimately, the reader may see the style and the language of deterritorialization and its structures.

Chirbes carefully traces the deterritorialization of the subject in the story of Rubén. The character of the unscrupulous developer has a long development dating back to the period of Spain’s transition from dictatorship to democracy. Rubén Bertomeu was an aspiring architect who was a frequent guest of the meetings of left-wing intellectuals:

Los proyectos de adolescencia con Rubén, la cercanía, los brazos de ambos rozándose mientras contemplan una película, la mano de Rubén en su cabeza, sobre su hombro, las discusiones que duran hasta la madrugada, el taller artístico con Rubén y con Montoliu, el pintor, que tuvo prisa por irse. Arquitectura, pintura y literatura unidas como un arma, una especie de catapulta con la que apedrear
aquel Misent que no acababa de despegarse de la grisalla de la guerra. Romper la grisura. (129)

Rubén substituted his artistic and political ambitions with building his construction empire. The estate of his parents was given to his younger brother Matías, Rubén’s antagonist in the novel, a left-wing radical. Hence the elder brother in this family narrative becomes the dispossessed character and this is a powerful stimulus for his economic deterritorialization. As he desires his own business, Rubén moves away from the artistic projects of his young years and self-identifies as a developer (“…yo soy constructor…” (Crematorio 201). This self-determination resonates with the dominant values of the times of transition to democracy. It characterizes the social power and the dominate discourse coalescing before the World Economic Crisis. This mode of social power is defined by Fernández-Savater as the consensual culture typical of the 1980s and 1990s:

La cultura consensual (o ‘‘Cultura de la Transición’’), que ha gobernado sin réplica en España durante los años ochenta y noventa, es un sistema de información centralizado y unidireccional, en el que los expertos y los intelectuales mediáticos tienen el monopolio de la palabra, las audiencias están sometidas y existen temas intocables. Pero desde el ‘‘No a la guerra’’ en 2003 hasta el 15M en 2011, movimientos sociales de nuevo tipo erosionan su legitimidad y subvienen su reparto de lo posible y lo imposible, lo visible y lo invisible, el sentido y el ruido, lo real y lo irreal. (Fernández-Savater 667)

Rubén self-defines as such an “expert” or authority attempting to monopolize the discourse. From a young intellectual he becomes the agent of the economic and political deterritorialization happening in his town as it succumbs to the neoliberal order of “España
del pelotazo.” He creates multiple buildings for tourists that are the product of mass consumption; his architecture-turned-commodity clearly shows this relation of deterritorialization and neoliberal globalization. Rubén's daughter, painter Silvia, grasps these changes in Rubén: “Papá se comporta como si jamás hubiera leído un libro, como si nunca hubiera pisado la escuela de arquitectura ni hubiera asistido a las tertulias con intelectuales de izquierda…” (269).

The second variety of deterritorialization is ontological and it manifests in Crematorio in two ways. One is the alienation of the individual through “neoliberal vulgarization and its catastrophic implications for social relations” (84), as Ryan puts it. The second is in spatial alienation; this occurs when the ties of belonging to rural spaces break up after multiple generations of traditional life. Chirbes relates both individual alienation/deterritorialization and a loss of a sense of belonging to the construction industry. Rubén deprives the owners and the peasants of the land traditionally owned by them to create blocks of uniform buildings and subdivisions. In a wider context Chirbes metaphorically describes how the deprivation of geographical and cultural spaces happens because of the construction. The excavations on the building sites reveal all the historic and cultural mix that formed the town and subsequently destroy it:

…Abrían zanjas, sacaban a la luz pedazos de muro defensivo, arcaicos muelles portuarios, almazaras, hornos de cerámica, de cal; restos de viejos baños árabes, mezquitas, o iglesias visigóticas, edificaciones civiles romanas. …Los propios albañiles sabían clasificar a grandes rasgos esos hallazgos. Si los cadáveres llevaban una moneda en la boca, se trataba de cementerios romanos, la moneda con la que el difunto tiene que pagar para que el barquero lo pase a la otra orilla; si
aparecían enterrados de lado, con los ojos huecos mirando hacia el mar, eran cementerios musulmanes: al poco tiempo, ya estaban tirando hormigón por encima, levantando la estructura de nuevos edificios que, tan sólo unos meses más tarde, ocupaban vecinos procedentes de cualquier lugar de Europa. (49)

The landscape is dismantled and destroyed layer by layer to be replaced by what Arjun Appadurai calls an ideoscape (11). The ideoscape for the deterritorialized population replaces the concept of the landscape. Chirbes is interested in the arrival of new ethnic and social groups to the Spanish Mediterranean coast. On the one hand he focuses his attention on Moroccans, immigrants from Latin American countries, and Eastern Europeans who contribute to the construction industry and landscape transformation. On the other hand, there are also wealthy foreign investors who are the ultimate clients of the construction industry. This polarization between marginalized migrants and the consumers of the commodified spaces lays one more foundation for the future Crisis. Both sides of this reality of the “España del pelotazo” change the landscape and turn it into an ideoscape. According to Appadurai, such a phenomenon combines features of the space where it had appeared and fictional spaces: “…Naturally, these invented homelands, which constitute the mediascapes of deterritorialized groups, can often become sufficiently fantastic and one-sided that they provide the material for new ideoscapes in which ethnic conflicts can begin to erupt” (12). To stop the process Rubén’s antagonist and younger brother, Matías, becomes a farmer and grows organic produce to return to the “paradise lost” – it is his attempt at a reterritorialization of the deterritorialized place. He
replaces the communist Utopia that had defined his life with the Enlightenment Utopia of cultivating one’s own garden.⁴¹

Fíjate en toda esta belleza, mientras se hiela Europa, dice, yo llevo las aceitunas a la almazara en la furgoneta para hacer mi aceite, enciendo el horno un par de veces por semana para hacer mi propio pan (es muy fácil, le enseñó a amasar, le gustaba echarle un poco de aceite y unas gotas de zumo de naranja a aquel pan crujiente), las verduras, berenjenas, tomates, tengo que despuntar los tomates, podo los olivos, ya he preparado los telones para la recogida de la aceituna, aunque la recogemos a mano, a ordeño; mira cómo van las berenjenas; llévate unas alcachofas; esta mañana he atado las lechugas; si vienes el martes comerás pan recién hecho. (Crematorio 275)

As I have argued previously, Chirbes performs deterritorialization on three levels in his texts. The first level is the common economic and cultural deterritorialization, the second takes place on the ontological level and is related to the identity of characters who appear in the novels, while the third level is connected to the style and the language of the novels. Chirbes recurs to several stylistic structures to stress political and ideological displacement caused by deterritorialization. I argue that on the formal level he uses ample lists of objects that are ideologically determined. Within the free indirect speech dominant in the text those lists, and enumerations convey the message of cultural or individual deterritorialization. The reader perceives an accumulation of the nouns or constructions defining objects and processes related to one topic. This buildup enforces the author’s voice. Typically, Chirbes

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⁴¹ Matías’s escape into private gardening is an indirect reference to Voltaire’s ending paragraph from Candide: "All that is very well," answered Candide, "but let us cultivate our garden" (Voltaire 169). This choice for the character in the end of his life is a primacy of the private over the public, one more way that, according to Chirbes, could be opposed to Rubén’s representation of neoliberal greed.
uses these groups of nouns and definitions to characterize phenomena crucial for
deterritorialization. Among them there is the construction industry, lists of commodities, art
objects, and varieties of food. The language of deterritorialization-related changes associated
with the construction industry can be seen in the following example:

El coche dejaba atrás decenas de edificios en construcción, palas removiendo la
tierra, amontonando los troncos secos de los naranjos arrancados; las excavadoras
abriendo huecos (la cercanía de la muerte tensa los nervios…)…y de nuevo, ha
jugado con el verso de Quevedo: buscas en Misent a Misent y no lo hallas. (93)

This complex sentence with many nouns in plural (edificios, palas, troncos, naranjos,
excavadoras, huecos) shows a massing of objects that, placed together in syntactical
construction, show the picture of deterritorialization happening through the construction
process. In a related way, lists of food items in the store are stacked densely within the
sentences and overload the reader’s perception:

Pero no hace falta irse a la naturaleza, las góndolas […] de los supermercados son
deprimirmentes cementerios: paletas de cordero muerto, huesos y chuletones de buey
apuntillado, vísceras de vaca sacrificada, cintas de lomo de cerdo electrocutado,
empaquetados en contenedores fabricados con los restos de árboles abatidos.

Vivimos de lo que matamos. (En la orilla 147)

The buildup of objects in this passage is a picture of animal flesh that is commodified and
destined for consumption and further decomposition. They contribute to further
deterritorialization of the subject.
Flesh and Biopolitical Aspects of the Crisis

In two novels by Rafael Chirbes under discussion, biopolitics plays a significant role. Often, Chirbes creates analogies between humans and animals, shows animalistic and naturalistic imagery. The reader encounters multiple comparisons of the characters to different animals (e.g., reptiles, birds of prey, vultures):

… Hace muchos años que mi lugar de veraneo es el interior del coche, mi playa del Nido particular, no un nido de ave, cálido; más bien, un nido fresco y húmedo, de reptil que hiberna entre las rocas. Me río con la idea (reptil entre las rocas) mientras me miro la piel de las manos llena de rugosidades y manchas: piel de lagarto, más de saurio que de reptil. (Crematorio 15)

Chirbes refers to the family as a zoo: “El cracker Ernesto (Matías lo llama así) cumple en el zoológico de la familia el papel de tiburoncito de las finanzas” (172). Such animalization of the family and social discourse is rooted in the literature of naturalism of the XIX century, where human desires and motivations were equated with animalistic impulses and hereditary determination. Yet in the case of Chirbes, his characters are not merely living organisms determined biologically as, for example, in some nineteenth century novels by the Goncourt brothers. The universe of the Mediterranean coast in the Crematorio and En la orilla novels is inhabited by characters who have crucial functions as agents of biopolitics. The term, which was developed by Foucault, implies the strategies and mechanisms through which human life processes are managed under regimes of authority over knowledge, power,

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32 I use the term “naturalistic” to characterize features proper to the aesthetics of naturalism in literature, that suggested that social conditions, heredity, and environment are main factors that determine human character.
and the processes of subjectivation. In Foucault’s definition, biopolitics combines biological and social aspects of human life especially through mechanisms of power:

…What we are dealing with in this new technology of power is not exactly society (or at least not the social body, as defined by the jurists), nor is it the individual body. It is a new body, a multiple body, a body with so many heads that, while they might not be infinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted. Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power’s problem… (245)

The novels by Chirbes clearly relate biological and social aspects of power in tracing the upcoming or developing Economic Crisis. The Crisis itself is a combination of effects on the economy and the human body (hunger, deprivation of home, and related changes). The biological and the political aspects are inseparable through the usage of specific images. Chirbes consciously applies not only animalistic discourse or attributes animal features to social relations and individual characters, he also recurs to images of flesh in decomposition. In both the novels he uses the word carroña (carrion) in various scenes: the rotten flesh smells at the end of Crematorio and the beginning of En la orilla, flesh is being torn apart by stray dogs in both novels, fragmented flesh fills the shelves of the stores. Chirbes uses the language of deterritorialization to introduce flesh and biological matter in the text. Body details are very important as well and Chirbes gives thorough naturalistic details of the decomposing flesh of the aging or dying characters. The same function is attributed to the libidinal impulse of characters. Rubén gets married to a young woman, and his ex-friend the writer Brouard has an affair with a young man characterized as “un ángel
pasoliniano” (335) in a reference to Pasolini’s *Teorema* main character. The biological component within the characters becomes so powerful that it determines their political and social function.

Chirbes, in his essay *El novelista perplejo*, acknowledges the impact of paintings by Francis Bacon on his work: “yo he mirado a Bacon. Hay referencias a él en mis novelas, algunos personajes inspirados por él” (48). Bacon´s pictures also appear in Pasolini´s movie.

Bacon’s art, especially in the genre of portrait, conveys disfigured proportions of the human image. The distorted flesh of the faces on Bacon’s pictures inspired Chirbes to depict a biological “distortion” of his character’s bodies. He states: “…en sus retratos, Bacon hace que estalle en confusión lo de dentro y lo de fuera, la carne y las vísceras como soporte de dentro…la creación de un entorno en el que el dolor crezca” (61). I suggest that the biological decay of the body in the texts and its parallel with social and economic decay may be explained through the concept of the “political animal.” Here I tend not to use this term in the strict sense that Aristotle used it.33 For the Greek philosopher, the human being is the only animal that is determined through its existence in the collective, the polis. Rather in the context of the novels by Chirbes, I propose that the term “political animal” reflects the biopolitical impulses shaping the novels. For Chirbes, the political component of the characters structures social relations and the animalistic component reflects primary biological drives inseparable from the “polis” in both *Crematorio* and *En la Orilla*. Signs of physical aging and dying for Rubén and Brouard in *Crematorio* take place at the same time

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33 In his *Politics* Aristotle states: “That man is much more a political animal than any kind of bee or any herd animal is clear…For it is peculiar to man as compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things of this sort; and partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city (Aristotle 1253 a8).
as their spiritual decay. Esteban and his father in *En la orilla* approach death while the economic and social structures of their village suffer from the Economic Crisis.

As I have pointed out previously, Chirbes closely relates the theme of historical memory to the reality of the ongoing Crisis. For him, the individual and the social in history are related through body and flesh—agents of the biopolitics—when the individual, who is often portrayed by Chirbes as the animal, becomes a political entity, “zoon politikon.” In this context, Germán Labrador Méndez points out that for Chirbes history and human bodies are related and manifested through the image of flesh (often in decomposition): “…Chirbes entiende la historia española contemporánea como un viaje circular a través de ritos antropófagos: el holocausto caníbal de la guerra civil, el banquete de muertos de la transición española, la cena de los idiotas de la burbuja y el ayuno forzoso de la crisis (229).”

The Crisis reality is thus preconditioned by the biological nature of humans, moving toward their death. Chirbes partly declares his belief in the biological determination of human nature:

> Eso que tanto odiamos es lo que hay dentro. Esos elementos son nuestra vida y, sin embargo, los odiamos. Cómo nos gusta un cuerpo, nos parece algo milagroso, sagrado, pero rompes el paquete intestinal, y el suelo se llena de sangre y de los restos de cereales que el tipo se acaba de comer, las legumbres a medio masticar, los garbanzos, las lentejas, una masa espesa y maloliente. Las guerras no son más que eso, romperles el saco a los demás y descubrir su composición. Un hedor asqueroso impregna el aire de los campos de batalla. Lo cuentan todos los autores de novelas bélicas. (Crematorio 334)
The images used by Labrador Méndez are reminiscent of the idea of *Danse Macabre* (the Dance of Death). This medieval allegory is implicit in Chirbes’ novels, showing that all walks of life result in death. Death determines the realm of the present, and the present in the novels is conditioned by the past and the history. I have mentioned that the historic markers that resulted in the present-day Crisis for the author are the unresolved Civil War, years of transition from the dictatorship to the democracy, and the booming economy of the “España del pelotazo.”

Biopolitical mechanisms operate in the novels in both directions. Chirbes relates bodily decay to the political and social decay of the Crisis. On the other hand, the economic Crisis also has an impact on the characters. The situation of the illegal immigrants from Eastern Europe (Yuri and Irina in *Crematorio*) and Latin America and Africa (Liliana and Ahmed in *En la orilla*) is under the direct impact of the Crisis as these individuals are the first to lose employment. Their condition as deterritorialized subjects is an ideal background to turn them into precarious subjects. Thus, biopolitical mechanisms of migration, displacement, and deterritorialization under the impact of the Crisis results in further precarity for the displaced subjects.

*Crematorio* and *En la orilla* share the same fictional universe as the Mediterranean town of Misent and adjacent villages. Chirbes ends his *Crematorio* with a separate one-page chapter in italics—*Estampa invernal de Misent*. This chapter is not an internal monologue like the other parts of the novel. In this concluding chapter, Chirbes provides a depersonalized description of the wintry town atmosphere. He opposes the winter calmness of the town to the frenetic summer rhythm shown in the novel. This description is full of visual and sound images of stillness and creates an expectation of something coming: “Se ha
detenido otra vez el viento, y a través de esa calma, desde el lugar en el que escarba el perro, se abre paso un olor dulzón, de vieja carroña, que impregna el aire” (415).

**From Economic to Symbolic Crisis: *En la orilla***

Chirbes uses images of the rotten flesh and putrefaction in both novels. They symbolize the finite nature of human beings, whose activity inevitably results in putrefaction. However, the last paragraph with images of the carrion and the dog is repeated in the first chapter of *En la orilla*. Chirbes continues with his fictional universe in this novel and this text is the author’s answer to the implied question he had posed in *Crematorio*: How would the spiral of unlimited corruption, speculation, and consumption end up? *En la orilla* is a detailed and complex panorama of the economic, political, and social Crisis that started in Spain in 2008 after years of unchecked growth. The dog looking for carrion at the end of *Crematorio* reappears in the first chapter of *En la orilla*. It is biting something that turns out to be a human hand. Ahmed, the illegal immigrant who lost his carpentry job in the village, spots the scene as he tries to fish something for lunch on the shore of the marsh. This is the beginning of the circular composition of this extensive text. The reader is taken through the monologues of the characters to understand whose body was devoured by stray dogs in the marsh of the village, and why.

The main part of the novel is a monologue by Esteban, the aging owner of the small village carpentry shop in Olba. He must take care of his father who has dementia, and his business is ruined because of the financial crisis. Other monologues are in italics and introduce the reader to the characters of carpenters who lost their jobs in Esteban’s shop, Esteban’s father’s caregiver, Liliana, who immigrated from Colombia, his partner and real
estate developer, Tomás Pedrós, and pages of Esteban’s father’s lost diary. The lives of all the characters are affected by the Economic Crisis.

Esteban invests all his funds into the new construction sites developed by Pedrós and loses his business and his mortgaged house. Liliana is fired from Esteban’s house after his bankruptcy; the carpenters from Esteban’s shop are in the same situation. These changes happen on the level of the plot and allow Chirbes to explore multiple areas where the Crisis affects individual lives and the social environment of the village of Olba. The village lies close to the fictional town of Misent where the events of Crematorio took place. In my approach to the impact of the Crisis on En la orilla I will trace how the local and small events in the novel obtain global and universal dimensions, transforming the text into the epic story of the Crisis. I will point to the symbolic and metaphoric meanings that Chirbes puts into depictions of everyday life through the consciousness and the memories of the characters. Analyses of multiple literary and visual intertexts to Francisco de Quevedo, Jorge Manrique, François Villon, and Francis Bacon aid in identifying multiple messages distributed through the novels fragmented points of view. What is more, my analysis will support Chirbes’s vision of the contemporary Spanish Crisis as a logical end to the division of Spanish society after the Civil War and the unequal opportunities presented to its winners and the losers. Chirbes traces these changes through the prospect of one family in the small village and projects it wider to Spain in general through his authoritative voice hidden within the monologues of the characters.

The Town of Misent, in the novel Crematorio, is located on the seashore, and it is directly connected to the sea as the source of its existence throughout the centuries. The coast of the sea attracts tourists and the town is the scene for a construction boom. The village of
Olba, where *En la orilla* is set, is also related to the body of water; but in its case, it is the marsh or the lagoon (*el pantano*) as the village is located more inland and not directly on the seashore. Chirbes consciously opposes these two watery spaces as well as the town and the village related to them: “El mar limpia, oxigena – el pantano pudre” (*En la orilla* 42). The marshlands contain the story of the main character and his father. There, Esteban’s father was hiding, along with other republican soldiers, at the end of the Civil War before he had to surrender, leaving him to live the rest of his life with the feeling of immanent loss. The territory adjacent to the marsh is an important psychological marker for Esteban. There the most notable events of his life take place; at the marsh he is taught to hunt, there he dates his love Leonor, and there he decides to kill his elderly father and commit suicide right after that in order to disappear. The sea in *Crematorio* is the stimulus for the development for the characters, while the marsh is an obvious metaphor for stagnation. The Crisis happening in the village and Spain is expressed through the image of the stinking waters of the marsh that attract and destroy through putrefaction. Chirbes refers to the metaphors of rot in both novels. In the texts, it is possible to observe multiple descriptions of decomposition of flesh, food, bodies, and nature itself. The putrefaction and decomposition of the organic substances is a natural condition for the marsh. The metaphor of putrefaction in the novel is related to human relations. Chirbes traces the origins of the current Economic Crisis to the failed historical memory that did not recognize the effects of the ultimate division of winners and losers after the Civil War. The attempts to destroy the marsh in the novel are related to the desire to erase any memory of the resistance:

Con la excusa de cazar a aquellos desgraciados aceleraron la desecación de las lagunas, promovieron los aterramientos, y les regalaron las tierras pantanosas a
algunos camaradas y excombatientes concediéndoles autorización para drenarlas y cultivarlas…. Las agresiones programadas al pantano fueron mezcla de estrategia militar, venganza política y rapiña económica. (98)

The father of the main character is an authoritarian figure who was on the losing side during the war and never recovered from this loss. His dedication to the family carpentry business and attempts to impose his values on his three sons result in rejection by two of them. The most indecisive, Esteban, dedicates his life to carpentry and sacrifices art school for this purpose. His father is the personification of the unresolved historical memory that continues to affect the lives of others related to the past conflict. The recent Crisis brought back the political debate on the need to invest or not to invest into recuperation of the historical memory. It is worth mentioning the fact provided by Ryan:

…The crisis in Spain has been appropriated by the right to deprioritize historical memory as they argue that the gravity of the present situation obviates a concern with the past, and that the scarcity of resources makes funding destined for historical memory unsustainable. For example, in the midst of debates about the transfer of Franco’s grave from Valle to Los Caídos to his residence, El Pardo, PP politician Eduardo González Pons asserted that historical memory did not interest the Spanish populace, who were far more interested in reducing unemployment. (84)

The balance between the economical and the ideological foundations of Spanish society tended to shift towards the economy at the expense of historical memory. As it could be seen from the quote above the recuperation of history was one of the easiest articles to
save upon in challenging times. Such quick savings would bring immediate populist results yet damage the ideological foundations of contemporary Spain in the long run.

As the marsh in *En la orilla* becomes the metaphor of the universe that attracts and dissolves humans in the novel, it also becomes the ideal expression of the Crisis happening in the village. Chirbes makes parallel descriptions of the Crisis and the decay in the marshlands. Specifically, the Crisis results in Esteban’s suicide and the Crisis brings Ahmed, who lost his job in Esteban’s carpentry shop, to the marsh to catch some fish for lunch. I argue that the marsh in the novel is a chthonic space that connects the human and the universe. This pre-human, terrestrial space removes any recent impact of the civilization. Labrador Méndez, in a different way, interprets the marsh as the menace to human culture and civilization as shown by Chirbes:

Unos pocos inviernos harán que se derrumben las edificaciones incompletas levantadas por los sueños del ladrillo junto al mar. La cultura, la educación, el progreso son una película de grasa en la marmita antropológica. Al rascar el lodo estático que cubre la laguna se manifiesta su verdadera naturaleza visceral, putrefacta y, entre sus aguas inestables, se avistan sus cadáveres fundantes. (231)

Chirbes’s obsession with the processes of decomposition is developed further as he introduces an entire chapter of internal monologue by another ex-worker of Esteban’s shop who had worked as a garbage collector. The detailed and naturalistic descriptions of how people dispose of their organic and other wastes resonate with the motif of human beings as subjects of entropy destined to disappear through decomposition. This topic was present in *Crematorio*, in which Chirbes used enumerations of diverse types of food (meat and seafood) as dead flesh exposed for the consumption and to fuel market mechanisms. In *Crematorio*
the rotten flesh was one of the drivers of the spiral of the economic boom on the coast. In *En la orilla* decomposing flesh and other products of human activity come to their logical end on the giant natural landfill that the marshlands of the village become. These marshlands (“el pantano”) also accumulate objects and bodies through the centuries. Chirbes mentions several times that artifacts of human life of the past can be easily found there. But in times of Crisis the accumulation of material wealth is not possible, and the universal chthonic force personified by the image of the marsh performs its own accumulation through dispossession. This time people affected by the Crisis are obliged to get rid of what had been gained through speculation in previous years. The apotheosis of the dispossession is when the main character, after losing his business and house, gets rid of his life in the symbolic space of the marsh.

The narrative rhythms of *Crematorio* and *En la orilla* are different because of their different topics. In *Crematorio*, Chirbes depicts hectic movement around the growing real estate bubble and the origins of the future Crisis. In this text, the accumulation of the resources and the construction happen through constant movement. The stream of consciousness of Rubén, the main character, takes place while he is in his car moving around the town, which is full of his constructions sites. As I have argued, the growth and development are determined by the Mediterranean Sea as a body of water that stipulates the town and its inhabitants. Although for Chirbes any movement results in death, decay, and putrefaction (Rubén’s car is heading to the cremation of his brother), the novel’s main symbol in the background is the sea which determines movement on the shore just because it is there. The sea metaphysically stands for a universal beginning, shaping the place and the people. The novel *En la orilla*, shows the Crisis as the destination of this movement. The
Crisis can be analyzed as the condition in which time stops. As opposed to *Crematorio* where the sea creates the dynamics and the movement of time, the main watery symbol representing the “metaphysical universe” in *En la orilla* is the marsh, where by nature movement is absent. The water is stagnant, creating smells of decomposition. Time is not moving from past to future in this novel. In *Crematorio*, Chirbes traced the continuity of Misent through the excavations from ancient Roman tombs to the future of high-rises dominating the neoliberal paradise landscape. Aging Rubén is still oriented to the future and his young wife is pregnant depicting the continuity of generations. Mónica is a character shown through the consumption of objects of material culture: “Este es mi cuerpo, ésta es mi sangre. Los cursos de cocina, la peluquería, la manicure, el beauty center” (*Crematorio* 360). Rubén’s future child is the symbolic heir of the neoliberal future built upon speculation and corruption. In *En la orilla*, though, Esteban is moving around the stagnated space of the marshlands. He has no children and he voluntarily disappears into the marsh together with his disabled father. Time in this novel comes to its stop through the Crisis. That lack of future-bound movement expressed through the pause in economic and social life in Olba shows time that is arrested. This metaphor allows Chirbes to further reveal the motivations and nature of the characters. Within this time, they fall out of the dynamic economic movement that determined them previously. The illusionary future is substituted by the overwhelming present that dispossesses different characters from different belongings. Esteban loses his business and house, and his workers lose their jobs. Economic losses reveal personal losses as the collapsed dreams of the characters uncover the void that results in breaking personal relations and a broken sense of community. The halted time of the Crisis is a powerful factor in alienation.
For Chirbes, the Economic Crisis of 2008 in the novel *En la orilla* is a logical ending to the conflicts started in the time of the Civil War. It eliminates the last participants and those who witnessed the consequences of the war itself. Esteban’s father was an active participant of the battle and his son’s generation is the first post civil war generation. Its members were directly impacted by the consequences of the war and experienced political division. Therefore, Chirbes attempts to trace the disappearance of the direct witnesses and participants of the nation’s division into winners and losers. This relation between the Crisis and separate historical memory is explained by the writer through symbolic elimination. As the direct subjects of the discussion disappear from the debate it becomes more abstract and loses its importance for the present-day generations affected by the Economic Crisis.

The question of what is more important, the unemployment or the removal of Franco’s tomb from the Valley of the Fallen, is the indicator of the changing priorities. The disappearing participants of the unfinished Civil War are replaced in Chirbes’s novels by deterritorialized subjects, who are mainly immigrants. In *En la orilla* he continues to pay important attention to the newcomers to Spain by creating the character of the Colombian caregiver Liliana who is sitting with Esteban’s father or tracing monologues of Ahmed from Morocco who works on his carpentry. The “foreign” characters who are illegal immigrants are presented to the reader both through the monologues of Esteban and through their own internal monologues and free indirect speech. As in *Crematorio*, Chirbes applies the language of deterritorialization and his style creates the images of the other through multiple lists of objects related to these foreigners. He provides entire nomenclatures of food, ingredients, stereotypes and cultural markers: “Pero le hablaban del cilantro, que ustedes ni usan, ni conocen, como tampoco saben lo que es de verdad la fruta: mangos, papayas,
corosoles, guayabas, uchovías, granadillas, guanábanas, pitayas; a la ahuyama ustedes la llaman más bien calabaza (*En la orilla* 31). The vision of the immigrants by Spaniards is contrasted to their self-portrayal through internal monologues. Often Chirbes attempts to approach the other who shapes the new Spanish social and cultural landscape through exaggeration, exoticism, grotesque, or simplification: “Desde que se produjeron los atentados de 2004 en Madrid, levanta sospechas cualquiera que venga de Marruecos …y tenga algo que ver con el islam y el islamismo. Ahmed piensa que los propios marroquíes colaboran en aguzar esa desconfianza y en dificultar las cosas” (15).

The novel relates the ideas of the Crisis, the time, the transient life through the image of the marsh. As the hectic dynamic of previous years is replaced by the stillness of the Crisis, the idea of time changes. With *Crematorio* Chirbes built a vision of time as dynamic movement, in *En la orilla*, as I have suggested, time slows down and stops as the Crisis begins. Time becomes like a non-linear Bergsonian duration. The French philosopher writes that “…the unrolling of our duration resembles in some of its aspects the unity of an advancing movement and in others the multiplicity of expanding states; and, clearly, no metaphor can express one of these two aspects without sacrificing the other” (Bergson 11). Descriptions of the marshlands and the ruined economy contribute to the stillness of time: “…todo aparece tranquilo y solitario, ni una grúa rompe la línea del horizonte, ningún ruido metálico quiebra el aire, ningún zumbido, ningún martilleo agreden el oído (*En la orilla* 14). That stillness of time sensed as duration not leading anywhere brings the narrative from the level of the local Crisis to a more general reconsideration of literary topos of *ubi sunt*. This topos dates back to Ancient Rome; Ubi sunt is the first part of the Latin phrase *Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt?* meaning "Where are those who were before us?" – an allusion to a life
passing by towards its end. The topic is considered in many ancient and medieval literary works, but Chirbes cites openly the poem by François Villon entitled *Ballade of the Ladies of Times Past.*34 alluding to the famous image of the snows of yester-year by Villon. Chirbes also implicitly includes motifs from Jorge Manrique and his famous poem from *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* (*Stanzas about the Death of his Father*). As in Chirbes’s novel, the father accompanies and determines the protagonist. Esteban’s father transfers to his son his own resentment caused by the loss in the Civil War. The father obliges Esteban to work in the carpentry business for the rest of his life to achieve redemption of those past losses. Mention of Manrique’s stanzas in the novel reflects the author’s meditation on life’s transience and its way to entropy. In the following lyrical paragraph Chirbes combines both Manrique and Villon to transmit his vision of time through the topos of *ubi sunt:*

> Pero cómo echamos de menos todas esas cosas que no volverán. Las nieves de antaño, las rosas que se han abierto esta mañana y se marchitarán a la tarde y cuando vuelva a darles el sol se quedarán sin pétalos, feas bolas secas, pequeñas calaveras que crujen entre los dedos cuando las aplastas, los infantes de Olba, las damas de Ucrania. (434)

“Las nieves de antaño” is a direct quote from the Spanish translation of Villon’s poem.

“Nieves de antaño” is known in English in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s translation as the “snows of yester year” (New Poems… 259). The concluding phrase “los infantes de Olba, las damas de Ucrania” is the allusion to Stanzas XVI and XVII by Jorge Manrique:

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34 The interrogative refrain of every four parts of the ballade ends with Mais où sont les neiges d'antan! (Villon 364), a lamentation of years gone by.
¿Qué se hizo el rey don Joan?
Los infantes d’Aragón
¿qué se hizieron?

… ¿Qué se hizieron las damas,
sus tocados e vestidos,
sus olores? (Manrique)

In the context of *En la orilla*, “Los infantes de Olba” points at the privileged residents of the village of Olba, winners of the unfinished Civil War. “Las damas de Ucrania” is an allusion to Ukrainian prostitutes, deterritorialized subjects, whose services were in demand by various characters in times before the Crisis but now are a distant memory: “Una ucraniana que me follé hace meses se queda mirando el todoterreno cuando paso, sin duda me ha reconocido, pero hoy ni me fijo en ella” (38). Comparison of the roses to the small skulls that crunch in the fingers may be considered an indirect reference to another powerful literary scene marked by the feeling of ubi sunt, in which Hamlet talks to the skull of Yorick.

I argue that such an intense concentration of multiple *ubi sunt* intertexts in one lyrical paragraph of Esteban’s internal monologue is a tool that makes it possible for the text to convey the sense of time not as a linearity but as a duration. The symbolic bridges between the two novels are also related to symbols of paganism and Christianity and the limits between life and death. In *Crematorio* the construction industry is shown as Moloch, an idol venerated by the protagonist. In *En la orilla* the main characters are carpenters, like Jesus. Crematory ends human existence in the material world by the destruction of its physical body. After the crematory, the human finds himself on the shores of the river separating the other world. The title of the second novel points to the limit, which is conveyed by English translation “On the Edge.” On the other hand, it is a reference to several poems by Quevedo
referring to the bank of a river. Allusions to Quevedo are present in *Crematorio*; “buscas en Misent a Misent y no lo hallas” (*Crematorio* 93) as a direct paraphrase of Quevedo’s sonnet “A Roma sepultada en sus ruinas”:

> Buscas en Roma a Roma ¡oh peregrino!
>
y en Roma misma a Roma no la hallas:
>
cadáver son las que ostentó murallas
>
y tumba de sí propio el Aventino. (Quevedo 16)

The allusion to Quevedo is repetition of the topic important to Chirbes of times past lost. The title of the novel *En la orilla* is connected to two of Quevedo’s sonnets: *Espectador del naufragio* and *Amor constante más allá de la muerte*.35

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35 ¿Ves esa choza pobre que, en la orilla, con bien unidas pajas, burla al Noto?
¿Ves el horrendo y líquido alboroto, donde agoniza poderosa quilla?

¿No ves la turba ronca y amarilla
desconfiar del arte y del piloto,
a quien, si el parasismo acuerda el voto,
la muerte los semblantes amancilla?

Pues eso ves en mí, que, retirado
a la serena paz de mi cabaña,
más quiero verme pobre que anegado.

Y miro, libre, naufragar la saña
del poder cauteloso, que, engañado,
tormenta vive cuando alegre engaña (Quevedo 174).

36 Cerrar podrá mis ojos la postrera
sombra, que me llevare el blanco día;
i podrá desatar esta alma mía
hora, a su afán ansioso lisongera:
mas no de essotra parte en la rivera
dejará la memoria, en donde ardía;
nadar sabe mi llama la agua fría,
i perder el respeto a lei severa.
Alma, a quien todo un dios prissión ha sido,
venas, que humor a tanto fuego han dado,
medulas, que han gloriosamente ardido;
su cuerpo dejarán, no su cuidado;
serán ceniza, mas tendrá sentido;
In this case, the image of “la orilla” is reminiscent of the Styx riverbank where the lyrical protagonist of the poems remains on the shore which borders between the worlds of life and death. Quevedo’s sonnets provide the background for the leitmotifs of the novel. In the case of the first sonnet, it is the position of the observer of the catastrophe taking place in the river waters, while the observer is protected by the safety of the shore. In the second sonnet, the character has already crossed the final limit that is the Styx river and is calling back to his life before death. It is worth mentioning that the English translation of Chirbes novel On the Edge loses the allusion to Quevedo’s sonnets as well as the reference to the shore of the Styx river that is the metaphor of the reality of the Economic Crisis for Chirbes. Thus, the mythological layer of the novel relates its realistic narrative to the universal non-historic dimension attracted through the myths and symbols. In the Spanish tradition, the Styx river is known as “La Laguna Estigia” and the lagoon correlates directly to the marsh (el pantano) where the protagonist of the novel commits suicide. However, Chirbes’s realism does not become “magic,” it does not involve any supernatural events. A symbolic dimension is brought to the text through the images that become archetypal. Those images are the sea, the marsh, and the flesh in decomposition. As Labrador Mendez noted, Spanish history and historical memory are metaphorically presented in both novels as the feast with a touch of anthropophagy—the cannibalism of the Civil war, the feast of the times of the economic “bubble,” and finally the imposed fasting of the Crisis. Through the allusions to paganism in Crematorio and Christianity in En la orilla Chirbes moves from realistic conventions to symbolic generalization. Worship of the Moloch of enrichment by Rubén in Crematorio correlates to the attempts of Esteban’s father to live a life of dignity and bring up

polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado (Quevedo)
his son as a carpenter in a simple life as a metaphor of Christianity: “no vivimos del trabajo de los demás, sino del nuestro. No explotamos a nadie” (En la orilla 49). In both novels these models bring the characters to the shore of afterlife, the ancient Styx river (lagoon in Spanish). Father and son of En la orilla disappear into that lagoon, and Rubén’s brother, Matías, disappears in the sacrificial fire of the crematory in Crematorio.

In these two novels Chirbes attentively traces the modern history of Spain dating back to times of the Spanish Civil War and creates a fictional universe expressed through the internal monologues of his characters. The foundations of the Economic Crisis according to his suggestions lie in the unresolved contradictions and imbalance in creation of what Ryan determines as networks of power. The exclusion of Republicans and their descendants from participation in the economy and in politics evolves in a division between future generations. In times of Economic Crisis emotional relations are affected and result in social and individual decay. The Crisis brings Spanish society back to the condition determined by Labrador Méndez as the “normality of underdevelopment,” as the illusions of prosperity and developmentalism vanish. In addition, Chirbes concentrates on processes of economic and political deterritorialization in Spain in times of a globalized world and applies what I call the language of deterritorialization. The expansive narrative form and the attraction of archetypal images allow Chirbes to move from the realistic (political and economic) dimensions of the Crisis to the level of epic and symbolic dimensions. Through multiple intertexts to national and world literature and art, the novels by Chirbes avoid connection to only one period in Spanish history. They move to the level of universal images and values.
CHAPTER 4.

From Individual Struggle to Solidarity in Texts by Lucía Extebarría, Cristina Fallarás, and Marta Caparrós

As I have shown in the previous chapters, in the earlier stages of the Crisis in Spain (approximately in 2008 – 2010) people remained on their own against the failing social order and economic hardships. Later the mass protest movements emerged. That consolidation transformed the social space and brought in new political movements. The change became possible largely due to incorporation of the new solidarity patterns in social interactions. This dynamics from the individual struggle to the social engagement is reflected in Spanish Crisis Literature and in this chapter, I aim at tracing its formation and impact the contemporary narrative. The political as category defines Spain in times of the Crisis as the interactions within the society are its first “victims.” The changes in the society find their reflection in the changes of the novelistic genre allowing it to acquire some traits of hybridity and incorporate further traits of other adjacent generic forms such as essay or autobiographical writing.

For the purpose of tracing these generic modifications I am going to analyze three texts: Liquidación por derribo (Liquidation by Demolition) (2014) by Lucía Etxebarría, A la puta calle (Get the Hell Out) (2013) by Cristina Fallarás, and Filtraciones (Leaks) (2015) by Marta Caparrós. I suggest that these three texts exist on the limits of the novelistic genre and include some features of other forms of literary expression. The reason to approach these texts written by Spanish female writers of both earlier (Etxebarría and Fallarás) and later (Caparrós) generations is that we may observe the change in perception and reaction to the Economic Crisis in Spain. In particular, the individualistic perspective and lonely resistance
of Etxebarría and Fallarás in the earlier stages of the Crisis evolve towards a collective engagement and acceptance of the Crisis as a permanent reality in the later text by Caparrós. In my subsequent analysis I show that *Liquidación por derribo* by Etxebarría exists on the margins between novel, essay, and graphic text. *A la puta calle* by Fallarás declares itself to be an autobiographical story, yet is mediated by multiple instances of self-fictionalization (as defined by Genette) and balances between documentary and fiction. The book *Filtraciones* by Marta Caparrós includes four stories of different characters who experience the post-Crisis zeitgeist and together shape the portrait of the generation. Those stories could be defined with the French term *nouvelles*, or as Spanish reviewers describe them, “micronovelas” (Salvador).

The texts by these three writers show us the fluctuations of the genre of the “novel of the Crisis” and its balancing between autobiography, fiction, essay, and fictionalization of the self.

In addition, these works describe different periods of the Economic Crisis, ranging from its beginnings in Spain in 2008 (in Etxebarría and Fallarás) up to post-Crisis life and portrayal of 30-year-old millennials who must deal with its consequences in *Filtraciones*. An analysis of the texts must trace several stages of reactions to a collapsing reality. First stage is an individual response to the Economic Crisis that reshapes the author’s and narrator’s subjectivity, as they are witnesses and participants to what is happening. In this case Etxebarría observes street protests and almost becomes a victim of clashes with police. Her daily routines, commute, and income are affected by this changing reality. For Cristina Fallarás, the individual impact of the Crisis is even stronger as she writes her personal story.

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37 The book by Caparrós was selected to be published at Caballo de troya publishing house by Elvira Navarro, whose novel *La trabajadora* I analyze in Chapter One of this dissertation.
how she and her family (her partner and two children) approach the inevitable eviction step-by-step for four long years. Individual stories give these two authors the viable background to move between the private and the public realms within their texts and create a narrative of the general impact of the Crisis that starts with minor changes in their lives. They observe the slow creation of the foundations for future collective actions. That said, their more individualized perspective does not yet grasp the reaction to the Crisis in the form of horizontal networks and new forms of civil society. Those become the focus of the attention in the “micro-novels” by Caparrós, in which she traces changes in the self-organization patterns of Spaniards affected by the Crisis and shows how they create alternative public spaces. These stories let the reader feel that from the desperate precarity of the first years of the Crisis, Spaniards managed to unite through collective action and civic movements such as 15M or by reviving squatting practices. This becomes possible due to an emerging sense of solidarity that aims to replace the individualistic and neoliberal attitudes existing before the Crisis. The three authors combine traits of essays and novels in their texts and “place the subjectivity of a Spanish female at the center of both these forms of writing” (Sullivan 53).

In this chapter, I argue that the three texts selected show the transition from the difficulties of the individual fight towards the collective action enabled by solidarity. In order to show these changes, I will consider the category of solidarity and its role in shaping fiction. The three authors articulate their female subjectivity in the texts; they are comfortable placing their gender identity at the center of their writing. Their narrative “I” dominates and structures the space of the stories, reaffirming the replacement of previous phallogocentric order in Spanish culture with the multiperspectivity not permitted by old-fashioned gender conventions. The strong voice of the narrator is present directly in the texts
by Etxebarría and Fallarás, and is also expressed by the fictional female protagonists of the Caparrós’ micro-novels.

**Liquidación por derribo** (Liquidation by Demolition) by

Lucía Etxebarría: From Essay to Fiction

Lucía Etxebarría is an accomplished poet and novelist, author of the bestseller *Amor, curiosidad, Prozac y dudas* (1997), whose work has been translated into more than twenty languages. Her book *Liquidación por derribo: como se gestó la que está cayendo* is an attempt to trace the reasons for the Economic and Political Crisis in Spain. Its style is a combination of personal narrative that recounts episodes from Lucía Etxebarría’s life between 2011 and 2013, and an analysis of political and economic processes based on the press, statistical reports, and scholarly sources. The text is illustrated by caricatures by Javirroyo, an illustrator from Barcelona. These constant stylistic shifts between personal narrative, “serious” analysis, and amusing pictures create a mix that straddles the edge between essay and literary text. Etxebarría’s book is a story with two main characters who constantly interact and determine one another: one is the Economic Crisis and the other is Spain. Etxebarría builds up the narrative of the Crisis, inscribing the writer’s ego onto the story. The elements of the Crisis that Etxebarría approaches are reflected in the chapter titles dedicated in turn to: corruption in Spain (“Somos un país corrupto”), the financial crisis (“La crisis financiera”), the real estate bubble (“El ladrillazo, una historia de terror”), individual reactions to the Crisis (“Cristina no atina”), social inequality (“Dejad que los ricos se acerquen a mí”), and so on. Autobiographical inclusions in the text by Etxebarría indicate
that, as per Barthes, autobiography is a fiction\(^\text{38}\) about our own identity, the way “we stage our plural” (Barthes V). In this way, Etxebarría creates a fictional double of herself who acts on the pages of the book, interacting with friends, publishers, and the general public. Her fictional self, although based on real events, moves through the text to expose the narratives through which the Crisis and its elements became possible. Her language — a combination of essay, pictures, and literary passages — is a tool used to unlock and expose the exploitative ideologies that enabled the Crisis. The implied author establishes agreement with the reader on the first pages of the text, declaring her intentions: “…este libro… No pretende ser un tratado de economía ni de política. No pretende arreglar el mundo, ni siquiera el país… Este libro pretende ser simplista. Ésa es su vocación” (21). This statement in the prologue builds up the reader’s expectations to decode the complex economic/political/social reasons for the Crisis in Etxebarría’s hybrid multi-genre text. I would define the proposal of the text as the creation of a series of landmarks in a semiotic journey through economy, politics, and sociology. She starts with the personal story of witnessing the brutal eviction by police of squatters in the centre of Madrid. She observes as the myth of neoliberal prosperity fails and marginalizes the middle-class. Etxebarría sees the action of the police and starts the process of self-exclusion from the dominant discourse in order to depict it from the side:

\[\text{Yo no me considero ninguna antisistema, yo soy una señora normal y corriente,}\]
\[\text{madre de una niña pequeña y dueña de una caniche que ni siquiera lleva rastas. No}\]
\[\text{me considero una perroflauta}\(^\text{39}\) mucho menos una radical. Pero es más: allí nadie era}\]

\(^{38}\) The nature of autobiographical writing had been approached in detail in works by G. Genette, P. Lejeune A. Compagnon.

\(^{39}\) According to \textit{La Vanguardia} the term perroflauta "se utiliza en muchas ocasiones de forma despectiva para referirse a cualquier joven con aspecto desaliñado.”

http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20110525/54161274942/eres-un-perroflauta.html
This attempt at self-inscription into the dominant symbolic order, with further expulsion from this order by the action of the police, initiates Etxebarría’s description of the changes happening in the social structures. Her narration of the self mixed with scientific and comic discourse aim at shaping the category of the political inside the Economic Crisis. Etxebarría declares non-allegiance to any traditional political power, stating: “…este libro no pretende ser ideológico ni posicionarse en ningún bando” (21). For her the political inside the Crisis is something that lies in the plane of interpersonal relations, something that forms the *polis* at the level of small communities rather than within the public discourse of the bipartite system. She advocates for strengthening horizontal ties between people as her declared aim:

“Debemos animarnos los unos a los otros… Necesitamos sociedades civiles activas, que no delegan, que no se rindan” (36). The alleged “seriousness” of the discourse adopted by Etxebarría throughout the text is a mask that may trick the reader. On the same pages with statistical data or where the author refers to scholarly sources, the reader may also see illustrations, the political caricatures, by Catalan artist Javirroyo. For example, on those dedicated to criticism of the Spanish bipartite political system which does not allow an alternative beyond two traditionally existing political forces, the reader may note images of two Darth Vaders from the *Star Wars* movies fighting each other with light sabers. One of them is black and the other is white; the note under the image states “Bipartidismo” (31). At the same time the author claims: “Dividir un país en dos y darte a elegir entre un bando u otro es un juego manipulador en el que se olvida que entre el blanco y el negro puede haber
muchísímos matices de gris, un juego que conviene al sistema, pero que no me convence a mí. A nosotros” (25). This visual image, as well as the other caricatures scattered across the book, expand the message conveyed by the language of data and references. Pictures and text complement one another. The “scientific” approach by Etxebarría consciously undermines itself through the inclusion of these images. They simplify the idea expressed in written text and work toward a greater accessibility of the text for the reader. Similar to the effect of the pictures, the inclusion of personal experiences, conversations with friends, and frequent exaggerations or conscious omissions of information, give the story of the Economic Crisis features of fictional narrative, putting it further away from the generic traits of the essay. Here, some reviewers find fodder and state that Etxebarría does not offer the “serious” essay:

…la indiscutible egolatría de la autora, que aprovecha cualquier ocasión para hablar de sus experiencias personales y las de sus amigos, le lleva a plantear algunos problemas desde un punto de vista algo sesgado, como cuando confunde los desahucios con la pérdida de una segunda residencia. (López)

This type of criticism fails to grasp the literary origin of Etxebarría’s work, her creation of narrative aimed at mass readership, where the reality is fictionalized through discourse to produce not only political but also aesthetic impact. I argue that such “double intention” is implicit in the text and corresponds to the author’s intention to make it accessible and a widespread reference in the public realm. As Etxebarría puts it:

En primer lugar, por primera vez en muchos años siento que a mi alrededor la gente está interesada por participar activamente en el sistema. Mi portero, el quiosquero, la del herbolario, el camarero, la librera, la taquillera, el taxista, la veterinaria… La
This observation shows change from the previous tendency of “exceptionally low rates of civic engagement and political participation in Spain, the very low understanding of important political issues among Spanish citizens” (Royo 1575). Thus, the text “sells” itself as social and political journalism, yet this boundary is a mask, behind which hides a strong literary component. An orientation to the mass market and mass readership correlate with Etxebarria’s calls to strengthen horizontal ties in society as an alternative to the Spanish political and economic systems that, in her opinion, were the primary reasons for the Crisis. By assuming this stance, the author reduces the impact of the global economy on Spain, consciously underlining the need to assume responsibility for the current conditions caused in part also by overcoming totalitarian legacy:

Una generación que vivirá peor de lo que vivieron sus padres, cuando ha sido criada, precisamente en la ley de mínimo esfuerzo, por unos padres que, intentando no repetir los comportamientos autoritarios de los suyos, los educaron desde la sobreprotección y no los prepararon, desde luego a la que está cayendo ni en el plano psicológico, ni en ningún otro. (217)

The text works on several levels. The first is a general information about aspects of the Crisis or reasons for it to happen. In these parts the author refers to multiple figures, numbers, and statistical data, and inserts cut-outs of magazine and newspaper articles to illustrate her point. Stylistically these parts follow the conventions of investigative

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40 Belen Esteban is a Spanish television personality. Here, her name is used as a reference to popular culture.
journalism or even scientific discourse. As an example, consider the paragraph on public service in Catalonia:

En ese periodo:

- Se triplicó el personal de las empresas públicas (de 10.822 a 45.473);
- Se multiplicó por diez el número de empleados de las fundaciones (de 604 a 6.443);
- Creció un 134 por ciento el personal contratado en los consorcios autonómicos (de 8.851 a 20.473).

(180)

Data inclusions and insertions from official documents appear in the text in smaller font size, which separates the general story narrated by Etxebarría from these blocs of external information, often parts of other articles, interviews, and reports. They enrich the hybrid shape of Liquidación por derribo, as on the neighboring pages the reader sees lists of data and the illustrations from the comic book. I argue that this approach of using various stylistic registries within the text performs its self-deconstruction. It is a strategy of the author who involves the reader in the realm of a textual game of style and genre recognitions. As soon as the reader is ready to read the “serious” essay, suddenly a caricature appears on the same topic. The image shifts the reader´s expectation of the text to a totally different register. This is why Etxebarría treats the press data and information from reports rather freely. Such approach for describing economic and political realities is in line with the provocative and hybrid buildup of the text. On the other hand, personal stories of her friends include a significant degree of fictionalization, as Etxebarría´s background as a novelist comes through in this personalized story-telling. She begins with the fictionalization of herself as the narrator who does not adopt the neoliberal discourse of consumption:
Nosotros fuimos siete hermanos y mis padres no eran ricos, y sé que mi madre invertía en siete niños lo que las actuales familias destinan a uno solo. Y crecimos, como ustedes pueden comprobar si ven mis fotos, lozanísimos. Yo heredaba ropa de mis hermanas, y no tengo ninguna vergüenza en reconocerlo. No tuve una habitación propia. No crecí con un trauma por ello…Si algo marchó mal en la infancia, el problema no fue el de vivir sin lujos, desde luego. (33)

The narrator pretends to establish her monopoly on the truth through this form of textual expression. The rhetoric applied by Etxebarría in fragments where she reinforces her essayistic and comic parts with personal stories (starting from her own one), leads the reader to identify their own experiences with the ones of the “real” people described in Etxebarría’s essay. This attempt to stick to the discourse of truth is shaped by what Barthes defines as “…the objectivity that is made provisional by the very history that renews metalanguages” (Writing Degree Zero, 153).

The author includes in the text a powerful implicit ideological message. Not only does Etxebarría openly call to strengthen the horizontal ties in society or create alternative mechanisms of power and civil action to resist the Crisis, she also codes a similar message in her textual structure through the hybridization of the genre, which becomes a mix between essay, journalism, and fiction. Her arguments are filled with “real life stories,” which she uses to exemplify or illustrate her thesis: “Pongamos un ejemplo” (44), “Voy a poner un ejemplo” (45), etc. The text constantly slides between the stylistic registers of official discourse and literary metaphors: “Todos sabemos que el sistema español para conseguir un empleo se basa en las habilidades sociales y en las relaciones personales. En cristiano: en el enchufe” (45).
Etxebarría calls for a strengthening of horizontal ties and social interaction beyond the state-approved traditional models. In the years following the book publication these types of relationships resulted in mass movements such as 15M and the emergence of new parties such as Podemos. Ironically, as Estrada puts it, the new parties imitated vertical structures and imbalances of power proper to old inefficient political forces:

...leading media, such as El País, have emphasized that the organization of Podemos, the newly created political party that represents the movement, does not follow the horizontal, participatory model but perpetuates the standard hierarchical organizational structure of all other political parties. (Estrada 496)

As Spanish philosopher Fernández Savater points out, the way to achieve participatory democracy is to “drill holes in the institutional definition of reality” (Fernández Savater). Such undermining of the dominant social discourse by poking “metaphoric holes” would result in the emergence of new meanings for the society. While the subtitle of Etxebarría’s book is cómo se gestó la que está cayendo, her stated aim is to explore the deficiencies of this institutional, neoliberalist vision of reality, dominant in pre-Crisis Spain with its construction boom, illusion of the welfare state, and wide access to consumption in exchange for debt. To achieve this goal the book covers multiple aspects of social interactions. Among these one finds soccer as an ideologeme; it brings the reality of Spain into a pre-established symbolic order of the nation state represented by the “La Roja” national team. Soccer as mythical structure aimed at escaping from reality to the illusionary space of the game was touched on also by López Menacho in his Yo, precario, as mentioned in Chapter Two of this dissertation. In López Menacho’s case, the main character is employed to attract the public to watch the games of the 2012 European championship. The situation becomes more absurd
given that as part of his duties, he must wear the national colours of Spain and shout out “España” at a Barcelona movie theater that is screening the match. While a strong independentist spirit prevents the locals from supporting the games played by the national team, the main audience are the immigrants from former Spanish colonies who praise the success of the metropolis. Spain won the 2012 European Soccer Championship and Etxebarría takes this event as a starting point for the chapter *El opio del pueblo*. Even the title, borrowed from Marx’s famous statement\(^{41}\) in the *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, suggests criticism of this sport being used as a distractor from the socio-economic processes caused by the Economic Crisis in Spain. Not only does the sport itself become a highly profitable and corrupt industry, it is also an ideological tool that has multiple functions. In López Menacho’s case, the reader may observe how it fails to unite people inside one of the autonomies (Catalonia in this case) around the national idea of metropolitan Spain as a nation-state. In Etxebarría’s approach, soccer is condemned as an industry, for being heavily subsided by the state and the taxpayers’ money; in her opinion, it is one of what Althusser once named “ideological apparatuses of the state.” After winning the 2012 championship subventions to the industry and the players increased, and Etxebarría provides multiple statistics to prove it. Furthermore, the players’ income amounts were tax-free according to her data. This prioritization of mass spectacle in hard times makes Etxebarría claim: “El fútbol profesional es el verdadero opio del pueblo, mucho más que la religión, pues ésta no llena la vida de los hinchas desde el lunes hasta el miércoles y desde el viernes hasta el fin de semana con la misma intensidad ni de la misma manera absoluta” (147). Etxebarría directly relates the mass

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spectacle to the role of spectacles in times of Ancient Rome, where they distracted the masses and solidified the emperor’s power: “Y es que resulta evidente que se están tomando medidas de promoción de fútbol para distraer a la sociedad de la gravedad de la crisis” (157).

Her narration of the story of the Economic Crisis and its background is an attempt by Etxebarría to represent the political. In my view, she erases generic boundaries in the text and combines different styles so as to find ways to approach a changing reality that escapes from a text limited by traditional generic boundaries both in form and in content. Etxebarría’s writing in her Liquidación por derribo transgresses the normative codes that would separate autobiography and fiction. The generic hybridisation of the text resembles what Stolzfus defines as “fictography,” where narrative fragments and self-conscious figurations aim at subversion of the law (Stolzfus 6). Etxebarría challenges an established social order of neoliberal values, dominant in times before the Economic Crisis. Her text is an expression of mistrust of paternalistic authority, bourgeois values, and essentialist thinking. Etxebarría uses her style or, more broadly, her language, as a tool to approach a new reality that resists traditional narrative models. This new language necessitates balancing between different genres and stylistic varieties, while combining personal, journalistic, and visual discourse all in one message. This linguistic mélange of multiple elements of expression from different genres is in line with the dominant message of the text. In her deconstruction of the Crisis, Etxebarría points to solidarity as a possible way to deal with the new reality. Solidarity on the extradiegetic level could become a foundation, according to Etxebarría, to joint action, creation of networks of mutual support, horizontal social ties and, ultimately, to the new vision of the political in a post-Crisis reality. I argue that the plurality of her text already reflects a message of solidarity in which language, in its multiple
manifestations and styles expresses itself as a metaphor for a new reality where old ways of expression have failed. Distinctive styles merge in one text and alternate resulting in a powerful message: to convey how different people are supposed to band together to challenge the condition of the “neoliberal truth” pictured by the author. As a result of these connections: “These personal contacts would provide the emotional basis for a strong allegiance to high solidarity on a local level in order to render it possible on a global level (Boshammer 381)” enabling the mass character of movements such as 15M.

In 2012, the fourth year of the Economic Crisis, Etxebarría considers it relevant to finish her narrative by questioning Spain’s political integrity and possibilities of its disappearance in the future in her last two chapters “Hacia dónde va Cataluña” and “Sobre los resultados de las elecciones catalanas.” Despite possible accusations of “españolismo,” Etxebarría is less interested in political and economic aspects of Catalan separatism. Her focus is the possible transformation of Spain resulting from these processes. She tries to distance herself from the centralist discourse by claiming her Basque ethnicity and underlining the fact that she had been threatened by ETA in past. For her, the independence of Catalonia defines further existence of the idea of Spain in the ideological plane as Etxebarría declares her intention to remain a distanced “third party” in the dispute about independence:

…hay dos respuestas: la simple y politicamente correcta es “yo no soy catalana y por lo tanto no me debo posicionar.” La segunda respuesta es la de novelista, que quiere ver toda la historia desde el punto de vista narrativo e incluso – por qué no decirlo – épico, y sería esta. (226)
She relates the rising number of pro-independence voters to the unstable economic situation that creates illusions of life improvement once the autonomous community stops giving away money to the federal budget. The idea of Spain and its political unity is inscribed by Etxebarría in the story of the Crisis that she creates as a writer, and is of relevance to my research. For her, the process of independentism is part of the shattering of the national narrative, unable to stand against the challenge of economic reshaping and shrinking in the 2010s. Also, the metaphoric title *Liquidación por derribo*, borrowed from the vocabulary of construction and commerce, may as well be related not only to the prospects of Spanish economy and welfare (el bienestar) but to the idea of the Spanish state in its current geopolitical limits as well.

**On the Way to Radicalization: *A la puta calle* (Get the Hell Out) by Cristina Fallarás**

The appealing title *A la puta calle* by Spanish novelist and journalist Cristina Fallarás Sánchez is followed by the subtitle *Historia de un desahucio*. Similar to Etxebarría’s work, it bounces between genres. On the one hand, what we have is an attempt to tell an autobiographical story of the four years that passed from the time the author lost her job in 2009 to that of her possible eviction from her mortgaged property in 2013. While Etxebarría tends to concentrate on general socio-political analysis of the situation in Spain, Fallarás narrates her story in first person, which adds intimacy and privacy. The analytical structure of Etxebarría’s text is much less emotional and “militant” as she does not identify herself as a direct victim of the Economic Crisis but rather perceives its impact more through the general changes in Spanish society. In the case of Fallarás, the discourse tends to combine traits of a
manifesto enriched with accusations. Her personal story is written using the narrative conventions of the autobiographical genre. Fallarás uses lineal narrative, which unfolds year by year, month by month to depict her personal eviction story. This first-person testimonial narration does not escape self-fictionalization, as defined by Lejeune, either. Fallarás consciously fictionalizes her story. She brings up some elements important to prove her point and visibly omits other moments that make her story less convincing. Therefore, I argue that the subtitle of the book, *historia de un desahucio*, together with the narrative strategies used by the author drive the text beyond the limits of investigative journalism and give it traces proper to a work of fiction. This is a story of trauma and “…life narrators writing ‘trauma’ are conventionally expected to pass some sort of judgement on the political conditions or the violence itself (Kim 98).” The reality that causes the eviction trauma, affects the writing and shifts generic boundaries, where texts presented as essays or documentary stories operate through fictionalization of reality and could be considered as post-Crisis fiction. It is remarkable how Fallarás declares explicitly her intentions as the in almost the same manner as does Etxebarría. While the latter states: “Este libro no pretende arreglar el mundo ni siquiera el país” (Etxebarría 21), Fallarás declares her own intentions:

> Este libro no es un ensayo sobre los desahucios ni sobre la crisis económica en España….Este libro es la narración de mi desahucio, un proceso de hundimiento en la miseria que arranca el día que me despidieron de un diario, a finales de 2008, y termina aquella tarde del 13 de noviembre de 2012 en la que el tipo llamó a la puerta y me convirtió en una desahuciada. (18)

Both authors make a statement to define the intention of their text and both use negative dialectics. They state their own vision through the negation, saying what the text, according
to their opinion, is not. These declarations in the introductions to both texts allow consideration of more complex mechanisms of the interaction between the authors’ intentions and the textual dynamics. For example, this direct appeal to the reader, declaring what the book is not, is a clear indicator to establish Lejeune’s autobiographic pact. Both authors build up the expectation of the future reader’s perception of the text. A potential reader is given the explicit pattern on “how to read the text.” However, the negative statements by both Etxebarría and Fallarás point at premises for the particular situations and individual stories in the texts. I argue that this negation of each author’s intent is a rhetorical figure that unconsciously directs the attention of the reader precisely to the objects of negation. Etxebarría’s statement that the book does not pretend to fix the economy or the country is in obvious contradiction to her detailed analysis of the current Crisis and strategies of moving out of it. In a similar way, the point of view by Fallarás, who tries to move her personal story of eviction away from the global context in her statement, shows the connection between the private and the public. Her individual story is a vivid representation of the global process of the Economic Crisis that had caused it. Therefore, the explicit declarations by both authors to “sell” the text as something that it is not, precisely indicate that the text is not only this declared absence, but also includes all those meanings and messages that have allegedly been expelled from it.

*A la puta calle* is written as an autobiography and is shaped by several metaphors of space and movement. I propose approaching it as a three-dimensional text, given that it includes categories of top, bottom, vertical movement, and lineal time. The spatio-temporal unity of the narration offers an image of the fall of the main character/narrator from the top of a mountain. The actual referent here is the Niesen peak in Swiss Alps, which has the
longest stairway in the world, Niesen peak in the Swiss Alps (“Desde lo alto del monte Niesen, tus huesos contra 11.674 peldaños”). Fallarás gives reverse-angle perspective of her falling from the symbolic top of the mountain along this longest stairwell year by year. Parts of her book are chronological in time and respectively refer to specific years of the individual fall resulting in eviction: “2009: Año uno en el despeñadero del monte Niesen,” “2010: Año dos en el despeñadero del monte Niesen,” and so on until 2012, the fourth year. The metaphor of individual impoverishment from Spanish middle-class life to unemployment and eviction as movement of falling down the stairs is not new. Rising and falling within societies is a traditional topic in the history of literature. In the case of A la puta calle, though, it is important to stress that such a fall has strict chronological markers, year by year. It goes from the first episode where the narrator Cristina is laid off while nine months pregnant, to her possible eviction from her apartment in Barcelona four years later. Movement down the symbolic stairs coincides with movement in time and creates a textual spatio-temporal unity, the chronotope. Bakhtin states that: “The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic” (Forms of Time… 8). A la puta calle manages to create a very well defined chronotope of the Economic Crisis through the image of the narrator/protagonist. The Crisis emerges in the individual story and its impact on her private life. Together with the inevitable self-fictionalization of the protagonist, A la puta calle becomes a deconstruction of the Crisis through the individual story. What’s more, Fallarás frequently uses hyperboles. Her choice to define growing individual precarity through the metaphor of the longest stairway in the world is an obvious literary exaggeration used to give epic proportions to the individual story. Similarly, Fallarás calls the Economic Crisis “Una crisis Fukuyamica” (46) several times in an allusion to the title of Francis Fukuyama’s well-known
Fallarás herself claims that the authenticity of her personal experience resulting in eviction is the reason for writing this personal story:

> Los de arriba, en cambio, no nos miran. No pueden. Quedan los periodistas, los informadores, que tratan en vano de narrar la pobreza, los desahucios, el porqué de este o aquel suicidio. ¿Cómo podrían? Si no te han cortado el suministro de luz, o de agua, o ambos, tu idea de la miseria es de plástico perfumado. Por eso yo ahora les sirvo. La desahuciada que narra.

The author is a journalist and a writer of detective fiction. Her falling down the metaphoric stairs begins after being laid off from the newspaper *ADN* and is inseparable from her writing. She writes continuously during her descent as this is the only way to earn some money to provide for the family, the children, and to pay the bills. The narrator Cristina is in a race against time and she mentions this as she writes several novels and submits them to various regional and national literary competitions in hopes of winning prize money. Additionally, she asks the bank to postpone payments and reduces her family’s budget for food, clothes, kids’ textbooks, etc. Together with other laid-off colleagues, the narrator opens some online newspapers and magazines that also fail to bring any profits. She mentions not only the free fall down the endless stairs, but also bumping against each stair. All Cristina’s actions are hectic movements to slow this fall and to reverse its direction and symbolically “climb up” towards her lost middle-class life. The reality of the Crisis is reflected in the pieces of the individual’s perception of the “broken mirror” though which it is hard to grasp the entire picture. The individual in the text is not the omnipotent god-like narrator who is...

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42 See Fukuyama *The End of History and the Last Man.*
able to perceive the entire picture. The reality of the Crisis reveals itself to the reader of the 
“A la puta calle” as its fragments impact the narrator.

Every year precarity builds up: “El año UNO de mi despeño por los once mil escalones del monte Niesen fue suave…El año DOS es distinto. La caída va tomando velocidad y los golpes pequeños se acumulan” (67). Fallarás was laid off at the beginning of the Crisis, yet she claims it is more difficult for the people who started falling in the middle of it: “a los que llegan ahora aquí abajo, a la tierra del agujero, apenas les queda ya sitio para moverse, porque los primeros no hemos dejado ni dejaremos de pedalear (51).”

The story depicts an independent character – a female journalist who relies only on herself in maintaining her household and bringing up two children. This concentration on her own life and her sense of individualism prevents her from looking towards collective ways to deal with the Crisis. Even though it is not until the very end of the story, that the narrator participates in strikes and manifestations, she does introduce earlier the alternative movements of 15M and squatting as possibilities given that some of her friends participate in these. The external dynamics of the economic fall are reflected in the internal development of the character. The journalist who is accustomed to middle-class life is gradually replaced by a subject on the way to radicalization: “Aún no era la pesada, beligerante, furibunda y piquetera individual en la que me ha convertido todo esto lo que sucede. Y a veces no se lo perdonó a la crisis; echo de menos cuando era cínica, soberbia y politoxicómana leve en taxi” (77).

Another argument in favour of the fictionalization of the autobiographical narrative by Fallarás is her conscious exaggeration of certain details that would prove her message and the omission of other details not so critical from her viewpoint. She concentrates on showing
her life on the edge of hunger due to a lack of money for groceries. The author compares this situation to the post Civil War years: “... y te oyes decir: Cariño, a partir de ahora la carne es para los niños, ese miserable momento de posguerra para el que no estás preparada, que pertenece a narraciones antiguas, a tomas en blanco y negro ...” (71). She opens the parallels between her story and the novels by Cela and Laforet written in aesthetics of “tremendismo” or neorealist films of the 1950s. Some episodes even lack narrative justification. Such is the case of the narrator’s irrational refusal to return her mortgaged property in exchange for debt settlement (dación en pago). This move would allow the evicted character to get rid of the large debt by losing her apartment instead. She understands that this choice would leave her both without the apartment and with huge debts to the bank to pay out for the rest of her life. The reasons for her seemingly irrational decision are that the family has no place to go and no one would rent to a family without any stable income. Cristina’s choice postpones the eviction, yet loads the character with additional financial burden. Fallarás tries to show how impossible it is to escape from the trap set up by the rules of the neoliberal order. Even losing the property is not an option in this case. As the reader observes Cristina’s family’s impoverishment, she adds more details to a lost social life as there is also no money for new clothing and cosmetics. In this case she underlines that, as a female, she would be expelled from the social entourage and suffer further isolation: “El proceso de miserización de una mujer que echa de menos la crema hidratante. MISERIZADA es una palabra que me gusta para definir todo esto. Y si no existía, ya existe, ¿no la ve escrita?” (145). Fallarás’ story falls under what Domna Stanton determines as autogynography: “…the female “I,” as opposed to the male, is not “simply a texture woven of various selves; its threads, its life-lines (come)
from and extend… to others. By that token, this “I” represents a denial of a notion essential
to the phallogocentric order: the totalized self-contained subject present to itself” (16).

The combination of lifelines extending to others, as defined by Stanton, is relevant in
the story by Fallarás as her “falling down” is inseparable from her family life and the
responsibility she bears for her children. She adds episodes of changing food habits “Mamá,
¿otra vez arroz?” (129) and the necessity to care about both her children and her partner,
Argentinian writer Raúl Argemí. Fallarás denies the phallogocentric order in her own way.
Not a single time in the story does Cristina mention the possibility of some kind of assistance
from her partner. The reader sees the mortgage and the debts as Cristina’s own responsibility.
She is a fully independent subject, who deals with the problems on her own. As Stanton puts
it: “Because of women’s different status in the symbolic order, autogynography…
dramatize(s) the fundamental alterity and non-presence of the subject, even as it asserts itself
discursively and strives toward an always impossible self possession” (16). I assume that the
character of Cristina in her “autogynographical” story suffers dispossession from her
place/apartment in the symbolic order because of an external impact. Her own place, her
“own room” as Virginia’s Woolf would name it, is owned and purchased without any
assistance of the males who dominate in Spanish patriarchal economic models; and the
Economic Crisis takes this symbolic “own room” away from her. Thus, the story becomes in
part one of dispossessing the female subject from her agency symbolized by the apartment.
Further dispossession happens as Cristina cannot afford new clothes or cosmetics anymore:
“La preocupación por la crema hidratante y la calidad de los coitos se aleja bastante del
discursode los medios de comunicación sobre la analfabeta crónica que firmó su hipoteca
con el dedo, bañada en lágrimas” (152). There is a two-way tendency in the text: the narrator
consciously expels the male subjects from the narrative; her partner is missing, and he does not participate in Cristina’s attempts to solve the problem of eviction. She deprives him of the phallocentric role in the story. On the other hand, she strives to fight the impoverishment by applying to literary competitions, running a digital newspaper, and desperately looking for jobs – including survival work as a waitress. These attempts show the discursive self-assertion of the character.

The narrator Cristina is not a militant member of the protest movements during the first years of her hardships. By the end of the third year, when she is not able to buy school lunches for her children, Cristina meets many people in similar situations at the school yard. They also live in precarity and inform her of possible ways to cooperate with other victims by joining the assembly of the squatters (“asamblea de okupas”) or going to protests. The narrator/character evolves from an individual response to the Crisis with the tools proper to the system that had started it such as the job search, establishing own business, etc., to a voluntary self-exclusion from the neoliberal order. Her individual trauma is similar to the trauma of many other people and as she meets them, together they recognize the similarity of their situations and “…recognizing traumatic pain will facilitate new forms of solidarity; or, to put it differently, that the unexpected comparisons trauma will be, themselves, a kind of progressive politics in action” (Dalley 372). Individual trauma prepares the ground for solidarity and collective action.

Cristina looks for new ways to manifest her solidarity with others in opposition to the social order. The Crisis in the individual story becomes an instrument of biopolitical impact. The bodies of the narrator and her children who suffer from a lack of good clothes, cosmetics, school supplies, and quality food point at the direct impact of the biopolitical
power exercised on the individual. Homelessness through eviction means exclusion for a former member of the middle-class. The post-Crisis generation is at the margins of the dominant social order: “Saber lo que no es lo mismo pobreza que la exclusión; entender que, entre los que estamos en la parte de abajo del territorio partido por la grieta, muchos somos sencillamente excluidos” (145).

Fallarás adds two fictional surrealist fragments to her text named “De cuando nos comíamos las patas de las sillas en uchronia.” As it is seen from the title, “Uchronia” (uchrony) is no time/no space. In these fragments Fallarás shows grotesque and absurd situations of family lunches. She exaggerates the poverty and hunger to unrealistic dimensions when the family members begin eating parts of furniture: “Dado que las astillas de las patitas de la cuna eran más tiernas, solíamos reservarlos para los niños, pese a las protestas del mayor, que, como correspondía a sus ocho años cumplidos, exigía compartir el alimento de los adultos: ladrillo” (37).

These two dystopic fragments show the absurdity of life in times of the Economic Crisis and reinforce other autobiographical parts of the text. Other authors whose texts I analyzed in Chapters One and Two also use similar narrative tactics. Doménico Chiappe, in his Tiempo de encierro, includes fragments in which the main character watches a dystopic TV show about cannibalism in the apocalyptic city under siege. Javier López Menacho includes narrative insertions unrelated to the main story line of his Yo, precario. He calls them “Intermiedo” alluding to “intermedio.” In those fragments, López Menacho exaggerates the personal fears of the main character to absurd levels. This narrative tactic of dystopic insertions helps the reader to perceive the message through extreme hyperbolization.

By the end of her story, Fallarás is more inclined to radicalization due to her exclusion from society. She considers joining the squatters and declares her evolution: “tuve que escribir que yo ya no soy una mujer pacífica, y que por eso no acudí a las manifestaciones del 25 de septiembre en Madrid (148).” This declared radicalization is another individual feature that could motivate an individual to join new horizontal social structures of the protest such as the 15M movement. As Hughes states: “…its structure that is more redolent of anarchism, the global justice movement, environmental activists, squatters’ rights and the peace movement than the more hierarchically organised feminists, trade unions or international solidarity movement in Spain” (410). A lack of “institutionalized solidarity” appeals to people, who, like Cristina in A la puta calle, feel excluded from society. But this deviation from the accepted forms of participation and hierarchies also contributes to the creation of new forms of citizenship. According to García, six to eight million people declared their participation in the 15M Movement on different stages (García 456). This resulted in the evolution of the very idea of solidarity. Rabanal defines it in Spain as a “dual process of self-determination and recognition of one's responsibility for the other” (Rabanal 74) in accordance with the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas's theories. In the context of Spanish movements, solidarity can be viewed as something based on horizontal ties that transform cityscapes, giving new meanings to the ideas of buildings, squares, and streets. These become places of creation and development of communities opposed to the traditional structures of the neoliberal order. Moreno Caballud calls those communities and their impact “cultures of anyone” (41). In this context, the eviction story by Fallarás shows an individual faced with the prospect of joining a protest movement after all other ways of dealing with individual impoverishment have been exhausted. As Cristina transforms from the object-
victim of the Crisis to the subject of new political reality, her militant attitude “ya no soy pacifica” (149) is understood by the reader as a last recourse and reaction to the external circumstances – a way of survival.

The reader of *A la puta calle* can feel the inevitable eviction coming; it is the logical conclusion of the text. All the previous events point the path towards it. As “…the real reader, who commits to the text with a certain demand, and who must situate himself in relationship to the narrate of the text” (Lejeune 233), the reader of Fallarás’s story anxiously awaits for the eviction procedure to happen. The entire texts builds up the commitment between the reader and the narrator within this premise. Yet the reader’s expectation is not satisfied, nor is the conflict resolved. Cristina, opts to possibly join the squatters to overcome her exclusion from society: “tuvo que llegar aquella posibilidad de okupación a los cuarenta y cinco años y con dos hijos… construir allí una nueva forma de vivir en esta sociedad que sin duda nos excluye” (147). Yet the reader never sees her being evicted from the apartment or moving to an empty building together with the other squatters. Instead, she briefly recaps four years of her decay, one by one in four paragraphs, and concludes with an open ending. The unknown future is beyond the limits of this autobiographical story of a personal eviction. In my opinion, this “narrative disappointment” experienced by the reader reflects the atmosphere of the later years of the Economic Crisis. The precarious reality is open-ended and never ends at the same time. The individual must learn how to exist within this reality on a daily basis without expectations of any radical change. The alternative is to survive collectively through the newly acquired agency of informal groups. New participatory forms
of the performance of citizenship express themselves through social cooperation and self-government and mark new solidarity in Spain.\textsuperscript{44}

**Solidarity in Action: *Filtraciones* (Leaks) by Marta Caparrós**

The tradition of considering different historic and cultural periods though the lens of literary “generations” runs deep in Spain despite multiple doubts cast on its relevance for the current period of cultural history.\textsuperscript{45} The principle of automatic reference of a group of people born in certain years as a generation is very convenient for journalism and everyday public discourse. In the case of the text *A la puta calle* by Fallarás, the narrator relates herself to the imagined “generation” whose active life was extremely short, before it was reduced to precarity and survival: “Me da la sensación,” piensa en voz alta, “de que son tipos que hasta los treinta y cinco iban con el carné joven en la mano y a los cincuenta ya están prejubilados. Eso sí que es una vida adulta corta” (57). Comparing the texts by Etxebarría and Fallarás, the reader may observe that a significant number of middle-aged Spaniards were economically and politically excluded, and remained on the margins of society in the years of the Economic Crisis. It is worth comparing their situation to the so-called “generation of one thousand euros” that included a large amount of Spanish youth who also had little chance of full inclusion in socio-economic processes. As the Crisis was one of the main reasons for the exclusion of large amounts of people, some literary texts talk about the next “generation” that followed the generation of one thousand euros. Young people graduated from school

\textsuperscript{44} This transformation results in building new political parties, such as Podemos that emerge based upon non-hierarchical social ties.

into a situation in which the youth unemployment rate was approximately 50% for several years in a row (García 456), and new active society members had no chance of being included in the institutionalized structure of the disappearing welfare state. These people by the beginning of the Economic Crisis were in their early to mid-twenties and entered their thirties in a situation of widespread precarity and economic and political instability. People of this group are the focus of the book *Filtraciones*, by the writer from Madrid, Marta Caparrós. The text includes four micro novels, or *Nouvelles*. The book was recommended for publication by Elvira Navarro, the author of *La trabajadora*. These four brief texts by Caparrós comprise the single volume. They tell stories of thirty-year-old urban residents who find alternative ways to socialize in times of the Crisis and actively participate in the new horizontal forms of engagement such as the 15M movement. Caparrós traces the shift from the individual precarity of the youth to their gradual mobilization and the creation of novel forms of solidarity: new social and cultural ties formed outside formal institutions. Moreover, Caparrós follows the politicization of this generational group and their contribution to new political powers, such as new parties or independent trade unions. She shows changes in the urban environment caused by a conscious refusal of endless consumption. In exchange, the reader may see how the merits of solidarity in the new informal communities start to operate. Caparrós makes use of a traditional third-person narrative. In three out of the four micro-novels her main characters are females, who change their lives in their early thirties. All the stories depict them coming to adulthood in a generation that must live in unstable economic and political conditions with unclear prospects for the future. The topics related and tone of the stories create one macro-narrative. Caparrós shows the symbolic “generational growing
up” gradually, from the beginning of the Economic Crisis and its impact towards an adaptation to the post-Crisis reality and the creation of new communities.

The first micro-novel, *Vacaciones*, tells the story of a freelance reporter, Julia, who returns to Spain from overseas to discover that there are no longer opportunities to find stable employment:

Después de largos años como redactora autónoma en varios países del norte de África, había vuelto a Madrid, pero ya no había conseguido el contrato indefinido del que sí gozaba antes. “Te marchaste justo cuando todo empezó a torcerse y no hay quien lo enmiende” le dijo su jefe…. Había ido encadenando contratos por obra y servicio, dando las gracias por ello. (11)

Julia finds out that she is pregnant and decides to go on a family vacation with her sister’s family. Caparrós tries to show this trip as a sort of “spiritual journey” towards the self. During the beach vacation, Julia witnesses uneasy relations between her sister, her husband, and their daughter, and she also has a miscarriage. Before this event she had been planning her future life with the baby. Afterwards, Julia has no plans. Caparrós shows a failed attempt to change the life of a character who had no responsibilities or attachment to social structures towards traditional family values. The author’s vision implies that the title of the story, *Vacaciones*, is an indicator of her previous life which did not require any social compromise. Caparrós shows life before the Economic Crisis as a permanent “vacation” in a similar way as Rafael Chirbes who refers to the type of pre-Crisis citizens as perennial vacationers in *Crematorio*. People become spectators of their own consumption show spending life on the symbolic “beach vacation.” Yet the first micro-novel is a story of the individual who is in
this situation when change is required. Julia is alone in the end of the story and her future is uncertain.

The second micro-novel, *Atrevimiento*, continues with the topic and suggests some possible ways out of individual solitude and social marginalization through solidarity and collective action. The main character is also a young female, Adriana, who is trying to establish herself in Madrid as a psychologist after completing her degree. In times of severe unemployment this proves impossible and Adriana takes entry-level positions unrelated to her education. At the same time the reader gets to know the story of her relationship with Santi, a young architect, who left her some time earlier and who is trying to renew their relationship. The reader sees multiple scenes with people in their early thirties, as they are trying to adapt to the reality of an unstable and precarious life. The characters live in shared apartments with roommates and gradually engage in the emerging decentralized social movements such as 15M. They also participate in the activities of the informal community centers established by the squatters in the seized properties. The micro-novel shows an evolution of the character from being lonely and abandoned in her early youth towards joining the common effort in the new reality. This gradual evolution has several steps. In the beginning, the characters do not feel empowered to fight the Economic Crisis and, thus, behave as objects who are manipulated into unemployment and precarity. After several months and years of life inside this constant instability, Fallarás shows a gradual evolution of the characters from individual suffering and enclosure, such as in the first micro-novel, to the acquisition of new active identities. It is worth reminding the reader that Doménico Chiappe’s novel *Tiempo de encierro* also shows the earlier stages of the Economic Crisis, somewhere between 2008 and 2010, and concentrates on the loneliness and self-isolation of
the female character inside her home. In the latter stages described in *Filtraciones* (the events narrated by Caparrós take place somewhere in 2013–2014), isolation transforms in new connections and emerging solidarity. This identity is shaped by joining other people and finding ways to meaningfully spend time, as opposed to the permanent and desperate job search. This evolution happens to Adriana´s character as well. As she discovers pleasure in new participatory activities, she assumes responsibility for her life and makes some important decisions. She breaks off her relationship with Santi and establishes a union at her office to prevent others from being laid off. Life in this “generation” is determined by lack of employment and inability to use their professional talents:

As the scale of the Crisis grows, the job taken by Adriana, even though it is a job of survival, becomes a privilege: “amigos y compañeros de carrera empezaron a quedarse en el paro. Tener un trabajo se había convertido en un privilegio. Adriana era una afortunada” (49). As the character’s life is filled with insecurity and the possibility of losing even this precarious position, she starts looking for distractions or an alternative to this “work-home” social model. Caparrós tries to show how the non-traditional common spaces and community organizations enter the lives of the people who were supposed to become part of the middle-class but never did because of the Economic Crisis. They are unable to afford their own
housing or make long-term plans. Economic instability sometimes even prevents representatives of the Crisis generation from having long-term relations or children. Yet the author shows how her characters become part of the new non-hierarchical social structures aimed at fighting the condition of forced precarity. Social clusters founded by “los indignados” or by the members of the 15M movement were perceived at first as marginalized communities, but later they attracted the masses. About 7 million people in Spain declared their participation in the 15M movement in 2014 (García 458). The protest movement was de-marginalized. In the early Crisis novel by Pablo Gutiérrez, Democracia, members of the protest group “El comité” occupy Marco’s apartment and behave as marginals. Marco’s middle-class wife runs away horrified once she sees them at her place. Several years later the attitude in society changes as the common spaces become a place for new politics to arise. In the same way the attitude of middle-class Spaniards changes. Caparrós writes about one such community she calls “la corredera” located in the occupied building:

…pensaban que no encajarían en este ambiente, los centros ocupas eran para hippies de pelo largo o semirapado, y la ropa holgada y vieja, algo inocentes y trasnochados. Aun así decidieron pasarse. … les vendría bien cambiar de aires, conocer a gente nueva, probar cómo eran aquellos cursos que tan apetecibles parecían en el papel.

(56)

As the stereotype of marginalization is broken, Caparrós introduces these new community spaces as the mechanism to oppose the official discourse of the Crisis and as places where the new solidarity is formed: “…Y dentro del edificio pasan cosas. Charlas políticas, ciclos de debates, proyecciones de película” (56). The nature of the 15M movement is decentralized
yet it contributes to building a new collective identity of the people, whose daily life was deeply impacted by the Crisis. As Asara puts it:

The movement… managed to build a collective identity because of its strong inclusiveness, tolerance and solidarity, which allowed the participants to find common ground beyond their ideological differences. This collective identity was boosted through the construction of daily sharing practices of caceroladas, food sharing, night camping, assemblies, direct action, etc. After the movement’s decentralizations, networks of mutual support were established in each neighbourhood to help victims of foreclosures and/or people experiencing economic difficulties. (532)

Caparrós shows her characters as they find these support networks inside the new communal spaces. Volunteering and participation in diverse activities reshape Adriana’s attitude toward her life and, according to Caparrós, create a new politically active and engaged subject.

Adriana becomes a member of the group “El colectivo.” It has the same name as the group of the pseudo-elitist intellectuals in the novel Deudas vencidas by Recaredo Veredas. Yet the activity of the group is totally different. Adriana’s “colectivo” is dedicated to amateur gardening on the outskirts of Madrid. Their practical output is minimal as the urban dwellers fail at the beginning: “…Entre las diez personas del colectivo apenas consiguen repartirse una decena de tomates mancillados y otras tantas lechugas agujereadas por el pulgón. Pero Adriana sigue acudiendo cada martes. Cree que es la sensación de la tierra húmeda entre las manos lo que le gusta” (57).

Lumpenized forms of protest in “el comité” depicted by Gutiérrez and elitist self-separation in “el colectivo” by Veredas are substituted by massive middle-class
engagement and participation through the 15M movement. Caparrós traces the transformation of the character from the individualist worried about her failed relationship and job search to the political subject who works at the collective projects and takes active part in establishing the union at her job. Although Adriana realizes that it would result in her future unemployment, she is more convinced of the importance of her social engagement and its role in bigger change. This sort of “bildungsroman,” the story of individual evolution, is more interesting from the perspective of new social formations resulting from new forms of solidarity. This solidarity becomes an ideologeme that shapes the opposition to the current economic situation. Solidarity interpreted this way, as Jameson puts it, is: “…a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the ‘collective characters’ which are the classes in opposition” (Jameson 87).

Caparrós is convincing when she describes the role of informal squatter centers such as the fictional “la corredera,” as they attract the middle-class and promote further systemic changes. She never mentions new political parties such as Podemos, but her text shows the fertile ground for their emergence. As Moreno Caballud mentioned, the public discourse and cultural authorities are challenged and “anyone becomes cultural authorities (Moreno Caballud 213).” Characters by Caparrós are this “anyone” who replace the “voice of authority” that preciously shaped the dominant discourse. The establishment is challenged by massive disagreement with its policies. At the same time Caparrós offers an open-ended future for her Adriana:

Será un alivio pasajero. Después sí que la echarán, volverá a estar en el paro una larga temporada. Volverá a encontrar un trabajo que no será el definitivo. Cambiará de
casa, también de país, vivirá con personas que aún no conoce, que aún no existen y que ahora mismo no imagina que algún día vayan a existir. (132)

The book’s title, *Filtraciones*, is taken from the title of the third micro-novel and could be translated as “Leaks.” It refers to leaking pipes behind the ceiling in the bathroom of the main character’s apartment. The author deals with the problem of immigration and identities of immigrants, and once again talks about young people who are trying find their way in life. Jules is a descendant of Spaniards who emigrated to Marseille in France when his father was a child. Now Jules lives in Madrid with his partner Ana and teaches French. His job loss coincides with Ana’s pregnancy and with the visit of his father, Antonio, from France.

Caparrós develops two parallel lines. One of them is the leakage in the bathroom that leaves a stain on the ceiling. Jules cannot fix it, despite his multiple attempts to repaint the wall. The other is his father’s visit, Jules’s anxiety on the matter, and tension in their relationship. The stain is virtually impossible to eliminate: “Podeis raspar y pintar todo lo que queráis pero acabará por volver a salir,” les dijo aquel tipo con gesto lacónico. “No es una mera gotera, son filtraciones, algo mucho más profundo” (150). Caparrós creates an obvious metaphor of the leakage coming out as a stain on the freshly repainted wall as a condition of life in Spain. Behind the façade of prosperity and liberal democracy there is a decay and slow destruction that constantly emerges and cannot be hidden. The character who tries to hide this leakage behind the layer of paint is shown as an indecisive person, unable to assume responsibility for his growing family. He is ashamed to ask his visiting father for money needed to cover expenses related with the baby. His father Antonio also has a dual Spanish-French identity, yet Antonio is a worker from Marseille who had to educate two kids by himself as a single father. His figure is an implicit censor for Jules who does not want to feel as a failure
because of his unemployment. On the other hand, Antonio is able to fix the leakage. Instead of hiring expensive official contractors, he buys himself the materials and invites illegal immigrants from Africa to fix the wall. They remove the old pipes and repaint everything, so the stain will not appear anymore. Within the story Caparrós tries to approach the concepts of migration and nomadic identities, shared by both father and son who are rooted neither in Spain nor in France. Jules is afraid to settle down and assume family responsibilities in times of economic precarity. His partner’s income is not enough, and he is unable to find a job. Antonio refuses to give him money; his assistance is limited to fixing the wall. But this act makes Jules understand the need for self-reliance and emotional maturity. In this story Caparrós works with the impact of the Economic Crisis at the level of private family life and the transformation of the family as a micro-social structure. Jules and Ana do not go to protests and neither do they participate in squatting. When there is no more money for rent, they ask for help from Ana’s parents. Both Jules and his father show a lack of belonging to Spain, despite being Spaniards by origin. They preserve a distanced point of view to what is happening in Spain, and Caparrós underlines this distance in several episodes when they fail to understand the meaning of Spanish words:

- Tu chapuza no tiene buena pinta. — dijo Ana.
- ¿Qué es chapuza?
- ¿Ocho años en España y todavía no sabes lo que es chapuza? — Jules se quedó en silencio (142).

Despite these signs of non-belonging to Spain, Jules must deal with Spain’s problems. The leak that at first seemed as something easy to fix (“son goteras de toda la vida” [146]), is in fact so serious that it is identified by the other more serious term: “filtraciones.” The
characters by Caparrós grow from individualism to responsibility and solidarity. These become manifestations of citizenship. In this context, I see citizenship not as a formal belonging to a certain country, but as an agency of the individual, proven by their engagement in individual or collective action. The identity of the subject belonging to the welfare society is gradually replaced by the identity of the engaged person, committed to one’s own life and to the life of others. Citizenship reveals itself through the performative actions of the character, as Joseph defines it: “citizenship is not organic, it must be acquired through public and psychic participation…The notion of citizenship connotes a sense of engagement with the public realm (Joseph 3–4).” I argue that the identities of these characters, who were previously free of commitments, transform from deterritorialized, nomadic subjects into actors of common cause. Although the common cause may be something as plural and lacking institutionalization as the 15M movement, with time the movement partially evolved again to become vertically-structured political parties with a strong populist component. The narrative by Caparrós captures this change in all four micro-novels.

The last micro-novel is the story of two Spanish friends, Marcos and Alex, who live in Berlin and hold part-time jobs. Marcos meets a partner and decides to follow her to her studies in Holland and commit himself to family life. Alex, on the other hand, keeps evading social ties with family and friends. He does not want to visit his dying mother in Spain, and he fails to maintain long-term relationships. But with time he also changes, and at the end of the story Marcos receives a postcard from Alex who followed his partner to Perú. Although the last micro-novel does not happen in Spain and is not centered on the Economic Crisis as the other three, it adds to the illusionary generational portrait of growing up and becoming a
responsible and engaged participant of social structures. In this last story the characters do not join protest movements but instead commit to family life. Looking at Caparrós’s four novels, we observe the movement from social self-exclusion to a return to society through solidarity with others. Before the Crisis, the generation of Caparrós’s characters was gripped by self-alienation and individualism. The economic change contributed to the evolution of views and individual values, increasing the need to share time, emotions, and cultural practices with broader groups of people. The need for individual support resulted in the creation of collective networks not integrated into formal mechanisms of the state. This transformation from alienation to engagement becomes the main topic for Caparrós and makes Filtraciones a depiction of the important generational shift happening in Spain in the 2010s.

The three texts by Lucía Extebarría, Cristina Fallarás and Marta Caparrós demonstrate the fluidity of the generic boundaries in the literature of Economic Crisis in Spain. Genres of the essay and the autobiography in cases of Etxebarría’s Liquidación por derribo and Fallarás’s A la puta calle tend to include high degree of fictionalization of the reality depicted together with fictionalization of the self. That places them on the limit between the documentary genres and the works of fiction. At the same time, the three texts allow to trace the chronological development of main themes related to the Economic Crisis in Spain. Earlier texts by Etxebarría and Fallarás declare strong individualistic stance, when the main character/narrator must face the economic challenges by herself. This self affirmation of a strong female identity against the hardships of the time defies phallogocentric norms. Both authors trace the emerging social movements opposing to the neoliberal practices. Etxebarría and Fallarás depict the birth of the new forms of solidarity. The book Filtraciones by Marta
Caparrós tells the stories in the later stages of the economic Crisis in 2014/2015. That is why she concentrates on the operation of already established new decentralized political movements. The reader may see the impact of the new forms of solidarity and participatory democracy on lives of younger generation in Spain.
In 2017, from its headquarters in Brussels, the European Union declared the end of the Economic Crisis. This bold statement was based on multiple figures showing that unemployment rates were at their lowest since 2008 and that the banks were stronger. However, this claim did not give much grounds for optimism in Spain. The unemployment rates among youth remain very high and the economic instability had now transformed into a long-term political crisis. Catalonia’s independence process together with the constant inability of the ruling Popular Party to form a stable majority in the parliament ended with the party’s removal from power in 2018. At first glance the political instability could well have resulted in economic consequences. Yet the Spanish economy is still on the rise in comparison to previous years of the Crisis and does not show strong dependence on the political crisis of the Spanish state. According to data published in early 2018 by the National Statistics Institute: “…La economía española creció el 3,1% en 2017, con lo que suma cuatro años de recuperación y tres años consecutivos creciendo por encima del 3%, de acuerdo con el avance del PIB publicado hoy por el Instituto Nacional de Estadística” (“La economía

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46 In 2017, the influential Spanish newspaper El mundo declares the end of the Crisis: “Bruselas da por superada la crisis diez años después de su estallido: el paro está en su nivel más bajo desde 2008 y los bancos son más fuertes” (Río).

47 According to State Radio and Television of Spain (RTVE) in September 2017 the unemployment levels for youth under twenty-five years of age remained at 38% compared to 11% in Germany (España lidera…).
española crece…”). The loss of direct connection between the political processes and the economic situation in the country is evidence of the weakening role of the Spanish nation-state from the point of view of its impact on the economy. The economy of Spain is becoming more distant from local politics as it deepens its connections to global markets through further globalization. On the other hand, the results of the Economic Crisis on Spanish society have been deeply transformative. Mass protests, public discussions, new political parties, and the participation of “everyone” in the building of new social structures stand as serious factors reshaping Spain in the contemporary world. The perception of modernity in Spain has changed as the concept of the Crisis became considered as something less temporal (something that has its beginning and its end) and transformed into a vision of contemporary reality as deeply unstable and full of unexpected risks and challenges. In my opinion, the post-Crisis generation of Spaniards has grown up in that worldview and moved away from perceiving reality as progressive movement or constant development. The Crisis has slowly vanished in the statistics of economic growth. The attitudes of the neoliberalist welfare state aimed at endless consumption and accumulation of wealth were tamed by the experiences of the Crisis survivors. And the Economic Crisis itself became the contemporary Spanish zeitgeist, a marker of the ongoing political, social, and cultural reality of today. Spanish writers work in a vibrant society at the crossroads of international migrations, on the border between European and African cultural spaces, in a country with a well-developed publishing industry, literary prizes, and existing reading culture. These factors contribute to a constant reconsidering of contemporaneity in fictional works. As the Economic Crisis was the main subject on the Spanish agenda from 2008 to at least 2014, the vast and prolific literary reaction to it was unavoidable. As I have shown in this dissertation, the Economic
Crisis, its impact, and the idea of the Crisis in general received multiple interpretations in works by Spanish authors. The aspects that, in my view, were crucial to trace this literary variety were the spaces of the Crisis, the categories of debt and precarity, the symbolic meaning of economic processes, and the relation between the Crisis and the legacy of the Spanish Civil War. Last, but not least, there was the phenomenon of solidarity in overcoming the consequences of the Crisis. My analysis of these aspects in recent texts by ten Spanish authors has allowed me to point to the appearance of generic modification within the wider genre of the novel that I define as the Novel of Economic Crisis. This variety of novels is part of a larger literary movement named by Valdivia as “Literature of Economic Crisis” (Valdivia 163) that comprises texts in other genres, such as essays or poetry. In this dissertation I have traced several aspects that, I argue, are crucial in defining this type of Spanish novel. I have applied a multidisciplinary approach to literary texts and sought to theorize each of them and describe the ways in which they operate as novelistic texts.

First, I analyzed the concept of spaces of the Economic Crisis and their presence in the novels Democracia by Pablo Gutiérrez, Tiempo de encierro by Doménico Chiappe, and La trabajadora by Elvira Navarro. In my analysis I relied on theories of space by Bachelard, Benjamin, and Heidegger. The private spaces of the characters in these novels were forcibly changed due to evictions and stimulated the characters to participate in protests, as seen in the novels by Gutiérrez and Chiappe. The Crisis also changed urban spaces and impacted the psychology of the characters, as happened to those of Tiempo de encierro and La trabajadora. Separately, the symbolic space of the novel Democracia is used by Gutiérrez as an attempt to fictionalize economic processes and give them universal dimensions. In the earlier stages of the Crisis (2008–2011), the characters attempted to hide inside the private
spaces of their homes. In the latter stages of the Crisis, the novels show the tendency for the characters to come out from the private spaces and take part in social and protest movements within the public spaces. This evolution of the spaces of the Crisis from private to public and from individual to social in the novels, reflects the tendencies of reactions to the Economic Crisis in Spain.

Next, I approached the categories of debt and precarity as inevitable signs of the Economic Crisis in individual life. Debt (and mortgages in particular), along with the real estate bubble, defined the emerging Crisis. Precarity of the masses appeared as a result of unemployment and the inability to pay debts which had been assumed in better times. The theories of Berlant and Dienst helped me to trace the multiple nature of debts not only as an economic category but also as a powerful ethical imperative. I analyzed the depiction of the symbolic debts of Spaniards to their past and to one another in times of the Economic Crisis in the novels Deudas vencidas by Recaredo Veredas, Ajuste de cuentas by Benjamín Prado, and Yo, precario by Javier López Menacho. Here, the debts cause impoverishment which leads to individual precarity and a specific worldview. The class of precariat as defined by Butler and Berlant emerges as a result. Many citizens remain excluded from social life and survive day to day as shown in the novels analyzed. Precarity becomes permanent. That is why I contend that in the case of Spain, the Crisis had a beginning but no foreseeable end as its structure changed. Precarity and instability became an inherent part of the post-Crisis reality and corresponding worldview.

Two large epic novels by Rafael Chirbes, Crematorio and En la orilla, trace the zeitgeist in Spain from before the Crisis to the middle of it. Chirbes creates vast panoramic texts revealing the complexity of contradictions that originated from unresolved conflicts between
the descendants of the winners and losers of the Spanish Civil War. Multiple political, social, and economic imbalances appeared as the winners and their descendants monopolized political and economic networks of power. That, together with global economic processes, contributed to the hidden exclusion of many citizens from different areas of life. Chirbes reveals the changes on the level of a small village and in the interpersonal relations between his characters. Economic relations based on imbalances resulted in the decay of social and emotional ties between people. The globalisation processes portrayed by Chirbes bring immigrant characters to the scene. They, as well as Spaniards, become deterritorialized subjects, as the condition of attachment to certain spaces becomes irrelevant in times of economic instability. From the view depicted by Chirbes, the economic context of contemporaneity shifts to the symbolic atemporal plane, showing Spain throughout history and as a part of broader humanity. The novels overcome temporal restrictions and combine the historic and economic context of the 2000s with universal aspects of the human condition.

Generic shifts in the literature of Crisis also make it possible for the text to exist on the limits between traditional genres of the novel and the essay. I demonstrate this fluidity of generic boundaries in the work of Lucía Etxebarría, Cristina Fallarás, and Marta Caparrós. Their texts combine traits of fiction, essay, and autobiography with elements of self-fictionalization. Elements of essay and autobiography in Etxebarría’s *Liquidación por derribo* and Fallarás’s *A la puta calle*, although based on real events, include high degrees of fictionalization of reality depicted together with the fictionalization of the self by the narrators. The three texts analyzed in chapter four demonstrate the chronological development of main themes related to the Economic Crisis in Spain. In Etxebarría and
Fallarás’ texts written in the early years of the Crisis there is a strong individualistic stance, reinforced by a portrayal of strong women who defied traditional phallogocentric norms and faced the Crisis by themselves. The book by Caparrós written later, in 2014, shows already established decentralized political movements and their presence in the daily lives of the younger generation of Spaniards. The texts of Filtraciones portray the impact of the new forms of solidarity and participatory democracy, and ways for people to engage in collective action.

The literature of the Economic Crisis in Spain, and more narrowly the Novel of Economic Crisis, naturally exists within the temporal boundaries set by the Economic Crisis that began in 2008 and which does not have an “official” end date. I argue that changes in the worldview caused by the Crisis and the instability it brought to the welfare state are irreversible. The idea that there is no perennial and uninterrupted development from good to better times is rooted these days. On the other hand, the popular movements brought to Spain by the Crisis have become political parties such as Podemos. Their vertical structure and the mistakes of the leaders evoke the previous traditional political parties while their agenda is at risk of becoming populistic. In the literature and in the genre of novel, the legacy of the Economic Crisis has brought a variety of new topics and situations. Among those are the situation of the precarious subject, ethical choices of the disappearing middle class, participation in new democratic movements, and the creation of networks of solidarity as opposed to traditional state-run networks of power. The voice of “cultures of anyone” is legitimized in Spanish novels of the Crisis. The voices of the intellectuals, the experts or “los

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48 In his interview in the summer of 2015, Angel Basanta, president of Association of the Literary Critics of Spain, claimed “Después de la crisis ya nunca será lo mismo” meaning that the “ghost” of instability and the risk of precarity are always in the background.
letrados” (including the writers) no longer have an exclusive monopoly on discourse. The writers themselves acknowledge the right of “everyman” to voice their concern and step aside in their texts, sharing the flow with the characters who represent the people. The uncertainty of post-Crisis times to come is reflected in the literary texts analyzed in this dissertation and expressed by multiple characters and narrators whose voices deliver the message.
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