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## NO(N)-PLACE LIKE HOME: POSTNATIONAL NARRATIVE IN CARLOS FUENTES'S *GRINGO VIEJO*

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*I had no nation now but the imagination.<sup>1</sup>*

The question of Latin American identity, usually tied to *mestizaje* and the loss of cultural essence after the arrival of the colonizer, has been a focus of postmodern critics throughout a larger part of the 20th century. One of the readers of Fuentes's novel *Gringo viejo*, for example, refers to David Alfaro Siqueiros' painting, *Nuestra imagen actual* (1947), displayed in the museum of contemporary art in Mexico, as a possible subtext of some of Fuentes's work (Gyurko 280-1). The painting shows a dark-skinned, bare-chested, and faceless man reaching out with both hands towards the spectator. For the critic, this image captures the paradox of the Mexican who, since colonization, "has still not recovered his identity or been allowed to create a new one" (281). Identity, for Gyurko and other postmodern readers alike, holds the qualities of an essence—in the platonic sense—as something transcendental, pure, and incorruptible. Once identity/origin is deemed lost, one has to look towards an imagined past to recover a sense of self.

The reading I am proposing of *Gringo viejo* aims to show that Carlos Fuentes was a writer and thinker well ahead of his time. Decades before the emergence of post-national discourse, Fuentes already envisioned and novelized a globalized world in need of a change of direction. Rather than breaking with postmodern values, however, the Mexican author adheres to them, while at the same time proposing a reevaluation and redefinition of some of postmodernism's key terms and concepts. His objective consisted of proposing a path, through art, for a constructive dialogue among nations who would coexist—on equal terms and with equal rights and opportunities—in a world "en el que todas las

culturas, y sus manifestaciones políticas, tuviesen vigencia” (*Tres discursos* 71-2). *Gringo viejo* promotes two main changes to established postmodern tendencies, very much in tune with recent postnational discourse:<sup>2</sup> firstly, a proposed change of direction when addressing the question of national identity (from the past towards the future), and secondly, a reevaluation of the concept of identity itself. In keeping with Pazian analogy, Fuentes moves away from an inward, platonic understanding of essence, towards a selfhood perceived as an outward and dynamic process of mutual growth with the other. As is evident in many of his novels, and also explicitly expressed in his essays, Fuentes rejects the validation of the past as the sacred keeper of a nation’s *Volksgeist* and fixed identity. Furthermore, for Fuentes, as *Gringo viejo* shows, rather than a source for melancholy, the loss of pure origin can also constitute a strength, as the faceless man from the past opens up towards a new kind of identity construction, one within a shared postnational future.

### *I. Postnational Construction of Identity*

As postnational critics well have expressed, the realities of our globalized world question the traditional understanding of nation, culture, and identity, and call for a redefinition of their meaning, in order to keep up with socio- and geopolitical changes (Schultermandl 12). Among one of the most representative examples is the questioning of cultural essentialisms as the source and carrier of national identity. Postnational thinkers decidedly move away from the concept of rooted identities, because, as they propose, in today’s dynamic world they are losing their bearing. This idea of identity as a collective and evolutionary process can be found throughout Fuentes’s work. As Julio Ortega rightly observes,

Fuentes será uno de los primeros escritores mexicanos en poner en cuestión la idea de la identidad como lo idéntico, estable y prefijado. Desde sus primeros relatos exploró la identidad como indeterminación, proceso y diferencia. La novedad de esta propuesta introdujo la duda metódica, creativa, en el edificio monumental de la identidad nacional [...]. Fuentes radicalizó [el cuestionamiento de la complacencia nacionalista en una identidad esencial y verificable]; introdujo la indeterminación del sujeto al someterlo a la práctica del otro, a su diferencia ganada en el diálogo (69).

George Irish, one of Fuentes’s readers, equally recalls the Bergsonian words of one of the main characters in *La región más transparente*, who “postulates that Mexico’s originality is *not evaluated in terms of sources* but rather in terms of an *evolutionary experience* [sic] which gains its validity and dynamism from the reality of the present as an *ongoing dialectical process* and from the [yet] undefined possibilities of the future” (32, emphasis added).

Fuentes’s novel *Gringo viejo* is a further illustration of this questioning of

fixed cultural essentialisms and the reexamination of identity, which takes into account the present and future interrelations with the national, cultural other. When reading *Gringo viejo*, critics have commented on the obvious parallelisms between the fictional Bierce and Don Quixote, supported by the fact that Cervantes's novel is among one of the few objects Bierce brings with him to Mexico. Therefore, Bierce has been widely read as a symbolic reincarnation of Don Quixote—due to his attempts at self-fashioning, his overall failures, his attachment to a past no longer relevant—or even as an Anti-Quixote.<sup>3</sup> I would like to propose yet another point of connection between *Gringo viejo* and *Don Quixote*. Since Fuentes, the writer, also acted as his own reader and literary theorist, his essays provide ample explanations for his novels, while his fiction often serves as a novelization or practical application of his thought. In his acceptance speech for the Cervantes prize (1987), Fuentes characterizes *Don Quixote* as the work of art that marks the beginning of modernity, due to the notorious instability of the novel's characters and settings. According to Fuentes, the awareness of lacking an immutable, ascribed identity is what motivates modern man to set out for a quest of self-definition. In the absence of a divine, *a priori* meaning of the self and his world, this process of self-fashioning occurs through man's interaction with his surroundings. Therefore, I argue that one of *Gringo viejo*'s main ideas, tied to Cervantes, finds its corresponding theoretical counterpart in the second part of *Valiente mundo nuevo*, where Fuentes maintains that especially for our modernity we need “el reconocimiento constante de que vivimos en un mundo variable,” so that “no tenemos más remedio que dirigirnos siempre al otro” (142-143).

This lack of fixed identities cherished as an incentive to reach out and grow with the other constitutes one of the pillars of post-national discourse, and also consistently arises as a topic of discussion on modernity—a discussion to which Fuentes was an avid contributor. Rather than a deficiency in the negative sense, indetermination and uprootedness could become the strength of the Mexican people. With Fuentes's quote in mind, Siqueiros's painting could then be read as an artistic rendering of the potential of an undefined nation reaching out towards the future and the other. In that sense, we then could add to the original title of the painting, *Nuestra imagen actual*, Fuentes's words written in *Geografía de la novela*: “no somos aún. Estamos siendo” (169). Replacing “being” for “becoming” implies not only looking inwards, but also—and especially—looking forward and outwards. The faceless Mexican's outstretched hands signals, thus, the readiness to grow with other nations, the desire to shape and be shaped through dialogue and cultural exchange, not just as one national identity, but rather as (and through) postnational affiliations.<sup>4</sup>

## ***II. Fuentes's Postnational Narrative as a Polycentric Non-Place and Universal Strangerhood***

The present day redefinition of identity as a collective and ongoing project leads me now to Fuentes's postnational thought, as I see it crystallized in his novel *Gringo viejo*. In his speeches, essays, and fiction, Fuentes expresses a coherent and consistent worldview, in tune with his political, social, and artistic agenda, reminiscent, at times, of 19th century symbolic realists. However, contrary to a Galdosian-type *novela de tesis*, where characters symbolize certain national elements and—to drive home the author's critical view of his nation—are either killed off or happily married in the end, the final destiny of *Gringo viejo*'s characters leaves the reader with more questions than answers. All main characters are either lonely or dead; one killed not once, but twice. In an apparent attempt to push his readers over the edge and into depression, Fuentes closes the novel with chapter XXIII containing only one sentence: the oft-repeated “Ella se sienta sola y recuerda” (236). If Fuentes's agenda consisted of convincing the reader of the benefit of a postnational affiliation between Mexico and the U.S., why does he not leave us with two enamored neighbors happily riding off into the sunset? And should we read this implied impossibility of a union of two cultures as a proof of the author's disillusionment with American foreign policies, leading to its isolation on the world stage?

The novel's refrain-like “Se sienta sola y recuerda” has been mainly read as a failure of, or as a lack of readiness on the character's part for, a fertile cultural encounter between nations. The use of the verb “sentar” could certainly be interpreted as a veiled “sentir,” further stressing what appears to be Harriet's state of loneliness following the deaths of Arroyo and Bierce, and her subsequent abandonment of Mexico. A postnational reading, however, may argue the opposite. By preserving Harriet as a separate subject, Fuentes willfully avoids the utopian myth of a “humanistic globalization,” which supposes the “harmonious union” of cultures after erasing the differences between them. This eradication of differences for the sake of a happy ending is implicitly yet forcefully rejected in the novel. Heeding Spivac's warning of the dangers of a (former) colonizer's “triumphalist self-declared hybridity” leading to neocolonialism (cited in Kuortti and Nyman 2007: 3), Fuentes cautions against “la velocísima integración mundial que podría dejarnos a todos sin rostros, o con una sola máscara sonriente: la del robot feliz” (*Tres discursos* 75). Through Harriet's complex function in the novel, Fuentes first refers to and then decidedly avoids both traps. Her inner conflict (that of unquenched desire) manifests itself in her symbolic and contradictory feelings of attraction and hatred for Arroyo. Harriet hates the Mexican revolutionary for making her first realize what she could become by his side, while at the same time showing her the impossibility of their union. Due to the work's title and the fact that it novelizes the writer Ambrose Bierce's mysterious disappearance in Mexico, it is natural that readers

have mostly focused on the old *Gringo* as the preferred object of interpretation. However, by shifting the focus towards Harriet as the possible protagonist, we can uncover an important underlying message, which exemplifies Fuentes's postnational thought and prophetic vision. When Fuentes leaves us with the final image of Harriet, seated and alone, rather than with a robotic happy smile on her face, he does so in order to stress her role in the novel as a postnational agent of negotiation. The *Gringa*'s function is to open a space for dialogue, with the goal to foster mutual understanding while respecting their differences and preserving idiosyncrasies. Rather than seeing Harriet as a passive force and as one of the multiple narrators, as has been stated (Gyurko 269), we could read Harriet as Fuentes's Borgean double and implied author of *Gringo viejo*. The insistence on "se sienta sola," as opposed to the expected "se siente sola," could simply describe the physical gesture—more so than an emotional state—signaling preparation for the writing process. Physical solitude, rather than loneliness, is what allows her to suspend time and to collect her memories. The refrain-like quote sheds the negative connotations of abandonment and loss (the previous apparent leitmotif of the novel), and now refers to a writer's seclusion and reflection. This implies, furthermore, that Harriet does not just hold the central role in the novel. She also appears as multiple characters, each connected to two separate times: the Harriet of the past living in Mexico, and the Harriet of the present, writing *Gringo viejo*. Through her writing, the multiple pasts and presents converge: not just her own, but also those of all other characters. Within this confluence of time, as Harriet sits down, remembers and writes, we recognize the powers of the narrative voice Fuentes describes in *Geografía de la novela*:

Esa voz nos cuestiona, nos llega desde muy lejos pero también desde muy adentro de nosotros mismos. Es la voz de nuestra propia humanidad revelada en las fronteras olvidadas de la conciencia. Proviene de tiempos múltiples y de espacios lejanos. Pero crea, con nosotros, el terreno común donde los negados pueden juntarse y contarse las historias prohibidas por los negadores. (172, emphasis added)

From this perspective, Harriet, the author, clearly embodies the *descubridor* Fuentes refers to in *Valiente mundo nuevo*: "el descubridor es el deseador, el memorioso, el nominador y el voceador" (46). Driven by the desire to understand, rather than to change or civilize the different-other, as was her goal in the beginning of her stay at the Miranda Ranch, Harriet eventually discards the role of the colonizer and becomes a discoverer with a postnational consciousness, moving from eurocentrism towards polycentrism. For Fuentes, as he explains in this prophetic essay, the discoverer "no sólo quiere descubrir la realidad; también quiere nombrarla, desealarla, decirla, recordarla. A veces todo ello se resume en otro propósito: imaginarla" (46). However, the invention of her "New World," through her writing, memory, and imagination, fulfills a completely different purpose than that of a conqueror. Written in the present

tense, the refrain-like quote contrasts with the past tense of the novel, and further reinforces the idea of the act of writing as an extemporal act suspending the linear time of narration. In her solitary realm of imagination, multiple times of narration are invited to intersect: the circular flow of time, symbolized by Harriet's repetition of seasons and indicative of the time of writing; and linear time, symbolized by Arroyo's one and only season, indicative of the time of narration. Even the structure of the novel itself could be interpreted both ways: as a false chronology—narrating Harriet's slow transformation from a troubled and uprooted identity into a character who discovers a way of belonging—or, if read as a circular text, taking as starting points any of the refrain-like “se sienta sola”s marking the eternal *ahora* of the time of writing.

If we read *Gringo viejo* as a circular rather than a chronological novel, Harriet becomes the demiurge at its center, taking on the role of the intradiegetic creator of time and space. Declaring herself the ruler and keeper of time, Harriet announces that “voy a regresar con tu tiempo, Arroyo; con el tiempo del viejo; los voy a guardar, Arroyo; tú no lo sabes pero voy a ser dueña de todo el tiempo que gane aquí” (140). The meaning of Harriet's name is equally significant here, and further supports her central function in the novel. Harriet comes from the Old German Henrik, meaning the ruler of home. In that sense, we could argue that Harriet, rather than a fully developed character in the traditional sense, acts the part and holds the symbolic meaning of place. More specifically, she fits the definition of Marc Augé's *non-place*: a space defining our modernity, “in which neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make any sense; spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality, in which only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesize the existence of a past and glimpse the possibility of a future” (87). For Augé, a *non-place*, because of its anonymity, solitude, and certain neutrality (read: lack of fixed identity), facilitates the encounter and collective experience of human destinies (120). As Harriet sits down—alone—and remembers, she offers herself up as an empty vessel or a *non-place*. Her memory and imagination, devoid of an individual center, open a collective space and time with a new center of enunciation, welcoming and connecting the many uprooted and ex-centric characters of the novel.

The novel clearly suggests that only as a *non-place* is Harriet able to become the voice of those who before were silenced by History and their respective nations: the voice of Bierce—his regrets, losses, and unknown death—, and the voice of the Moon-woman, who gave up her name but now can tell her story through the *gringa*, her *descubridora*: “sólo se lo podría contar a alguien llegada de una tierra tan lejana y extraña como los Estados Unidos, el otro mundo, el mundo que no es México, el mundo distante y curioso, *excéntrico* y marginal de los yanquis” (*Gringo viejo* 157). Harriet's centricity in the novel and her ex-centricity as a *non-place* become evident throughout *Gringo viejo*. She facilitates the multiple discourses of others, including her father's black



lover in Cuba, by supplanting the lover's imagined loneliness with that of the abandoned daughter's. Finally, her memory as a *non-place* invites Arroyo's voice and opens a space for him to speak for his oppressed and silenced people. While Harriet is writing, Tomás Arroyo speaks through her and for his people: "Tomás Arroyo. Para ti, Rosario, Remedios, Jesús, Benjamín, José, mi coronel Frutos García, Chenchó Mansalvo, tú misma Garduña, en nombre de las chozas y las prisiones y los talleres, en nombre de los piojos y los petates, en nombre de..." (187). This imagined ventriloquism is particularly telling, since the repetition of "en nombre de" takes on biblical undertones and thus stresses even more the correlation between enunciation and divine-like creation, as well as between enunciation and self-sacrifice, both characteristic of Harriet's function in the text.<sup>5</sup>

Harriet the writer becomes thus "the nombrador" of the Mexican *campesinos* by replacing the Versailles ball-room of mirrors with her own solitude, her own memory, and her own imagination. The insistence in the novel on the question of whether she, like the others, contemplated herself in the ball-room mirrors, and the final answer that she had not, has been read as a proof of denial and "perhaps even dread of accepting her new [transcultural] identity" (Gyurko 268). However, if we understand Harriet as the writer, as the discoverer, and as the "namer," it makes sense that she herself will not look into the mirror—because she *is* the mirror. There is only one incident in the novel, before she leaves the U.S. for Mexico, when Harriet contemplates her own face. Gazing into a mirror, she attempts to trace her reflection, but realizes that her face is empty: "[su rostro] parecía no más viejo sino más vacío, menos legible [...] como la página de un libro que palidece cuando sus palabras lo abandonan" (*Gringo viejo* 73).

Harriet the mirror, Harriet the blank page of a book, Harriet the *non-place*, and Harriet the "namer," all function as heterotopias, defined by Foucault as a placeless place. A place without a place is a utopia, in the sense that it is an illusion. But at the same time, as Foucault tells us, a reflecting mirror is also a real place, and as such, is able to connect and embrace all surrounding spaces. This is the function of Harriet's character in the novel. Foucault helps us to understand why she, in return, becomes centered only after first renouncing her own center, thus opening herself up to the ex-centricity of the other. This is equivalent to Heidegger's idea that, in order to truly discover who we are, we first have to learn to exist without a name. As the mirror, empty by itself, Harriet has to become like the faceless man of Siqueiros's painting, before she can find meaning through the other characters reflected by and within her. This is exactly how she describes her purpose and even happiness: "Yo fui más feliz cuando mi adorado padre nos dejó [...]; sentí que ahora las cosas dependían de mí; era yo quien debía sacrificar, esforzarse, posponer, no sólo en nombre propio, sino en nombre de todos los que me quieren y son correspondidos" (123). This "Ser feliz cumpliendo con el deber" could be interpreted, of course, as Bakhtinian irony, as a double voice undermining its meaning. But within the context of postnational narrative and Harriet as the implied writer of *Gringo viejo*, this statement takes



on a wholly different meaning: it expresses how her own vacuity (symbolized by the loss of the father and her origin as an unsatisfying belonging) enables her to become a place of encounter and the voice and mirror of the silenced and fragmented other, who, in return, initiates a positive, humanizing change in her: “La nueva compasión [...] ella se la debía a un joven revolucionario mexicano que ofrecía vida y a un viejo escritor norteamericano que buscaba muerte: ellos le dieron existencia suficiente *a su cuerpo* para vivir los años por venir, aquí en los Estados Unidos, allá en México, dondequiera” (214, emphasis added).

The much repeated “se sienta sola y recuerda” as an implied agent of dialogue also brings to mind Zygmunt Bauman’s definition of the stranger as the universal and universalizing condition of modern man. As mentioned before, Harriet’s character is determined by a lack of belonging and her difficulty to truly connect to a place. Her uprootedness differs from Bierce’s, however, since his renunciation of his nation is a conscious decision following his disillusionment with North American politics, whereas her lack of belonging is portrayed as an integral part of who she is (with all the possible connotations of her as an allegory for the nation she represents). According to Bauman, this uprootedness, defined as being “neither inside nor outside, neither friend nor enemy, neither included nor excluded [...] makes the native knowledge inassimilable” (*Modernity and Ambivalence* 76-7). While this, in Harriet’s case, may not be a desirable condition and further stands between her and her capability of understanding the Mexican men and women (examples of these abound in the novel), for Bauman, recognizing this uprootedness and ultimate strangerhood can also facilitate a first step towards post-national dialogue, despite its interfering with the assimilation of culturally-specific or native knowledge. He continues to postulate that “the vision of universality is born of rootlessness [...]. It is only through setting oneself apart that one can share in the predicament of others, and participate on equal footing in the universal human condition. Strangerhood has become universal. Or, rather, it has been dissolved; which, after all, amounts to the same. If everyone is a stranger, no one is” (97).

Fuentes’s decision to choose the Mexican revolution as the backdrop of a novel that can clearly be read as a commentary on the complexities and needs of our time is not gratuitous. Uprootedness is common to all characters in the novel, although their reasons differ, depending on their culturally and historically specific circumstances. Nevertheless, we find Bauman’s idea reformulated in the voice of the Moon-Woman, who explains that the only reason she could open up to Harriet and speak through her was because of their common uprootedness: “le podía contar esto a la gringa no sólo porque era diferente, sino porque ahora ellos, los mexicanos, eran [...] como ella, como el gringo viejo, como todos los gringos: *inquietos, moviéndose, olvidando su antigua fidelidad a un solo lugar y un solo paisaje y un solo cementerio*” (157, emphasis added). Bauman’s definition of universal strangerhood, visibly expressed in the novel, also brings to mind Fuentes’s own view on ex-centricity explained in *Geografía de la novela*:

Al antiguo eurocentrismo se ha impuesto un policentrismo que [...] debe conducirnos a una ‘actividad de las diferencias’ como condición común de una humanidad sólo central porque es excéntrica, o sólo excéntrica porque tal es la situación real de lo universal concreto, sobre todo si se manifiesta mediante la aportación de lo diverso que es la imaginación literaria (167).

This “literary imagination,” described by Fuentes as a Goethe type *Weltliteratur* but freed from 18th century eurocentrism, promotes a literature of difference, a narration of diversity, yet flowing together en “un mundo único, en una ‘superpotencia única’” (167), which we can find represented in Harriet Winslow and her *non-place* of narration. Harriet exemplifies what Schultermandl would consider a model for postnational thinking, capable of mutually enriching cultures through contact, since “cultural identities draw on and come into existence through the interaction with other cultural identities. Identity is therefore not only a process of identification, it is a continuous cultural dialogue between self and other” (Schultermandl 16).

In the last chapters of the novel, Fuentes plays U.S. official discourse, representing western-driven globalization, against Harriet’s literary imagination, representing postnational and culture-driven discourse. The questions the reporters ask Harriet upon her crossing back into her homeland are eerily reminiscent of the U.S.’s past foreign policy: whether the U.S. should intervene in Mexico’s revolution (read: invade to protect interests), whether she wants to avenge her father’s death (read: invade to protect interests), or whether the U.S. should bring democracy and progress in order to save Mexico (read: invade to protect interests). Harriet’s answer summarizes one of the main underpinnings of a postnational consciousness, and is proof of to what extent her attitude towards the neighboring nation has changed over the course of the novel. When she first arrived at the Mirandas’ Ranch, she came as an educator trying to civilize its inhabitants. Now, rather than trying to “save” the other—meaning to make them like her—her ambition rests with “aprender a *vivir con México*,” realizing that “lo importante era vivir con México *a pesar del progreso y la democracia*, y que cada uno llevaba *adentro* su México y sus Estados Unidos [...]” (222, emphasis added).

At this point, Fuentes appears to come dangerously close to falling into the trap of what one critic calls the postmodern phenomena of “neo-liberal opportunism and global sisterhood” (Schultermandl 16). However, Harriet’s voice, in continuation, really does express what postnational critics are proposing all along. She does not make a secret of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles, such as her own prejudices and limitations. All to the contrary, she admits that “yo soy débil y extranjera y aun en mi condición de aristocracia empobrecida, un ser protegido,” that “yo no puedo asimilarlo todo en tan poco tiempo,” “también soy parte de mi propio pueblo, no puedo negar lo que soy” (227). Harriet’s doubts, self-criticism, her previously declared lack of empathy towards

what is different, her final abandoning of Mexico, and her solitude in the U.S., undermine any kind of utopian or simplistic view one would be tempted to stick to Fuentes. In *Valiente mundo nuevo*, the author explains indirectly the ending of *Gringo viejo* and why there can be no happy ending for Arroyo and Harriet: “tal sería la perfecta armonía de la Utopía definitiva. En realidad no sería sino una nueva enajenación, porque sin la distinción entre objeto y sujeto, se pierde la facultad de razonar” (142). While in Fuentes’s narrative utopias are indeed present, they only persist as unfulfilled desire and longing, thus keeping their transformative powers, rather than paralyzing progress by offering an idealized substitution of reality.

Van Delden distinguishes between two forms of cultural relativism: one, following Isaiah Berlin, who thinks that each culture is a self-contained windowless box. Another, which, all to the contrary, believes in the possibility of two cultures’ meaningful communication. Van Delden proposes, and I agree with him wholeheartedly, that through his work as a writer, “Fuentes is asking his readers in the United States to become cultural relativists in the second and not the first sense,” and that “it is equally clear that his purpose is not only to demand that we acknowledge difference [the goal of postmodern thought], but also that we strive for a rapprochement between cultures [the objective of postnational narrative]” (344-5). Harriet’s willingness to open herself up, her eagerness to learn, her final understanding that “esta tierra ya nunca me dejará” (223), and, of course the same pages constituting her own polycentric discourse as the implied author of the novel, all indicate that some progress can be made, if only within the realm of art, on fostering dialogue among cultures and constructing postnational affiliations. With novels such as *Gringo viejo*, Fuentes is pointing us into the right direction.

## NOTES

1 “The Schooner Flight” (Walcott 346).

2 While the scope and focus of the article do not permit an extensive elaboration on postnational theory, I would like to clarify that it is not a refutation of postmodern thought, but rather an attempt to adjust postmodern modes of interpretation to adequately respond to the specific challenges of a globalized world, such as the (apparent) disintegration of borders through technology, the normalization of border crossings, or the increasingly complex processes of transculturation. Schultermandl, Toplu, Kuortti, Nyman, among others, provide excellent introductions and contributions in their studies and anthologies. While a consensus among critics concerning terminology has yet to be established, most distinguish between “global” (referring to economic

and geographic aspects), “transnational” (referring to the blending of more than one national identity through border crossings), and postnational (referring to the attempt to redefine selfhood as a fluid concept and through factors beyond national or cultural origin).

3 See Creighton (70-2), Sagnes Alem (131), among others.

4 Post-national affiliation is a term used by David Hollinger. Hollinger’s preference for affiliation over identity stresses the idea of fluidity, rather than permanency, and also the idea of self-determination as an active and participative process, involving the self and the other (cited in Schultermandl 14).

5 The idea of the former colonizer speaking for the formerly colonized certainly raises red flags. However, what Fuentes proposes and achieves by having his main character “write” the other, is different from (neo)-colonialism. The important factors of excentricity and self-sacrifice here avoid any association of her character with a Westerner overwriting the subaltern voice.

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