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Transatlantic Fuentes: Between “The Two Shores” of Multiculturalism and Glossocentrism

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“When a bazy perception of culture is combined with fatalism about the dominating power of culture, we are, in effect, asked to be imaginary slaves of an illusory force.”

Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*

The cultural program that Jerónimo de Aguilar pronounces at the end of Carlos Fuentes’s short story “The Two Shores” appears to be inconsistent with the fundamentals of democratic liberalism and multiculturalism upon which they are ostensibly based. Furthermore, cultural visions like those in “The Two Shores” lend signifying imagery and empower cultural institutions, the media, and political authorities to exert symbolic violence upon minorities, thereby negating the multiculturalism that such visions claim to be promoting.

El programa cultural que Jerónimo de Aguilar pronuncia al final del cuento “Las dos orillas” de Carlos Fuentes parece inconsistente con los fundamentos del liberalismo democrático y multiculturalismo en los que aparentemente se basa. Es más, visiones culturales como las de “Las dos orillas” rinden imágenes y poder de significación a instituciones culturales, medios de comunicación y figuras políticas, capacitándolos para ejercer violencia simbólica sobre las minorías, negando así el multiculturalismo que tales visiones afirman promover.

Key words: Carlos Fuentes—Criticism and interpretation, Carlos Fuentes—*The Orange Tree*—“The Two Shores”, 20th century narrative, Mexican literature, multiculturalism, democratic Liberalism, transatlantic studies, panhispanism, *transbispianismo*, Spanish language in Latin American culture, ethnocentrism, glossocentrism.

Palabras clave: Carlos Fuentes—Crítica e interpretación, Carlos Fuentes—*El naranjo*—“Las dos orillas”, narrativa del siglo XX, literatura mexicana, multi-

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culturalismo, liberalismo democrático, estudios transatlánticos, panhispanismo, transhispanismo, lengua española en la cultura latinoamericana, etnocentrismo, glosocentrismo.

The publication of *El naranjo* (*The Orange Tree*) in 1993 concurred with a wave of literature reflecting on and revising the meaning of Latin American identity and historical experience upon the Fifth Centennial of the European arrival to the Americas. This short story collection reproduces themes present in some of Fuentes's contemporaneous essayistic work, as in, for example, the documentary book and video series *El espejo enterrado* (*The Buried Mirror*) and *Valiente mundo nuevo* (*Brave New World*), where he communicates his view of Latin American culture as the result of a traumatic clash as well as a mutual contamination between different cultures. The collection's opening story, "Las dos orillas" ("The Two Shores"), is a narrative by Jerónimo de Aguilar, who, with Gonzalo Guerrero and five other nameless castaways, was presumably the first European to land in what is known today as the United Mexican States. Aguilar's narrative presents itself as a correction to what is known of him through the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (*A Truthful Account of the Conquest of New Spain*) written by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, whom Aguilar censors because, he says, "le falt[a] imaginación" ("he lacks imagination," Fuentes 1993, 15).¹

"The Two Shores" maintains an ambivalent relationship with the *Historia verdadera*, at times like a postmodern parody that replicates entire fragments with slight, distorting variations. However, the story also replicates Fuentes's more reverent approach to the chronicler in *Brave New World*, where he unhesitatingly positions Díaz del Castillo as a founder of Mexican literature: "es nuestro primer novelista" ("he's our first novelist," 1990, 74). Throughout his commentary, Fuentes promotes the perspective that, in addition to narrating the conquest, Díaz del Castillo's text constitutes an elegy both for an indigenous world that has disappeared and for the lost opportunity of cross-cultural contact (1990, 75, 79; see also Fuentes 2002, 156–57). In fact, multiple statements in "The Two Shores" echo others in *Brave New World*, to the point that the fictional Aguilar almost becomes a stand-in for Fuentes's understanding of Díaz del Castillo.

1. All translations in this text are mine.

This similarity partially explains why some critics have read “The Two Shores” in parallel to Fuentes’s own approach to Díaz del Castillo. Aguilar’s discourse is a narrative of the conquest, too, but it proceeds in inverse order, from the death of Cuauhtémoc to Aguilar’s captivity among the Mayas. The final chapter of the narrative tells of an indigenous campaign to conquer Spain under the leadership of Aguilar’s companion, Gonzalo Guerrero, culminating in the construction of a “temple” (literal or metaphorical) representative of the union of Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Indigenous American cultures. The invasion has been diversely commented on with an emphasis on the notion of “alternative history.” Alfred MacAdam sees the story as a consolation, a sort of “transitory refuge from facts” (2002, 440), whereas Paul Jay sees it as a performance “inverting and unmaking [Bernal Díaz’s] earlier chronicle by rewriting it” (1997, 408). Such performance might be playful, according to Julio Ortega, who perceives (somewhat hedonistically) a festive move in the rewriting of history, “the merry probabilism of what could not be but that, in the writing, comes to be” (2001, 75, translation mine). Or it might be a discursive working through, confronting and accepting the burden of the past through a dialogue with the canonical texts on both sides of the Atlantic (Celorio 2001).²

Of particular interest is Carrie Chorba’s insightful analysis of the story (2004), connecting “Las dos orillas” to Fuentes’s totalizing interpretation of the Spanish American experience in *El espejo enterrado*.³ Chorba comments on the statements in chapter 0 of the narrative as an illocutionary act that can lay the foundations of a new multicultural constitution, pointing out that such prophetic vision suffers nonetheless from the “problematic overvaluation of Spanish” as a “unifying (or uniform) factor of the Hispanic culture and identity [that] depletes the text of the very heterogeneity it proclaims” (2004, 480). Chorba concludes that “because of an inherent contradiction in Fuentes’s thoughts about cultural plurality and continuity, ‘The Two Shores’ does not fully bring about the inclusivity that the author advocates so energetically” (494–95).⁴ Indeed, in this representative passage, the Spanish language appears as a master

2. For a more extensive discussion of “alternative” or “counterfactual” history in “The Two Shores,” see Ribas (2010).

3. It is worth noting that the book was published alongside a five-hour video series in Spanish and English, narrated by Fuentes himself. This video series, marketed to American higher-education institutions by Public Media Enterprises, LLC, was produced with the support of the Smithsonian Institution and the Spanish commission on the Fifth Centennial.

4. See also Chorba (2005, chapter 3) for a later development of her reading of “The Two Shores” in conjunction with Carmen Boullosa’s *Llanto*.

language, a universal standard against which a diverse set of non-coeval languages and their derived cultures can meet and coexist:

La lengua española ya había aprendido, antes, a hablar en fenicio, griego, latín, árabe y hebreo; estaba lista para recibir, ahora, los aportes mayas y aztecas, enriquecerse con ellos, enriquecerlos, darles flexibilidad, imaginación, comunicabilidad y escritura, convirtiéndolas a todas en lenguas vivas, no lenguas de los imperios, sino de los hombres y sus encuentros, contagios, sueños y pesadillas también. (Fuentes 1993, 65–66)

The Spanish language had already learned to speak Phoenician, Greek, Latin, Arabic and Hebrew; now it was ready to receive Maya and Aztec contributions, to make itself rich with them, to enrich them, to give them flexibility, imagination, communicability and writing, turning them all into living languages, not imperial languages, but languages of men and their encounters, contagions, dreams, and also nightmares.

All these readings of the story are consistent with Fuentes's conception of history as the confluence in the present between the memory of the past and the desiring projections of the future.⁵ Chorba has criticized Fuentes's "attempts to ascribe plurality to *mestizaje* in a pan-Hispanic context" (2005, 76), considered as allegorical manifestations of views exposed in the author's nonfictional work. But no approach questions Fuentes's vision in "The Two Shores" by discussing its underlying assumptions as well as its connections to some current visions of the manifold called "Hispanic" culture. Therefore, this article is not so concerned with demonstrating the (multiple) discursive links of *The Orange Tree* with Fuentes's late fictional work, much less with discussing the author's historical understanding of the conquest (or "encuentro entre dos mundos" as he often describes it), though both factors illuminate another matter that has wider cultural implications. This article will comment on the influential discourse of multiculturalism and transatlantic relations underlying texts like "The Two Shores." I will show how, upon close examination, this discourse seems to be inconsistent with the fundamentals of

5. In one of the interviews collected in *Territorios del tiempo*, he declares:

Yo creo que la novela da la historia como hecho vivo, en el presente que recordamos y deseamos. Realmente en una novela el hecho histórico está siendo vivido como memoria y como deseo, es decir que no hay otro pasado que el de la memoria en el presente, y no hay más futuro que el del deseo también en el momento actual. Esto es lo que la literatura, la poesía, la novela dan de una manera insuperable (Hernández 1999, 244).

I believe that the novel delivers history as a living event, in the present that we remember and desire. Truly, in a novel the historical event is experienced as memory and as desire, which means that there is no other past but memory in the present, and there is no future but desire in the present moment. This is what literature, poetry, novel, give in an optimal way.

democratic liberalism that Fuentes has claimed to espouse in his non-fictional discourse and public appearances. Furthermore, through the example of declarations by different personalities, Fuentes among them, at the Congreso Internacional de la Lengua Española, I will argue that this discourse lends signifying imagery to powers such as state-supported cultural institutions, the media, or political representatives to impose symbolic violence upon minorities, thereby negating the multiculturalism that they claim to serve.

In "The Two Shores," the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by the indigenous peoples of the Americas is the vehicle of a cultural allegory representing the union of these clashing cultures in a common language and guided by the principles of syncretism, multiculturalism, and tolerance. These principles of linguistic unity and multicultural diversity are supposed to exorcize the foundational trauma of the conquest that haunts the narrator at the opening of the narrative. However, the terms of such a cultural regeneration are problematic because they establish a contradictory "multicultural homogeneity" that emphasizes the collective aspect of performances whose societal dimension is intertwined with individual spirituality or expressiveness, such as religious worship or speech itself.

Fuentes's perception of a foundational trauma in Hispanic culture (the Spanish conquest and genocide⁶ in the Americas) has motivated him to

6. I am aware that my use of this term may seem inaccurate or even provocative to some. My personal position is as follows: although it would be a stretch to claim that the *conquistadores'* actions had as a prime objective to obliterate the American indigenous people, the outcomes that resulted from their presence and actions do meet the definition of genocide established by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1948, article 2), whereby:

[G]enocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Prior to the Spanish arrival, the indigenous population of the Americas stood at 80 to 100 million, according to Dobyns's landmark paper in *Current Anthropology* (1966; see also Lowell 1992; for criticism of Dobyns, see Denevan 1976 and Henige 1998), of which perhaps 70 to 90 million disappeared by the middle of the sixteenth century. Although most deaths were largely due to epidemics, numerous actions by the conquerors meet the above definition of genocide, such as deadly force against noncombatants; mutilations to inspire

identify the Spanish language as the “unifying bond” that transcends such trauma. But this results in an avowal of glossocentrism that, in fact, legitimates the outcomes of the conquest. In other words, Fuentes’s need to recognize and make sense of the traumatic origins of Spanish-speaking culture in the Americas cannot escape the trap set by his self-imposed need to legitimize Spanish as the vehicle of a global, transnational culture. Fuentes establishes language as the essence of a unified *Transhispanic* culture.⁷ At the same time, however, he ignores how culture modeled after the ideal of a homogeneously shared language is the basis of an inequitable assimilationism that imposes the native language of one group upon a multiplicity of other groups that have been historically subordinate.

The cultural project in “The Two Shores” is aided by what Amartya Sen calls “miniaturization” (2006, xvi), that is, the identification of an individual or group of individuals with one reductive parameter that defines a monolithic “civilization.”⁸ While the discourse of “The Two Shores” claims how Transhispanic culture would stand to win if it embraced its internal religious diversity, its uncritical embracing of the unifying bond provided by language shows the actual failure of his model in acknowledging the diverse parameters that constitute identity. Thus,

terror; forced labor in the form of *repartimiento*, *encomienda*, or *mita*; rape or cohabitation in different degrees of compulsion (the offspring always lacked legal recognition); destruction of crops; torture for the crime of “idolatry”; destruction of codices; or abduction of children for indoctrination in missions or convents (see Rivera Pagán 1990; Bernand and Gruzinski 1996). Furthermore, later discursive attempts to hide, minimize, or confuse the outcomes that such actions had for the indigenous population are consistent with denialism.

7. I use the term “Transhispanic” employed by Julio Ortega of Brown University in the 2003 special issue of *Iberoamericana* dedicated to transatlantic studies. As I will show, the writing of Fuentes (also a visiting professor at Brown for many years) reflects or anticipates concerns in the field of literary and cultural studies similar to those expressed by Ortega years later.

8. Fuentes makes this equivalence between culture and religion in his nonfictional works as well. For example, in *Por un progreso incluyente* (*For an Inclusive Progress*), he writes:

La escuela laica no se pronuncia en contra de ninguna religión y haría bien en enseñarlas todas como fenómenos culturales de gran importancia. Quizá por este motivo Vasconcelos puso las estatuas de Cristo, Buda, Mahoma y Confucio en los cuatro rincones de un patio de la SEP (1997, 96)

Secular school does not speak against any religion and would do well to teach them all as cultural phenomena of great importance. Maybe this is the reason why Vasconcelos put the statues of Christ, Buddha, Muhammad and Confucius in the four corners of a courtyard in the Ministry of Public Education.

I will show how the story's discourse presupposes the benefits of cultural diversity as long as they are brought together by linguistic unity. The narrative fails to bring a resolution to this aporia. Indeed, if we understand language (or "the word," as Fuentes writes at the end of the story) as an intrinsic component of culture, claiming that these two terms may harmonize when guided by the opposite principles of homogeneity and heterogeneity seems impossible. Furthermore, Fuentes's allegory reflects a perception of transatlanticism that restates and validates old imagery of conquest and sexual imposition and is convenient for the hegemonic discourse of the privileged in those political systems where democratic action is generally limited to participation in polls and market consumption.

Considered under the terms of Slavoj Žižek's critique of liberal multiculturalism (1997), Fuentes's discourse appeals to sober, civic values of inclusiveness, tolerance, and diversity at the same time that it validates an allegiance to certain "bad instincts" proscribed by the politically correct hegemonic discourse. In Fuentes's story, Aguilar shows a visionary attitude not exempt from the puritanical attitude of one in possession of a revealed truth who "knows" that anyone who questions or does not share these truths should be placed beyond the moral frontier within which respectable members of society locate themselves. But this multiracialism and multiculturalism are located in the use of the Spanish "*verbo*," or word, as a sign of shared identity. Thus, asserting the Spanish language as the unifying bond of multiple peoples implicitly makes those "bad instincts" manifest both in its validation of the conquest's effects and in the use of imagery that can be easily appropriated by institutional discourse.

A critique of Fuentes's visions of linguistic homogeneity in his later work is relevant to general literary and cultural criticism because it illustrates the mechanics by which a form of avowed multiculturalism can articulate itself, disregarding the liberal democratic principles upon which it is ostensibly founded while, at the same time, being of service to the hegemonic discourse of Western and Latin American democratic polities. Moreover, this article will show how such narrowly conceived multiculturalism lends a language to and validates the institutional renderings of hegemonic discourse, exemplified here through speeches from the Spanish Royal House and keynote addresses delivered at the Congreso Internacional de la Lengua Española (International Congress of the Spanish Language). The institutional use of the signifying power of such multiculturalist imagery implies a symbolic violence against minorities, rendering a confusing and inaccurate representation of the multicultural reality in the Latin American world. Finally, at the end of

the paper, I will describe how Fuentes's cultural program equivocates between the pragmatic requirement of a *koiné* for an operant liberal democracy and the alleged cultural superiority of that common language, and I suggest that his cultural project seems also a conservative reaction to some of the cultural challenges posed by globalization.

Foundational Trauma and the Transatlanticist Position

The Fifth Centennial compelled many Hispanophone intellectuals at the end of the twentieth century to reinterrogate critically the significance of the European arrival to the Americas, not only paying attention to its negative effects, but also showing a genuine interest in recovering the voices and discourse of all those who were traditionally marginalized from or oppressed by historical and political processes. Linda Hutcheon associates this interest with the discursive politics of post-modernity (2002, 66). Remarkably enough, Fuentes's marginal narrator is not a voice of the victims of the genocide, but a Spaniard. His speech from "the supreme liberty of death" (Celorio 2001, 298) recalls other *postmortem* narratives of the Hispanic tradition (such as María Luisa Bombal's *La amortajada* or Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*), a liminal position that also evokes the Derridean *revenant* to whom the reader owes a "hospitable" welcome as a way of doing justice to the voices who have disappeared from the historical record (Derrida 1994, 175). Actually, Aguilar is not absent from such record, though he does complain about being mentioned "only" fifty-eight times in Díaz del Castillo's account (Fuentes 1993, 14). Having been captive among the Mayas, Jerónimo de Aguilar claims to have become an acculturated subject, a traitor to the Spanish conquest, and a self-appointed secret champion of the voices silenced by history. Aguilar's contradictory position contests dualistic distinctions: he is dead but talks like the living; he marvels at the cyclical time of Maya cosmology, but his narrative is a "*cuenta atrás*", or "countdown"; he stands as an intermediary between the Spanish and the indigenous, between Europe and the "(Older) New World"; he is Spanish by birth though he claims allegiance to the Mesoamerican peoples. Aguilar manifests the liminal, borderline condition of what Homi Bhabha calls the "freak social and cultural displacements" that epitomize contemporary literature (1994, 12).

This "freak" claims that the foundational act of the modern American nations is an inherently traumatic event: "Europa le ha arañado el rostro para siempre a este Nuevo Mundo que, bien visto, es más viejo que el europeo" ("Europe has forever scratched the face of this New World that, all things considered, is older than the European," Fuentes 1993, 14). The notion of the foundational trauma at the origins of mod-

ern Mexico (and, by extension, the modern Americas) is one of the constants of Fuentes's work.⁹ Dominick LaCapra defines "foundational trauma" as that extreme event, real or imaginary that, paradoxically, may turn into the basis of an individual or collective identity (2004, 57). LaCapra adds that this trauma may generate an identity-based communion between subjects and enable the vindication of history with a transformative finality over oppression and abuse in the present:

Insofar as [the foundational trauma] fixates one obsessively on old grievances or dubious dynamics and even induces a compulsive reenactment of them, it may also function to undermine the need to come to terms with the past in a manner that constructively engages existential, social, and political demands and possibilities of a current situation. (58)

The narrative treatment of "The Two Shores" consists precisely in the search for a cultural formula that may overcome the original trauma of the Mexican subject and recognize this origin when creating the structure that may redefine both culture and identity.

However, Fuentes's discourse and stance as a public intellectual might not be the more coherent or fair to the actual people burdened by the consequences of such trauma because his discourse employs a rhetoric that co-opts the indigenous experience. For example, Aguilar's discourse localizes the foundational trauma in something that he terms a "shared defeat": the Mesoamerican civilizations are destroyed and the expectations of both the *conquistadores* and the miscegenated inheritors of the conflict are frustrated:

No nos engañemos; nadie salió ileso de estas empresas de descubrimiento y conquista, ni los vencidos, que vieron la destrucción de su mundo, ni los vencedores, que jamás alcanzaron la satisfacción total de sus ambiciones, antes sufrieron injusticias y desencantos sin fin. Ambos debieron construir un mundo nuevo a partir de la derrota compartida. (Fuentes 1993, 15)

Let's not fool ourselves. No one escaped unscathed from this venture of discovery and conquest—neither the conquered, who witnessed the destruction of their world, nor the conquerors, who never achieved the total satisfaction of their ambitions, suffering instead endless injustices and disenchantments. Both should have built a new world after their shared defeat.

Although a few lines above this he establishes a neat geographical distinction between an aggressor ("Europe") and a victim ("New World"), Aguilar now confuses the identity of two distinct parties, "victors" and "vanquished," in the communion of a "shared defeat," thus creating an

9. See, for example, Fuentes 1990, 47; 1992, 17; 1997, 120; 2002, 118; and Hernández 1999, 195.

illusory equivalence between the defining traits of each defeat: “destruction” and “disappointment.”¹⁰

The idea of a “shared defeat” is a rhetorical alibi that minimizes the impact of the Spanish presence in the Americas: destruction of polities, population displacement, disappearance of graphically and orally transmitted knowledge, rape, child abduction, and massive epidemics. Interestingly, there are two references to “bubas” (“syphilis”) in the story. These references acknowledge the question of epidemic exchanges, but also seem a red herring: Fuentes presents the epidemic in a way in which the conqueror appears as victim of an American indigenous illness¹¹ while eschewing references to influenza, smallpox, typhus, or yellow fever, which are thought to have killed most of the native population in the Americas between 1492 and 1560.¹²

Aguilar’s “freak” in-betweenness or liminality anticipates significant current discussions in Spanish and Latin American studies today, such

10. Fuentes’s nonfictional work transmits similar notions. A substantial part of his reading of the Spanish conquest in *Brave New World* concerns the utopian hopes of Renaissance intellectuals about America (1990, 47, 56–70), as well as the failed expectations of the conquistadores (1990, 82; see also *The Buried Mirror*, 1992, 135–37). The idea of a “shared defeat” is also present in other narratives of *The Orange Tree*. For example, in “Los hijos del conquistador” (“The conquistador’s sons”), Martín Cortés, son of Doña Marina (Malinche), and Martín Cortés, the legitimate son of the conquistador and second Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca, share their thoughts during their captivity for conspiring against the Spanish crown, a common destiny that unifies them as human beings. In “Las dos Numancias” (“The Two Numantiae”), Cornelius Scipio needs to turn the Roman camp into a mirror image of the Numantine city that the Empire is trying to subdue. Likewise, in *The Buried Mirror*, Fuentes delineates the following paradox: “¿Se entenderá algún día la conquista de México como una derrota del vencedor y del vencido, a fin de poderla considerar, al cabo, como una victoria de ambos?” (“Shall one day the conquest of Mexico be understood as the defeat of victor and vanquished so that, in the end, it will be possible to consider it a victory for both?”, 1992, 123–24); in *Brave New World*, Fuentes claims that “al cabo, la conquista significó la derrota del conquistador” (“in the end, the conquest meant the defeat of the conquistador,” 1990, 85, see also 90–91). See also Hernández 1999, 125.

11. The first major outbreak of syphilis in Europe occurred during a siege in the city of Naples in 1494. For this reason, there is a widespread belief that Columbus’s expedition brought syphilis into Europe, though the question of its origins remains largely open among scientists. For a brief approach to the discussion intended for a nonmedical audience, see the contrasting viewpoints of Magner, Hendrick, and Flannery (nd).

12. While the question of epidemic transmission has frequently been phrased as evidence excusing the conquerors from intentional wrongdoing (Katz 2003, 1.20), this argument equivocates between guilt and responsibility. Indeed, although the transmission of illness cannot be generally deemed as a blameworthy act freely and willingly committed by one or more individuals, enough evidence exists proving that the conquistadores were aware of a connection between their presence and the epidemics afflicting the indigenous population without a discussion ever occurring about efforts to mitigate the damage—much less to repair it (Mann 2006, 145–147).

as Julio Ortega's attempt to reframe the field in the terms of transatlanticism or John Beverley's recent denunciation of a "neoconservative" turn in Latin American studies. The former writes:

Los "estudios transatlánticos" aparecen como una posibilidad distintiva, libre de la genealogía disciplinaria, que reduce los textos a su origen, pero también libre del *parti pris* liberal, que requiere de un sujeto en el papel de la víctima (colonial, sexual, imperial, ideológica . . .). La lectura transatlántica parte de un mapa reconstruido entre los flujos europeos, americanos y africanos, que redefinen los monumentos de la civilización, sus instituciones modernas, así como de las hermenéuticas en disputa. Por ello, esta lectura da cuenta más que de un tiempo histórico de un tiempo trans-histórico, entrecruzado de relatos una y otra vez actualizados. Su discurso se mueve entre islas que rehacen la nominación y costas que exceden la catalogación. (Ortega 2003, 114)

"Transatlantic Studies" appear as a distinct possibility, free from the disciplinary genealogy that reduces texts to their origin, but also from the liberal *parti pris* that requires a subject in a (colonially, sexually, imperialistically, ideologically) victimized position. The transatlantic reading begins with a map reconstructed by the European, American, and African fluxes that redefine the monuments of civilization, their modern institutions as well as their hermeneutics in dispute. This is why this approach accounts for something more than a historical time, but a trans-historical time, crossed through by accounts made present over and over again. Its discourse moves between islands that remake naming and coasts that exceed cataloguing.

Thus, "Transatlantic studies" paves the way toward de-institutionalizing the academic distinction between two discursive fields termed "Peninsular" and "Latin American" in what should become a long-overdue restructuring of *hispanismo* or Hispanophone studies. More importantly, Transatlantic studies, Ortega claims, represent the quest for a "third way" in the study of Hispanophone discourse that escapes the strictures of both the "philological" (largely Spanish) and the "culturalist" (Anglophone) approach (2003, 106, 111-12). Ortega establishes theoretical principles of transatlanticism that evoke the *ethos* of Fuentes's critical, transatlantic subjectivity before the problematic Fifth Centennial celebrations.

However, Ortega's transatlantic stance claims freedom from a "liberal" (read leftist, postcolonial) *parti pris* that presupposes the victimization of minorities in every approach to discourse, which he claims is often grounded merely on "professional good conscience, and the liberal paternalism of symbolic compensations" (2003, 111). The narrator of "The Two Shores," in its description of the American conquest of Spain, partakes in a similar rejection of victimhood in the symbolic "chapter 0" of his narrative. The description of the indigenous peoples' conquest of Spain constitutes a reconstructionist allegory that embraces diversity in the name of liberty and linguistic community. This gesture falls well

within what John Beverley calls the “neoconservative turn” in Latin American studies, which he defines as “an attempt by a middle and upper middle class, university-educated, and essentially white, criollo-ladino intelligentsia to recapture the space of cultural and hermeneutic authority” from market-driven cultural studies and from social and political discourses that have sprung from the new forms of populism and *indigenismo* since the early 1990s (2008, 79).

While I do not share its anathemizing undertones,¹³ Beverley’s article is a powerful reminder to be wary of the potentially homogenizing gestures of some approaches to transatlanticism—like those in Fuentes’s later works and like-minded institutional discourses. At stake is the definition of the standard terms to define multiculturalism, and what we include inside this definition is as important as what we leave outside. In the following pages, I will discuss how Fuentes’s well-intentioned multicultural paradigm is, regardless of its good intentions, inconsistent with the liberal democratic values that he purports to represent because of his reductionist, glossocentric attachment to the Spanish language. Furthermore, I will show how such contradiction can become a feeder for exclusionary institutional discourse.

Glossocentrism: The Word and the Imperial Gesture

Despite the indigenous conquest of Spain at the end of the narrative, Aguilar still transmits his story in Spanish. His story articulates an allegory where a claim to religious diversity becomes the ideal multicultural cover for essentialistic and homogenizing policies that would round up a multiplicity of languages, classes, heritages, diverse modes of being, knowing, and acting, under the epistemic aegis of the Spanish language, whose history of imposition not only in the Americas but also in Spain itself is extensively documented.¹⁴ On the one hand, the “multicultural” side of the project implies a flawed conflation of “culture” with the religious. Thus the discourse privileges transcendentalist practices as the authentic manifestation of the essence of a group’s identity, as signaled by

13. In his response to Beverley, Mario Morales refers to the “lynching of the unbeliever” (2008, 86), and denounces Beverley’s discourse as a puritanical gesture of political correctness (2008, 89–90; see also Žižek 1997, 33–34). Morales notes that what Beverley calls a “neoconservative turn” can also be understood as a reconstructionist (some would say “reactionary”) attempt to resist the hegemonic prevalence of the “theoretical corpus of subalternist postcolonialism” (2008, 85).

14. See, for example, the first two chapters and the afterword to the second edition of Walter Mignolo’s *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2003) or Herreras García’s *Lenguas y normalización en España* (2006). Specifically concerning colonial Mexico, see María Bono López’s “La política lingüística en la Nueva España” (1997).

the culmination of the indigenous conquest with the building of “el templo de las cuatro religiones, inscrito con el verbo de Cristo, Mahoma, Abraham y Quetzalcóatl” (the temple of the four religions, inscribed with the word of Christ, Muhammad, Abraham, and Quetzalcóatl,” Fuentes 1993, 62). A potentially damaging consequence of such conflation of ethnicity, geographical location, and religion is the imbalanced reinforcement of patriarchal and/or conservative leaders in their authority to determine what is “traditional” or “authentic.”¹⁵

On the other hand, the “homogeneity” lies in the belief in the Spanish language as a unifying bond by virtue of its having received multiple “aportes” (Fuentes 1993, 65) from different languages across history. As shown in the passage quoted at the beginning of this article (see above, page 146), the Castilian or Spanish language constitutes the stable repository that synthesizes the ideological and aesthetic contributions of disparate influences. The phrasing of that passage does not differ much from Mary Louise Pratt’s proposition of language as a *contact zone*, that is, “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (1991, 33). But who speaks in that passage? Is Aguilar a narrative stand-in for Fuentes’s vision of contemporary culture in Spanish-speaking countries? Comparing Aguilar’s statements with Fuentes’s essayistic work is revealing. For example, in *Valiente mundo nuevo* (*Brave New World*), the author rejects the term “Latin America” in favor of:

[L]a descripción más completa, Indo-Afro-Ibero-América, *o por razones de brevedad*, Ibero-América o aun, por razones literarias cuando me refiero a la *unidad y continuidad lingüísticas*, Hispano-América. Pero en todo caso, el componente indio y africano está *presente, implícito*. (1990, 12, italics are mine)¹⁶

15. Amartya Sen expressed similar concerns when criticizing former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s appeal to Sikh and Muslim religious leaders within the UK as the legitimate representatives of ethnic groups that have a much broader spectrum of social and ideological positions than those explicitly represented by religious practice (2006, 163ff). For a discussion of this flawed approach to culture in the Latin American context, see Rachel Sieder’s contribution to the volume *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives* (2001).

16. Fuentes developed this argument further in *En esto creo*:

Quizás hacía falta esta asimilación indo-afro-iberoamericana para tender el puente sobre el Atlántico, colmar el abismo de los rencores y las querellas y reconocernos en nuestra otra mitad que es España. Pero España para Iberoamérica es algo más que España. Es el Mediterráneo renaciendo en el Caribe, el Golfo, el Pacífico y el Atlántico americanos. España es la filosofía griega y el derecho romano. España es la España de las tres culturas, cristiana, árabe y judía, dándose cita en la corte de Alfonso el Sabio y

The more complete description, Indo-Afro-Ibero-America, or, *for brevity's sake*, Ibero-America or even, for literary reasons when referring to *linguistic unity and continuity*, Hispano-America. But in any case, the Indian and African content is *present, implicit*.

The absorption of the “Indo” and the “Afro” indicates a euphemistic failure to acknowledge Pratt’s “asymmetrical relations of power.” Analogously, the narrator Jerónimo de Aguilar insists that the Spanish or Castilian language must be the axis that links the experiences in a boundless melting pot of identities that inhabit or once inhabited the Luso-Spanish colonies. If so, then the experiences of, for example, Extremadurans, *porteños*, Aymarás, Catalans, Chicanos, Mozarabs, Jewish converts, Mexicas, P’urhépechas, Taínos, and a manifold of present and past nations and ethnicities could use this Castilian or Spanish language as the framework of all encounter and debate.

Furthermore, this form of cultural *mestizaje* presupposes a pristine essential integrity of its preconstituting components, denying the very real internal diversity and multiple heritages of the Greek, Roman, Maya, or Mexica cultures themselves (to name only civilizations explicitly referred to in the text). Clearly, then, Fuentes’s problematic cultural essentialism falls under the concept of Jean-Loup Amselle’s “*mestizo* logic,” that is “a continuist approach to culture that emphasizes non-distinctiveness and eschews attention to the pre-existing syncretism of the ‘original’ cultures” (1990, 10; see also Gruzinski 2000, 43–44), an approach additionally restricted by the imperialistic atavism of linguistic homogenization.

The centrality of Spanish in Aguilar’s utopia and Fuentes’s essay follows the theoretical tradition of Ángel Rama’s *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*, whereby literary culture creatively adopts the Hispanic, indigenous, and African contributions in the search for a stable balance between the aesthetic extremisms of the regionalistic imitation of local speech and knowledge and the uncritical importation of European discursive styles (1982, 82). Thus, it seems that, according to

desastrosamente expulsadas por el dogmatismo ciego de los reyes católicos, Isabel y Fernando. España es la gran lección de una cultura fortalecida por la adversidad (2002, 122).

Maybe this Indo-Afro-Iberoamerican assimilation was needed to lay the bridge over the Atlantic, fill the chasm created by resentments and complaints and recognize ourselves in our other half—that is, Spain. And yet, Spain is for Iberoamerica something more than Spain itself. It is the Mediterranean reborn in the Caribbean, the Gulf, and the American sides of the Atlantic and the Pacific. Spain is Greek philosophy and Roman law. Spain is the Spain of the three cultures, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic, meeting in the court of Alfonso the Wise and catastrophically expelled by the blind dogmatism of the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Fernando. Spain is the great lesson of a culture strengthened by adversity.

Aguilar, the primacy of the narrative word in Spanish would guarantee a stabilization of the seething melting pot of identities under the "Transhispanic" label. But, as I said previously, Jerónimo de Aguilar and Gonzalo Guerrero are white men initially committed to the colonial enterprise, so we must question the marginality that Aguilar himself claims at the beginning of his narrative ("Ahora creo que en la muerte todos estamos, como Solís, tras de la puerta, viendo pasar sin ser vistos"; "Now I think in death we are all, like Solís, behind the threshold, we can see people passing by without being seen," Fuentes 1993, 17).

Carmen Rivera maintains that Fuentes's choice of Aguilar as a narrative voice is ideal because "it represents the establishment of a world differing from its origins where the two cultural, racial, and linguistic 'shores' of the *mestizo* individual meet" (1995, 50). But rather than the "mestizo," the specific outcome of Aguilar's project would consist more of subjectivities transculturated into the homogenizing guide of the language that held colonial and military power for the five hundred years after the conquest. Furthermore, Linda Egan claims that in *The Orange Tree* Fuentes follows a dialogical cosmovision inspired by Bakhtin, where "everything coexists with its contrary, in a frontier where thesis and antithesis differ and unite" (2006, 326, translation mine). Yet Fuentes's Bakhtinian perspective is facilitated by a simplifying allegiance to Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera* as the master narrative framework of the history of the conquest, which does little to acknowledge the diversity of interests and agendas that might have come into play during that episode. More importantly, Fuentes's "epic binarism" masks the destruction of diverse, complex cultures and their ineluctable transformation into new sets of hybridized cultures in an illusory simultaneity in which a single, unified "New World culture" breeds itself out of its own destruction like a phoenix. Thus Carlos Fuentes minimizes the human and cultural impact of the conquest. Although "The Two Shores" performs a homage to the lost cultures in an exercise of catharsis and symbolic recovery from their absence (much like Fuentes's own reading of Díaz del Castillo's chronicle in *Brave New World*), themes such as pseudodialogism or the privileging of the Spanish language silence and co-opt the voice of indigenous cultures.

I should note that the whole of *The Orange Tree* does not always shirk from the question of linguistic imposition. In the story "The Two Numantiae," the narrator Polybius, mentor of Scipio Aemilianus, reflects that the Numantines surrendered to the Romans "because they lost the word. They forgot speech." Consequently, Gonzalo Celorio comments that in Fuentes "the Conquest is nothing but the abolition of difference to affirm one's own identity, either through eliminating the Other, or by incorporating it into one's self" (2001, 297). Likewise, Alfonso de Toro

points out that in “The Two Shores” “the struggle to dominate over the word is at the same time the struggle to construct a new identity” (2005, 86); specifically referring to the same passage cited at the beginning of this article (see above, page 146), de Toro adds that historical processes “always carry with them a loss and an enrichment in a dynamic process that produces new, rich cultural identities” (87).

However, I see a problem in the underlying logic of antithetic couplings such as “dominate—construct” or “loss—enrichment.” This play with dualities can be found also in Fuentes’s essayistic work, like this passage from *El espejo enterrado* (*The Buried Mirror*) summing up his perspective of the conquest:

La hazaña de Cristóbal Colón abrió el telón sobre un inmenso choque de civilizaciones, una gran epopeya, compasiva a veces, sangrienta otras, pero siempre conflictiva: la destrucción y creación simultáneas de la cultura del Nuevo Mundo (1992, 97)

Christopher Columbus’s feat lifted the curtain over an immense clash of civilizations, a great epic, sometimes compassionate, sometimes bloody, but always conflictive: the simultaneous destruction and creation of the culture of the New World.

The Spanish language purports to be the element that transcends economic or social differences. Spanish is, however, the tangible heritage of the conquest, and its defense as unifying bond constitutes an ideological validation of the conquest, echoing Elio Antonio de Nebrija’s statement on “la lengua,” language as “compañera del imperio” (“companion of empire”) in the prologue of his *Gramática* (1981).

One could argue that Fuentes’s narrative precisely intends to “disputa[r] el orden de las cosas” (“[to] dispute the order of things,” 1993, 67) in that the Amerindians do not impose their language but acquire the “enriched” tongue of the conquered Spaniards instead. But is it still possible to argue for the suitability of a unified language for this pluralist project when we know that Fuentes’s association of the religious—as the reductive parameter identifying culture—to the *logos*—as the instrument to communicate knowledge—uncritically reproduces the evangelical position embedded in the enterprise of the conquest? Franciscan pioneers of evangelization in New Spain such as Johan Dekkers equaled the value of language study with that of theology for evangelizing purposes (Bernand and Gruzinski 1996, I:341). Fuentes’s idea still echoes theses of the imperial project—like those of the Dominican friar Domingo de Santo Tomás, who wrote in the prologue to his Quechua grammar that “[t]his language is so in agreement with Latin and Castilian in its structure that it looks almost like a premonition (prediction) that the Spaniards will possess it” (quoted by Mignolo 2003, 48). Assuming the

language of the oppressed to communicate the transcendental vision of the oppressor was indeed the strategy chosen by the earlier missionaries until they realized that it was more practical to abduct the children and youth to educate them in the Spanish language in their own monasteries (Bernand and Gruzinski 1996, vol. I: 342, 347).

Fuentes's discursive strategy is defined by the search for resolution and stability for a traumatized New World consciousness, symbolized by Cuauhtémoc's "rostró arañado" ("scratched face") at the beginning and ending of the story. But the monolingualist and universalistic approach of Fuentes's cultural program reminds us how much the Latin American "boom" was committed to the aesthetics of the Western European and North American elites and reveals again the impossibility of recovering from that foundational trauma in the terms explicitly proposed.¹⁷ The "enrichment" of the Spanish language with cultural "contributions" from the other languages betrays an assimilationist colonial logic: the criteria that define the Other are no longer necessary because the monolingual "I" has appropriated them by means of conquest. For example, the discourse of "The Two Shores" fails to describe the coevalness between the Latin and the Nahuatl contributions to the Spanish language. Most linguists agree that Spanish is a derivative of vulgar Latin that would be later imposed in the American territory by means of conquest, but on the other plate of the scale, Nahuatl stands as a mere supplement to the discursive economy of the conqueror, instead of being a constitutional part of the language. In this story, the claim of the Spanish language as unifying bond erodes potential assumptions of cultural superiority between the communities that constitute this multicultural whole. However, as long as Latinate speakers cannot be as thoroughly transformed by Nahuatl language as Nahuatl speakers were transformed by the discourse of the Latinate colonizers, unification is the term that masks homogenization. The argumentative strategy of "The Two Shores" is tantamount to using egalitarian arguments to defend inequities, which I discuss in the next sections.

The New Multiculturalism and Its Old Metaphors

Despite the apparent practicality of union in one language, the narrative and ideological structure of "The Two Shores" stands in significant opposition to liberal or progressive models of cultural citizenship. Aguilar's

17. Again, *Brave New World* provides an outline of this schizoid condition between the elegiac memorial of missing Mesoamerican cultures and the unapologetic establishment of European modernity (1910-1930) as the model for modern Latin American literature from the "boom" to the late twentieth century (1990, 42-46).

challenge to “the order of things” appears lacking when it relies on fossilized metaphors of military might and expressions of violent sexuality to convey his vision of a renewed multicultural Transhispanic project.¹⁸ Precisely, the parodic intent of Aguilar’s justification of violence for a greater good rhetorically masks a validation of violent conquest as the channel to transmit culture and ideology:

Cometimos algunos crímenes, es cierto. A los miembros de la Santa Inquisición les dimos una sopa de su propio chocolate, quemándoles en las plazas públicas de Logroño a Barcelona y de Oviedo a Córdoba (. . .) Viejos judíos, viejos musulmanes y ahora viejos mayas, abrazamos a cristianos viejos y nuevos, y si algunos conventos y sus inquilinas fueron violados, el resultado, al cabo, fue un mestizaje acrecentado, indio y español, pero también árabe y judío, que en pocos años cruzó los Pirineos y se desparramó por toda Europa (. . .) No pudimos frenar los atavismos religiosos de algunos de nuestros capitanes. Lo cierto, empero, es que los españoles sacrificados por los mayas (. . .) tuvieron la distinción de morir ingresando en un rito cósmico y no, como pudo sucederles, por una de esas riñas callejeras tan habituales en España (Fuentes 1993, 63–64).

We committed a few crimes, it’s true. We gave the members of the Holy Inquisition a taste of their own medicine, burning them in the public plazas, from Logroño to Barcelona and from Oviedo to Córdoba [. . .] Old Jews, old Muslims, and now old Mayas embraced Christians, old and new and if some convents (and their occupants) were violated, the ultimate result was an increased mixing of bloods—Indian and Spanish but also Arab and Jew—who in a few years crossed the Pyrenees and spread over all of Europe [. . .] We could not restrain the religious atavism of some of our captains. The fact is, however, that the Spaniards sacrificed [. . .] had the honor of dying in a cosmic rite and not in one of those street fights that are so common in Spain.

Thus, the ideas subjacent to Aguilar’s discourse repeat the Hispanic imperial thesis with an emphasis on linguistic absorption, which is essential to breaking the ethnic barriers to the creation of a seemingly unified Transhispanic cultural manifold. In his incapacity to eschew its aesthetic

18. It is worth pointing out that a few years before Fuentes, Gloria Anzaldúa had coherently advocated for a model based on the culinary metaphor of “amasamiento” (“kneading”: [1987] 2007, 55), where a single free individual becomes the vehicle for a diversity of idiolects and other dimensions of identity. What she calls the “new mestiza” is an individual with “a tolerance for contradictions [. . .] and ambiguity [. . .] an Indian in Mexican culture [. . .] Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. [. . .] She operates in a pluralistic mode [. . .] Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (79–80). This “something else” lies in the transformative capacities of her adaptiveness, for not only is she able to sustain multiple “cultures” and “points of view,” but also she resists the multiple sources of oppressiveness (Anglo on Hispanic, Hispanic on Indigenous, man on woman, heteronormative on queer), so both plurality and resistance result in an original, individual, free, and constant performance that Anzaldúa summarizes in the metaphor of “amasamiento” (“kneading”).

predilections, Fuentes's discourse becomes entangled with colonialist imagery even when it claims to unravel it. The pretense of overcoming a traumatic foundation and, collaterally, the presumed "victimizing imperative" of liberal discourse are undermined by the implicit author's incapacity to abandon some of his ideological foundations. The conscious choice of abandoning them would imply, indeed, a conscious *parti pris* (to use Ortega's expression) and, therefore, a recognition of the implicit violence condensed in terms such as "aportes" (or their academic equivalents: "transculturación," "hibridación") or the liquid, somewhat sexualized "flujos."

The choice of these types of metaphors is not exempt from the risk of political instrumentalization, as certain high-profile interventions in the International Congress on the Spanish Language (CILE) would prove. During the inauguration of the III CILE, attendees heard Juan Carlos I, King of Spain, subscribing, almost word by word, Aguilar's cultural program in "The Two Shores" when he claimed:

Todas las lenguas son, en mayor o menor grado, mestizas, y el castellano, que lo fue desde su configuración inicial, se hizo español ensanchando precisamente su mestizaje. Primero en la Península y, más tarde, y de modo decisivo, al desarrollarse en América. Todos y cada uno de los contactos con otras lenguas y culturas han ido depositando en la lengua española marcas de mentalidades, costumbres y sensibilidades distintas.¹⁹

All languages are, in one degree or another, mixed, and Castilian, which was so from its initial configuration, became Spanish precisely expanding its mixture. First, in the Peninsula, and later, and in a decisive manner, developing in America. All and each of the contacts with other languages and cultures have deposited in the Spanish language the mark of different mentalities, customs, and sensibilities.

That this form of institutional discourse also minimizes or ignores the crude realities lying beneath the "*ensanche*" or "expansion" of the Spanish language had already become ostensible in His Majesty's infelicitous statement during the 2001 Cervantes Prize awards:

Nunca fue la nuestra lengua de imposición, sino de encuentro; a nadie se le obligó nunca a hablar en castellano: fueron los pueblos más diversos quienes hicieron suyo *por voluntad libérrima*, el idioma de Cervantes. [Italics are mine]

Ours was never an imposed language but a language of encounter; no one was ever forced to speak Castilian: the most diverse peoples made the language of Cervantes theirs, *with the freest exercise of their wills*.

19. All quotes from the CILE in this paper are discussed more extensively, from a sociolinguistic standpoint, by Mauro Fernández in "De la lengua del mestizaje al mestizaje de la lengua" (2007).

A statement like this was bound to raise a political storm in a country where the scars of Francoist violence in all its manifestations, linguistic included, continued to be felt by many living people. Symptomatically, the Royal House clarified that the Monarch “se refería a la implantación de la lengua en América a partir del Siglo de Oro” (“was referring to the implantation of the language in the Americas from the Golden Age onwards”; Marcos and Company 2001). Thus, in its attempt to neutralize the potential political storm at home by specifying that the referent of the remarks were the former colonies, the Royal House only succeeded in further emphasizing its denialist ideology.

Other presentations in the CILE validate this silencing “mestizaje.” In the II CILE, Fuentes himself (2001) acknowledges the origin of Spanish in America as a “catastrophe,” but then he goes on to imagine the language as a “lingua franca” among diverse indigenous communities. Fuentes reprises the idea during the inauguration discourse of the III CILE (2004) through the image of a P’urhépecha from Michoacán communing with a Chilean Pehuenche in the Spanish language (2004b), an idea that was dismissed by the sociolinguist Rainer Hamel as a mere “fábula literaria” in the course of the same conference (2004). Is it likely that the manifold socioeconomic realities of the Americas and the Peninsula allow exchanges like those imagined by Fuentes to ever occur within the Hispanic nation-states? Mauro Fernández comments with some irony on the lack of utility for a P’urhépecha and a Pehuenche to commune together in Spanish and hypothesizes that this exchange between “tarahumaras, rumis, zapotecas” would be more likely to occur in downtown Los Angeles in some functional form of English (2007, 72). The key to the differend, the untranslatability of the discourse of the non-indigenous about the indigenous, lies in a classical liberal conception of rights as belonging to individuals and not to collectivities. Consequently, such conception demands that “cualquier tipo de reivindicación se sitúe necesariamente en el marco jurídico que funda el Estado-nación, y *no en posiciones panamericanas*” (“any kind of demand should be situated within the juridical frame established by the nation-state, *not in Panamericanist positions*,” 2007, 74, translation and italics are mine). Fernández’s critique implies that Fuentes’s image of Transhispanic unity claims to be founded on the very ideology that denies such unity, and his metaphor of a common voice is based on an understanding of democracy where freedom of expression is not met by a right to be heard without the limiting interference of hegemonic agencies such as the market, local political institutions, or state-supported academic exchanges.

The unequal, violent exchange leading to *mestizaje* is never completely forgotten, though certainly manipulated for rhetorical effect. The metaphor of the scar in “The Two Shores” highlights a need to address

a foundational trauma in the foundation of Hispanic American culture. Aguilar induces a sleep on Guerrero, who wakes up haunted by and transformed into Cuauhtémoc:

Cuando despierta, llorando por la suerte de la nación azteca, se da cuenta de que en vez de lágrimas, por una mejilla le rueda el oro y por la otra la plata, surcándolas como cuchilladas y dejando para siempre en ellas una herida que, ojalá, la muerte cicatrice un día. (Fuentes 1993, 68)

When he wakes up, crying for the fate of the Aztec nation, he realizes that instead of tears, gold and silver run through each cheek, furrowing a slit through them and leaving there forever a wound that death may, hopefully, heal one day.

However, the reduction of conquest and genocide to scars on a fallen ruler's cheek carries a sublimating load. Similar displacements occur with regard to the sexual connotations invoked by the very word "mestizaje." When Malinche learns Spanish and, consequently, Aguilar is no longer indispensable to the Spanish expedition, he muses that Malinche has acquired a new power by "castrating" Cortés. This passage shows Aguilar's perception of sexuality as an affirmation of a political alliance, refined with the fear of the female tongue as a consuming and castrating tool. The use of the tongue is like Cortés's own speech, a Machiavellian subterfuge:

La Malinche le había arrancado la lengua española al sexo de Cortés, se la había chupado, se la había *castrado* sin que él lo supiera, confundiendo la mutilación con el placer (Fuentes 1993, 39, italics in the original)

La Malinche had pulled the Spanish language out of Cortés's genitals, she'd sucked it out of him, she'd castrated him of it without his knowing it, by disguising mutilation as pleasure.

In spite of his attempt to renew the legend of Malinche, Fuentes merely reverses positions, a symbolic restitution that remains reductionistic in its failure to portray Malinche (and, by extension, the indigenous woman) beyond her sexuality. Such a rhetorical move does not contest but merely masks the sentimental and sexual tones of the Malinche legend as it has been constructed since the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly, Aguilar's narrative does not mimic the nationalistic myth of Malinche as the temptress who, driven by her love for the foreign conqueror, caused the destruction of whole civilizations. However, since Aguilar's narrative mediation casts the aura of a *femme fatale* on the character, her moral motivations remain suspect even when the narrative timidly attempts to redefine her as a willing agent with her own political agenda and her own strategies and abilities to see it through.

During the III CILE, Juan Luis Cebrián made the remarkable claim

that “¿Habrá que recordar, una vez más, que el proceso de creación del lenguaje, de cualquier lenguaje, es desde sus orígenes un proceso de mestizaje? El destino de las lenguas, de todas las lenguas, es ser violadas, penetradas” (“Should we recall, once again, that the creation of a language, of any language, is from its origins a process of *mestizaje*? The destiny of languages, of all languages, is to be violated, penetrated,” 2004). Fernández comments that this imagery highlights “algo que *parece* olvidarse constantemente en el discurso apologético del mestizaje, y es que éste raramente proviene de un intercambio entre iguales voluntariamente consentido” (“something that *seems* constantly forgotten in the apologetic discourse of *mestizaje*, that it rarely comes from willing and consensual exchange between equals,” 2007, 80, italics are mine).

Fuentes’s imagery receives positive cultural and institutional feedback when it is reproduced by Juan Luis Cebrián, a renowned journalist and former director of Spain’s largest newspaper (*El País*), a member of the Real Academia de la Lengua, and the CEO of PRISA, the largest media group in Spain. In Cebrián’s allocution, the tongue is the object of a metaphorical rape analogous to Fuentes’s “aportes” or “enriquecimiento,” which deviates attention from the sexual abuses and marriages without legal recognition that the conquerors forced upon the conquered.

Cebrián’s metaphor of rape summarizes this “*mestizo* question.” The guilt-inducing awareness of the violent conditions initially imposed by the colonialist enterprise finds a resolution through the construction of metaphors of mestizaje with all its displacements, symbolic compensations, and pseudoinclusive corollaries. Thus the perceived “victimhood imperative” is overcome in this type of discourse by the idea that people are unified by something with deeper intrinsic worth than family ties, place of birth, and so on—a common language with which disparate peoples can understand each other. The problem lies in identifying the *koiné*, a linguistic use consensually shared for pragmatic, commercial convenience with an “enriched” common language that has been reached through a natural process. Such identification is arrived at by resorting to metaphors with a sexual character that imply the “naturalness” of the linguistic unity perceived by the more privileged. Once the hegemonic linguistic use has become thus “naturalized,” a process of “neutralization” follows, whereby the hegemonic language becomes the “general rule”—everybody’s anonymized “language of encounter.”²⁰ Faced with this “general rule” and its “unifying” potential, the minoritized language becomes “connotated,” “polarized,” assumed to represent the peripheral, the par-

20. For a more extensive description of this process, see Woolard in Del Valle’s *La lengua, ¿patria común? Ideas e ideologías del español* (2007) and also López García’s *El rumor de los desarraigados* (1985).

ticularistic, provincial, exclusivist before the hegemonic “normality” that views itself as “universal,” “cosmopolitan,” “unifying.” Obviously, this way of framing the question of “minority” *versus* “official” or “international” languages eludes acknowledgment of the political and often violent processes that have made the latter the ruling paradigms. What is so peculiar in “The Two Shores” is how this elusion occurs precisely while the narrative discourse claims to address it.

Whose Cultural Freedom?

The need to seek a unifying cultural bond in language suggests a fear of linguistic diversity as a destabilizing influence in the construction of a Transhispanic cultural order. Does this stem from an apocalyptic vision of ethnic politics as a threat to peace, a fear expressed in the much-touted concept of “Balkanization”? Or does it arise from the representation of ethnic heterogeneity as a “problem”? The underlying idea of such a vision seems to be that ethnic mobilization and revindication are contrary to the principles of the liberal-democratic state espoused by Fuentes in his essays (see, for example, his later nonfiction works, such as *En esto creo* or *Contra Bush*). And yet, in light of studies that indicate political *indigenismo* may have broadened and consolidated the fragile democracies in the post-Cold War Americas,²¹ it is difficult to consistently argue that the rise of any movement presenting an alternative *episteme* to those inspired by rationalism and Enlightenment will always present a threat to liberal democracies.

One could ask, with Paulo Freire, if this common language facilitates the “critical consciousness through which a community can analyze its conditions of social existence and engage in effective action for a just society?” (Freire 2000, quoted by Mignolo 2003, 322). Does it meet a fundamental democratic test such as preoccupation with equality in a context of difference, or would it hinder such conditions by virtue of creating linguistically defined center-periphery relations? “The Two Shores” argues in favor of the cultural unity and autonomy of a transnational entity that can be defined as “Transhispanic” by virtue of the self-understanding (and self-preservation) of a linguistic majority. Aguilar’s political agenda does not exclude awareness of the existence of another political agenda in the mind of his antagonist Malinche, though his discourse fails to represent it at length. Jerónimo de Aguilar and Malinche both represent their own autonomous and self-delimited moral universe as defined more extensively by John Rawls in *The Law of Peoples* (1999,

21. See, for example, the case studies about Colombia and Bolivia by Van Cott (2007), about Guatemala by Warren (1998), or about Ecuador by Walsh (2005).

25–35). In this liberal tradition, Fuentes’s “alternatives of liberty” appear to be based on the Dworkinian idea according to which options and elections in life depend on a publicly shared cultural structure, a language of diverse traditions and conventions. The liberty of individuals depends on the richness of these consciously chosen ways of life and of the possibility of freely revising those options provided by a society with a rich cultural structure that depends on a shared language (Dworkin 1985, 228–231).

And yet, applying Seyla Benhabib’s critique of liberal political theory, Aguilar’s cultural project would seem to hinder recognizing the distinction between the *ethnic* as a historical community with shared memories and interests and the *demotic* as the autonomous and democratic enfranchisement of each individual (Benhabib 2006, 68–69). Why should Spanish be the language of choice? “The Two Shores” claims Spanish is the right option because it is the language of the conquerors who have been, in their turn, conquered, as he imagines in his later nonfiction works, such as *El espejo enterrado* or *En esto creo*.²² From a Dworkinian standpoint, this choice would precisely be the more diverse cultural structure. In the prioritizing of Spanish, however, Aguilar creates a peripheral Other, Malinche, to whom any preexisting diversity, syncretism, and hybridity are denied. Curiously enough, this style of *mestizaje* appeals to dynamic hybridity: the Spanish language does not have an essential nature; there exists in it a diversity and a syncretism that is, however, denied to indigenous cultures even when there’s ample evidence that it was a world brimming with exchanges, as evidenced by the multilingual nature of Malinche herself. Indeed, Fuentes’s treatment of Malinche is a distinct symptom of a cultural atavism within creolized, urban cultures of “*mestizaje*” in Mexico that overlooks the internal diversity within “indigenous” civilization and the interactions that exist inside its regional components.

In Fuentes’s line of thought, there’s something inherently “Hispanic” in the common knowledge of a language. This essentializing component

22. The paradox of the “conquered conqueror” is a recurrent theme in Fuentes’s work (see note 10). However, it has evolved into a more accommodating image consonant with the *fait accompli* attitude of many hegemonic visions of *mestizaje*. This contrasts with an episode in one of his major works, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, when the title character, transfigured into the conqueror Hernán Cortés, enters a church where “outwardly Christian” images that retain an “inward” indigenous style and spirit observe him with distant, ironic mockery. (The church in *La muerte* is a reference to Santa María Tonantzintla in Cholula, Puebla, whose singular, magnificent decorations are also a matter of discussion in *The Buried Mirror*; 1992, 157–158). Hence, thirty years later, Fuentes has evolved from the incomplete conquest that stumbles upon the colonized subject and fails to colonize him aesthetically and spiritually to a Vasconcelan cosmic entity improved by an indigenous contribution, or, in Fuentes’s own terminology, “aporte.”

files down differences for a descendant of creoles or someone from the central regions of Spain. It eliminates the particular stance from where another subject could position himself or herself before homogenizing forces as well as other choices in self-representation. In Eric Hobsbawm's words:

The concept of a *single*, exclusive and unchanging ethnic, cultural or other identity is a dangerous piece of brainwashing. Human mental identities are not like shoes, of which we can only wear one pair at a time. We are all multi-dimensional beings. Whether a Mr. Patel in London will think of himself primarily as an Indian, a British citizen, a Hindu, a Gujarati-speaker, an ex-colonist from Kenya, a member of a specific caste or kin-group, or in some other capacity, depends on whether he faces an immigration office, a Pakistani, a Sikh or Moslem, a Bengali-speaker, and so on. There is no single platonic essence of Patel. He is all these and more at the same time (1996, 87).

Indeed, Malinche (or Anzaldúa's "new mestiza," as discussed in note 16) is not too different from Hobsbawm's representation of a contemporary multidimensional cosmopolitan citizen. Who is that woman? It is precisely her indefiniteness, the difficulty of locating her line of thought, in contrast with her evidenced sexuality, that turns out to be threatening for Aguilar/Fuentes's cultural project, which, in a peculiar reversal of nationalistic logic, debases indigenous culture by essentializing it.

Moreover, taking into account Kymlicka's criticism of Dworkin's vision of liberty in culture:

So the unavoidable, and desirable, fact of cultural interchange does not necessarily undermine the claim that there are distinct cultural structures, once we recognize that they are based on a common language. But if cultural structures are based on language, then we must also recognize that in multination countries, there will be more than one cultural structure. It seems to follow that a liberal state has an obligation to sustain the cultural structures of national minorities as well as the majority culture. (Kymlicka 2004, 123)

It follows that Fuentes does not recognize the diversity of cultural structures in the diversity of languages and that his pluricultural model unified in language fails to meet a democratic test of preoccupation with equality in a context of difference. Indeed, Fuentes's pluricultural reductionism to a common language destroys "societal cultures" as defined by Kymlicka: "a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres" (1995, 76). Because such cultures "tend to be territorially concentrated, and based on a shared language" (76), linguistic homogeneity impedes the possibility for individuals to *consciously opt for* forms of information, association, and expression of their choice, and

to freely evaluate and reflect on the utility derived from that choice. Therefore, securing and promoting access to particular societal cultures guarantees that individuals will thrive culturally in a free society (1995, 83-84).

Situated in the historical context of the collapse of Latin American authoritarian governments at the end of the twentieth century, Fuentes's linguistic unifying bond seems grounded in a sort of "Babelian fallacy," a phobia to the presumed disaggregating potential of linguistic diversity. This Babelian fallacy sees particularism as a lost opportunity to find a common framework to construct national citizenship. From this perspective, particularism is guided by a self-centeredness that drives the individual away from a concern for the common good. This perception raises fears of national disunity that, in a Latin American context, seem to be politically justified by the inequities before the Northern neighbor. It would seem, then, that linguistic homogeneity creates a unifying ground to stand together against the neocolonial impositions of free trade agreements, political interference, or security obligations inspired by the U.S.'s "War on Drugs."

However, my impression is that in its attempt to *contest* the epic, traditional view of the conquest in the face of new forms of imperialism, "The Two Shores," loses sight of the challenges of globalization. Are we still living in a written culture that justifies the demand for a *koiné* without ever considering its exclusionary potential? What is the sense of embracing a monolingual identity in a world that is becoming more globalized and, by extension, potentially more plurilingual? Doesn't English sufficiently supply the need for a *koiné*, "the kind of English which is today, for intellectuals, what Latin was in the Middle Ages"? (Hobsbawm 1996, 95). Considering King Juan Carlos, Juan Luis Cebrián, and Fuentes's own interventions at the CILE, it appears that Hispanic institutional discourse can, at its more elitist level, force an *equivocation* between "culture language" and the *koiné*. Thus, the recognition of the practical need for a *koiné* becomes the justification for the cultural imposition of a difference-abolishing language. The demarcation of the objectives or utility of language as communicative, cultural, or political, may actually allow us to see the uses and implications of Fuentes's dreamed common language beyond the purely sentimental. Furthermore, the conflation of all these objectives might turn Aguilar/Fuentes's project into a weapon for an external, unwinnable "culture war" against the English language as a *koiné*, with potentially devastating effects for both the Iberian and the Latin American cultural complexes.

Hispanophone academic discourse echoes this concern about the cultural ascendancy of English. Antonio Cornejo-Polar laments the "anglicization" of Latin American studies: critical texts in English tend to use

bibliography in that same language and ignore material produced in Latin America, leading to a “strange hierarchy” where texts in English dominate the field of “estudios hispanoamericanos.” Consequently, Cornejo-Polar denounces a “dramatic decline” of linguistic competence of the language “native” to the field among both professors and students (1997, 10–11).²³ But couldn’t we then say the same of the uncritical acceptance of the Spanish language as a sort of “unifying bond”? Finally, Julio Ortega’s own search for a “third way,” or a compromise between the inoperancy of traditional Hispanic philology and the political predetermination of Anglo-Saxon postmodern criticism, seems an academic echo of Fuentes’s quest for overcoming the silent sanctioning of the violent origins of “Hispanic American” culture in traditional narratives of the conquest while seeking refuge from the multiple pressures from the Northern neighbor.

Thus, Fuentes’s perspectives on ethnoconvergence seem to be a reaction to the late-twentieth-century tension between the promises of global cosmopolitanism and the dilution of national projects in Latin America (see García Canclini 2002, 49–50), clouded by the fear of a cultural globalization guided by American cultural imperatives. Fuentes responds with a reaffirmation of a new type of transnational identity, which we could call “Transhispanic,” that is based on concepts that echo the contemporary late-twentieth-century anxiety before an “Americanization of culture.” Such a reaction is problematic, however, for it recycles old themes of *mestizaje* that appeal to a contradictory valuation of diversity for its own sake at the same time that it declares the irreducible specificity of each of its constituents (Gruzinski 2000, 42).

Conclusion

“The Two Shores” is a narrative that, in the proximity of the Fifth Centennial of Columbus’s voyage, attempts to reexamine and overcome the traumatic foundation of Hispanic culture in the Americas. The allegory of the indigenous conquest of Spain attempts to overcome the foundational trauma with a prophetic/prescriptive refoundation of a diverse community constituted through the manifold heritage of transatlantic cultures. Fuentes’s avowed multiculturalism presents a view of liberal democratic polities as a point of encounter of multiple identities ostensibly homogenized by a common feature (in this case, language), by virtue of which all other differences become effaced in a level playground of

23. This article, written in English, can barely escape this contradiction. An assessment of the causes of this imbalance in Hispanophone studies that Cornejo-Polar reports has been long overdue.

social, economic, and political opportunity. However, a truer appreciation of sociocultural diversity should also entail a willingness to examine when and how difference or distance from established means of access to and production of societal power and knowledge may create inequalities and imbalances in social, economic, and political opportunity.

In spite of its positive message, "The Two Shores" indulges in recycling old metaphors of *mestizaje*. In doing so, Fuentes resuscitates the pseudocosmopolitan language of urban elites that absorbs non-European cultures into the transcendent myth of a collective hybridized culture that would retain a European ideological core with additions ("aportes" in Fuentes's language) of superficial, picturesque, or nontransformational aspects of its indigenous or African constituents, which are relegated to a supplementary, cosmetic condition.

The counterproductive outcome of this *neomestizaje* has diverse causes. Images such as the indigenous conquest of Spain or the castration of Cortés may be interpreted as symbolic compensations or not. But, clearly, such imagery reveals the atavistic recourse to military metaphors or the more overtly sexual dimension of the Malinche myth, which suggests an implicit ideological framework that validates the cultural heritage of the Spanish conquest despite the story's avowed renunciation of it through poetic imagery and a stylized reverse narrative. Furthermore, the reductionism or "miniaturization" of the manifold aspects of "culture" to their religious dimension simplifies the much more complex exchanges, tensions, or miscommunications that may occur within this "unified" culture. The gesture of allegiance to liberal principles does not translate into freedom of choice, association, or disassociation in a community that is monolithically defined by one core shared language that has been "enriched" by external contributions. Finally, the hybridity and diversity of Fuentes's Transhispanic culture takes for granted the stability and particularity of its constituent components—thus, through an inversion of traditional nationalistic logic, Fuentes debases indigenous cultures by essentializing them.

If we read "The Two Shores" as an attempt to make sense of and overcome the foundational trauma of the genocide against the indigenous peoples of the Americas and establish the discursive basis of an inclusive culture, then the election of Spanish as a unifying principle does little but precisely confirm the silent "order of things" that Jerónimo de Aguilar claims to contest. Although Fuentes criticizes the use of the term "Latin America" for its imprecisions as a colonial construct (1990, 11-12), his rhetoric appears tied to Eurocentric atavisms, and his interrogation of the foundational trauma fails to create a valid language for what Walter Mignolo would call a "post-Latin American world" (2005, 157) as a space for epistemic renewal. In *The Idea of Latin America*, Mignolo writes about the

search of “lo propio” (“our own things”), not as an essentializing exercise, but as a frame for appropriating concepts, ideas, and self-redefinition through the colonial wound. The concept of bringing “aportes” to the Spanish language emphasizes the subordinated (indeed, colonized) character of the “Other” who “contributes” to and “enriches” the constitution of the Hispanic essence. In Fuentes’s model, the Hispanic is a complex with a linguistic essence that constructs itself with the Other. It does not dissolve itself in the Other; it does not return or reciprocate: the Hispanic is seen as a stable *mestizaje* built with multiple contributions. The Hispanic itself is hybridized, but it does not transform itself any further into multiple components constituted in a crucible of de-hierarchized perspectives or in coeval languages and cosmologies.

In sum, the discourse in “The Two Shores” produces and contributes to the proliferation of ideas that are contrary to the cultural objectives stated by its narrator. Excerpts from institutional declarations at the Congreso Internacional de la Lengua Española and the Premio Cervantes prove that the hybridity and linguistic community that Fuentes advocates in his later work operate in synergy with the discourse of institutions that wield communicational, economic, and political power. Thus, the hybridity fashioned by Carlos Fuentes becomes a multiculturalist language of the elites. Their much less subtle usage of such imagery exerts symbolic violence upon the individuals at the margin of this glossocentric construct. My study does not negate the validity of literary discourse as a form of inquiry, but it alerts to its dangers when its imagery is translated uncritically, under the guise of communitarian sentimentality, to a social and political discourse uttered from institutional frameworks with an authoritarian and exclusionary potential.²⁴

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