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## The Disembodied Subject: Resistance to Norms of Hegemonic Identity Construction in Carmen Naranjo's *Diario de una multitud*

### Abstract

Costa Rica, whose civil war ended in 1948, represents a distinct literary space in which problematics of subjectivity were debated long before such dialectics appeared overtly in the rest of the isthmus. Carmen Naranjo's novel *Diario de una multitud* (1974) is situated in this context, and her novel demonstrates a preoccupation with the heterogeneity of *tico* identity.

Naranjo favors a collective representation of the urban citizenry. Through the perceptual liminality of the individual subject, the friction generated by its absence, the constant blurring that resets the boundaries of specific identities, and the disappearance of the private realm, Naranjo avoids inscribing lesbian desire. This novel has a disappeared lesbian. The urban multitudes are a spectacle of diversion that imply a *mise en abyme* of sexual desire, a speculation on the impossibility of liberating that desire. The blurred melancholy of the multitude replaces the blurred lesbian haunting the pages but never appearing in them. The splintered subjectivities, absence of sexual markers, and secretiveness of private lives imply the violence with which sexuality has been repressed.

This study argues that denying embodiment to the subject(s) of *Diario's* narration simultaneously obscures the lesbian and resists the violence that definition and even self-definition perpetrate on the subject.

### Keywords

Costa Rica, Carmen Naranjo, disembodiment, lesbian identity, identity, collective identity, individual identity

The Disembodied Subject: Resistance to Norms of  
Hegemonic Identity Construction in Carmen Naranjo's  
*Diario de una multitud*

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While the postwar period in Central America is traditionally defined in relation to the Sandinistas' electoral defeat in 1990, and the Peace Negotiations in El Salvador in 1992 and in Guatemala in 1996, Costa Rica, whose civil war ended in 1948, represents a distinct literary space in which the revolutionary problematics that engulfed the other Central American nation-states during the 1960-90 period were mostly absent. How then, do Costa Rican writers mark their beingness within the isthmus? Carmen Naranjo's narrativity is situated in this particular context. Her 1970s literary production demonstrates a marked preoccupation with issues of identity, specifically, the heterogeneity of *tico* (i.e., Costa Rican) identity.<sup>1</sup>

In *Diario de una multitud* (1974) 'Diary of a Multitude,' henceforth shortened to *Diario*, Naranjo avoids constructing individual subjectivities in favor of collective representation of the urban citizenry. It is a fragmented text comprised of voices that alternate chaotically throughout the narrative, demonstrating the concrete lack of a privileged subjectivity. While this fragmentation serves to disorient and even unsettle the reader, leaving one without a sense of order or plot, it represents another type and form of narrativity and, therefore, a different kind of story highlighting the fractured constitution of the popular subject. This positionality is justified by the country's socio-political situation and serves as a counterstatement to the myth of *tico* exceptionality, prevalent since at least the end of the nineteenth century, which continues

to characterize Costa Rica's public image even today, as will be explained later. Through the annihilation of individuality in this representation, the polyphony of the voices portrayed, and the carnivalization of their consciousnesses, Naranjo articulates an alternative to hegemonic identity and emphasizes the complexity of the social composition of the country, opening space for the voices of alterity.

Through the perceptual liminality of the subject in this representation, the friction generated by its concrete absence, the constant blurring that resets the boundaries of specific identities, and the disappearance of the private realm, Naranjo encounters a way out of inscribing lesbian desire. This novel has a disappeared lesbian. The urban multitudes are a spectacle of diversion that imply a *mise en abyme* of sexual desire, a speculation on the impossibility of liberating that desire. The blurred melancholy of the multitude replaces the blurred lesbian haunting the pages but never appearing in them. The splintered subjectivities, the absence of sexual markers, and the secretiveness of private lives imply the violence with which sexuality has been repressed.

This study looks first at Ileana Rodríguez's *Women, guerrillas and love* (1996) as well as Mikhail Bakhtin literary theory to examine the contestatory and destabilizing operation of the novel genre. Through the representation of the collectivity, Naranjo dismantles the myth of Costa Rican exceptionalism and, simultaneously, affirms that the alleged unity of national identity is a regulatory fiction. This study also refers to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), to examine the relationship between the female body and discourse. By denying embodiment to the subject(s) of *Diario's* narration, Naranjo effectively seeks simultaneously to obscure the lesbian and to resist the violence that definition and even self-definition perpetrate on the subject.

Naranjo's novel was published in 1974, at a time when suppression of gay and lesbian subjectivities by governmental entities and citizens was not yet a distant memory. It is relevant, given the times represented, to trace the structure of *Diario*. The novel is comprised of three sections: "Hilos" 'Threads,' "Claves" 'Keys,' and "Tejidos" 'Weaves.' These divisions, as noted by Arturo Arias, correspond to parts of the day.<sup>2</sup> "Hilos" represents the time from daybreak to

siesta and the voices contained therein are disconnected, evidencing the stark lack of solidarity among the urban masses. The second part, “Claves,” extends from mid-afternoon to nightfall, and its anonymous protagonists are primarily preoccupied with their own existential angst. The final section, “Tejidos,” in which Naranjo synthesizes the first two parts of her novel by staging a scene of *relajo* ‘mayhem,’ takes place between nightfall and midnight.

Before delving into the analysis of Naranjo’s subversion of Costa Rican national regulatory fictions, it is necessary to examine what constitutes *tico* exceptionalism. The notion of Costa Rican exceptionality originated in the late nineteenth century as a means of attracting foreign investment and a labor force. Verónica Ríos Quesada explains it thus: “Necesitan por tanto construir una imagen atractiva de sus respectivos países para posibles colonias de inmigrantes e inversionistas” (Diss.) ‘They need therefore to construct an attractive image of their respective countries for possible immigrant colonies and investors.’<sup>3</sup> As Ríos notes, this project of visibilization was taken on by Central American elites. Costa Rica proved to be the most successful of the nascent Central American states at projecting this so-called “attractive image” and drawing in foreign workers and capital.<sup>4</sup>

In the twentieth century Costa Rica has been defined with many appellatives, including, among others, “la Suiza centroamericana” ‘Switzerland of Central America,’ “tierra de maravillas” ‘land of wonders,’ and also as a bastion of “la paz, el trabajo duro, y el progreso” (Palmer *et al.* 1) ‘peace, hard work, and progress.’ One of *Diario*’s voices articulates the myth by ironically reproducing one of the president’s speeches:

...esto es un paraíso, somos la envidia de otros países, aquí no hay pobreza, no hay mala situación todos nadamos en plata, nadie se queja, la comida sobra, el bienestar inunda las calles. (62)

...this is a paradise, we are the envy of other countries, here we have no poverty, there’s no bad economic situation we’re all rich, no one complains, food abounds, well-being floods the streets.

The image promoted discursively possesses what Iván Molina Jiménez calls “una decisiva base étnica” (8) ‘a decisive ethnic basis’;

that is to say, a Eurocentric tendency to define Costa Rica as a white nation. This idea of racial prejudice should be the first warning of the deficient conceptualization of *tico* identity, but it is not the only signal of its artificiality. In addition, Naranjo portrays a chaotic and heterogeneous Costa Rica that flatly refuses to be happy, peaceful, and supposedly homogeneous.

Ileana Rodríguez affirms that in *Diario* “the popular character has lost its unity, its individuality” (116). She argues that in Naranjo’s novel we no longer have

...the poor little man of Ramírez and Arias, or Argueta’s lovable peasant woman; neither is s/he Asturias’s or Dalton’s humble Indian, let alone Morales’s or Borge’s heroic *guerrillero*, nor for that matter does s/he embody Che Guevara or Alegría/Flakoll’s massacred people. S/he is constituted as a popular non-subject—assorted, eclectic, disparate, dispersed. (116)

The diversity of the speaking subjects in *Diario* thus defies classification as a homogeneous unit. Naranjo situates the text’s emphasis on disconnected dialogues rather than on defined characters. The negation of embodiment and individuality in the text, and with it the impossibility of an internal discursive coherence, resists the monologic discourse constituted by the myth of Costa Rican exceptionalism.

Naranjo effectively creates a polyphonic novel in the Bakhtinian sense that affirms that the root of polyphony “...lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent” signaling that what there is in this type of text is a “combination of fully valid consciousnesses, together with their worlds ... that ... remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than homophony” (*Problems* 21). This novel has multiple voices, there is no interaction between speaking subjects until the end of the text; the declarations made by each particular subject are articulated in a disconnected manner. Each voice names its reality, creates its personal world. As a result, “There is no sequence; there is no plot; there is no story; there is no individual protagonist” (116), as Rodríguez points out. Naranjo avoids privileging any one subjectivity over another through this egalitarian representation of the voices of the multitude. The only unity these dispersed and diverse subjects possess is their

role in constructing, and empowering, a new Costa Rican identity that underlines its complexity, the “unity of a higher order than homophony” outlined by Bakhtin, that thereby invalidates the myth of exceptionalism.

Most of the voices represented in *Diario* explicitly resist the aforementioned *tico* exceptionalism. Among them, the voice of a university student contradicts two postulates of this myth: peace and equality. He reflects:

Soy un desastre, pero sé que el cambio viene, se siente en el aire, en esta inercia de las calles, en esta pereza de ser siempre iguales, en esta necesidad de romper las estructuras para que haya un acomodo sincero, acorde con la demanda que contiene la vida. (40)

I’m a disaster, but I know that the change is coming, I can feel it in the air, in this apathy in the streets, in this laziness about all being equal, in this necessity to break down the structures so there can be a sincere adjustment, in accord with the demand that life possesses.

This declaration portrays a society ripe for a systematic adjustment of the configuration of national identity, gesturing toward a conception more faithful to the day-to-day realities and experiences of its citizens. The so-called “pereza de ser siempre iguales,” pronounced ironically, signals the falsity of the concept of identity homogeneity, and the latent threat of a violent uprising that would destabilize the country’s system points to the fragility of the articulation of a peaceful *tico* that the agents of the powers-that-be so ardently promote.

The desire to empower this identity quality is revealed for its artificiality in the mouth of another of the speaking subjects of *Diario*:

Llueve mierda aquí, pura mierda ha caído en este largo invierno. Y necesitamos esconderla. Para eso llaman a los periodistas, para que inventen la tranquilidad y la paz, y mierda arriba y mierda abajo. (79)

It's raining shit here, pure shit has fallen in this long winter. And we need to hide it. That's why they call the journalists, so that they can invent tranquility and peace, and shit from top to bottom.

The voice of an elderly woman further highlights the unnaturalness of covering over Costa Rica's dirt, or the real state of their society, asserting that by covering things up, the filth stands out in contrast. Though she speaks specifically of dirty handkerchiefs, the analogy is no less applicable to Costa Rican society at large:

No sé por qué la gente trata de ponerle color a las cosas que se ensucian, como si la suciedad no se viera. Es peor. El color mismo fija la suciedad para siempre, ya no se puede borrar. (25)

I don't know why people try to dye dirty things, as if the dirt couldn't be seen. It's worse. The color itself just sets the dirt permanently, now it can never be erased.

It would seem that the attempts by the powers-that-be to cover the ugly parts of Costa Rican society are futile. Those to whom they pander see through the farce and continue to deny them any agency in their self-determination. In fact, Naranjo presents a tourist's perspective exemplifying how transparent the myth of *tico* exceptionalism truly is. As this character names the attractions he expected to find on his visit, he ironically enumerates contradictory experiences such as having his wallet and papers stolen and finding the people infinitely more reserved than he had imagined. He ends his speech with a revealing statement: "Cuando conozco un sitio nuevo, siempre sé cómo lo recordaré después. De aquí no sé, cierro los ojos y no veo una imagen precisa" (88); "When I visit a new place, I always know how I will remember it later. I'm not sure about this place, I close my eyes and I don't see a precise image." The tourist is unable to conjure the portrait of Costa Rica that official discourse seeks to paint. The subjugation of its people to this identitary image marking them is more subtle than violent, but it retains its aggressive power. Various other voices in the novel explicitly articulate this same censure of the pervading myth while others demonstrate the impossibility of constructing an authentic national consciousness.

Perhaps the most powerful undermining of the myth of Costa



Rican exceptionalism is found in the last section of the novel, “Tejidos.” In this part of *Diario*, the subjects that make up the urban collectivity interact in a *relajo* ‘riot’ that inverts the prevailing power structures in a carnivalesque manner. The episode originates in a student protest in one of San José’s plazas, which evolves into fierce looting and results in numerous fires. The student demonstration is a political event but the resulting chaos is divested of any ideological markings. It represents, above all, a brief disturbance of the established social hierarchies that constructs a world turned upside-down that demystifies the image of the happy *tico*. There is a latent viscosity in the masses as marginalized sectors impede attempts by the authorities to control the crowd. The police are ridiculed in an exchange between an anonymous citizen and an official. Replying to the policeman’s command that he not be pushed because he states “soy la autoridad,” ‘I am the authority,’ the speaking subject suggests that “La autoridad se ha disfrazado de payaso” (274) ‘Authority has dressed up as a clown.’ The image of the policeman as impotent fool underlines the nonsense of his affirmations of official power and defense of the status quo. The inversion of social hierarchies signals the possibility of subverting hegemonic norms that try to impose a *tico* national identity.

The carnivalesque rebellion underlining Costa Rican exceptionalism as fiction stands out when one of the subjects describes the situation:

Tanta tranquilidad no podía ser cierta, éramos el ejemplo pacífico del mundo, democracia y cultura. Nos hemos dejado intoxicar por doctrinas extranjeras, extrañas a nuestra personalidad, ajenas a nuestros problemas, ese es el peligro de la comunicación cuando hay un deseo estúpido de imitación y de envidia. Eso mismo, vulgares copiadore, eso es lo que somos. (288)

So much tranquility could not be true, we were the example of pacifism, democracy, and culture in the world. We’ve allowed ourselves to become intoxicated with foreign doctrines, unusual for our personality, far from our problems, this is the danger of communication when there is a stupid desire for imitation and envy. This very thing is what we are, vulgar copycats.

Revealing the ideological and economic interests at the root of the ideational myth exposes it as inauthentic, and also as an index of the subjugation of this diminutive nation to the hegemonic powers of Occidentalism. There is no appreciable authenticity; everything is a copy, a performance seeking to cover the fact that “estamos viviendo en una sociedad descompuesta” (291) ‘we are living in a broken society.’ The established powers are just as incapable of defining themselves as their own citizens.

The riot ends just as abruptly as it began, pointing toward the possibility of a tangible solidarity among the masses. Nowhere does it presume to offer a solution to the problematic identity that has now been publically (and discursively) deconstructed. Regardless, the disturbance (and even the text itself) could potentially be a warning, a marker highlighting the degrading effects of this burdensome imposition, a fictive act meriting only mocking derision. Naranjo portrays instead a heterogeneity that distances itself from the traditional regulatory mechanisms and makes space for “otras voces, otros gestos, otros rostros” (231) ‘other voices, other gestures, other faces.’ By extension, we perceive a wider application for the demystification of homogeneous identities. All of the speaking subjects, just like the text, are composed of fragments that correspond to diverse positionalities. They do not, in the end, establish any univocal or even ordered cohesion. With *Diario*, Naranjo refutes the myth of *tico* exceptionalism and the artificiality of its national construct, and also questions the nature of traditional notions of subjectivity. In this sense, *Diario* represents one of the first Central American novels to question left-wing, if not Marxist, discursivities about national identities so *en vogue* in the 1970s; she achieves this through the evocation of a regulatory fiction that denaturalizes realist representation to favor, literally, the margins of the nation as the center of her text, thus evidencing the lack of identity substance prevalent in the empty spaces of other discursivities that disguise *tico* identity problematics.

While Naranjo’s polyphonic text serves in large part to demystify the concept of Costa Rican exceptionalism, there are other subversive projects at play as well. As indicated in the introduction, one of the other significant problematics of identity construction explored is that of the binary governing the heteronormative conception of

gender and sexuality. In particular, this study explores the effect of the subject's disembodiment in *Diario* as it pertains to the disappeared lesbian and examines the contestatory potential of this spectral figure.

Before embarking on this analysis, a brief history of attitudes toward and the experience of homosexuality in Costa Rica is necessary, including governmental policies regarding these aforementioned sexual practices, still labeled abject until recently. The first significant historical event is the decriminalization of homosexuality in the Constitution of 1871 (Obando xiv). Alexander Obando points out that the decriminalization of such non-heteronormative sexual practices did not result in concomitant and immediate acceptance. In fact, homosexuals continued to be persecuted by the government as well as by the common citizenry (xv). This hostile climate continued until approximately 1968, chiefly because acknowledging the subjectivity of homosexuals ran counter to the aforementioned Costa Rican exceptionalism. In the 60s and 70s, Obando notes, there were gay and lesbian bars and clubs operating openly, but they were still subject to hostility and blackmail. Most social gatherings, then, were held in private homes, and gays and lesbians of all social classes adopted this practice (Obando xvi-xvii). The 1980s ushered in some of the first LGBT defense organizations (Obando xvii). During the Figueres Olsen administration, raids continued on gay and lesbian bars, and in fact even increased during this period. Such raids have by and large ceased since then, and the country has become a travel destination for "First World" gays and lesbians (xviii). Despite the progress achieved, patriarchal, Catholic society has remained resolute in its opposition to same-sex marriage (Obando xviii). It is naive to assume that even though Costa Rica has fashioned itself as a gay-friendly tourist destination its latent homophobia would have been erased.

Because antipathy still remained in the 1970s, it might be that the so-called self-ghosting of the lesbian subject in *Diario* serves to, as Terry Castle puts it in *The Apparitional Lesbian*, "escape hostility" (7). If what Castle suggests is true, that naming the lesbian dehumanizes her, then not naming her, not giving her embodiment serves as a certain means of escaping the binary norms of identity

construction. Not only does this strategy allow the lesbian subject to remain invisible, and thereby evade antagonism, it also serves to highlight the violence with which non-normative subjectivities are suppressed. While this “self-ghosting” effectively hides the lesbian, it simultaneously manifests the ferocity of the regulatory mechanisms in society that cause her to obscure herself.

While the lesbian hides herself in *Diario*, she has long been “ghosted” by culture, as Castle claims, because of her being considered a “threat to patriarchal protocol” (4-5). Castle uses the words of Monique Wittig, who explains that:

The refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not. For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the *role* ‘woman.’ It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man. (qtd. in Castle, 5)

The lesbian resists binary norms of identity construction and thereby threatens the patriarchal powers-that-be by rejecting the basic tenets of their conception of identity legibility.

Castle makes a relevant point about the disappeared lesbian:

The spectral figure is a perfect vehicle for conveying what must be called—though without a doubt paradoxically—that “recognition through negation” which has taken place with regard to female homosexuality in Western culture since the Enlightenment. (60)

Her invisibility, then, makes her visible. It can be said that the “self-ghosting” of the lesbian in *Diario* is a strategy deployed by the author to somehow acknowledge the unacknowledgable. Castle’s last point about the apparitional lesbian is that “[t]o become an apparition was also to become endlessly capable of ‘appearing.’ And once there, the specter, like a living being, was not so easily gotten rid of. It demanded a response” (63). So while the absence of the lesbian in *Diario* might on one hand seem to be an evasive strategy that allows the lesbian subject to escape violent repression, her ghosting also functions as a constant threat to the stability of the regulatory fictions of heteronormative modes of identity construction. The paradoxical nature of the lesbian’s absence from the text lends her a

greater power than her presence could.

How does Naranjo deploy the disappeared lesbian in *Diario*? Turning to the text itself, its very narrativity begins with an epilogue attributed to Juana Sánchez, a cook and servant. It demonstrates the liminality of the subject in Naranjo's representation since, as Rodríguez points out, "her voice is strategically situated outside the corpus of the text" (119). This signals in turn that the speaking subjects of *Diario* will be located "outside the cultural hegemonic discourse" (Rodríguez 120). Naranjo presents what Butler terms the "domain of abject beings," the outside of subjectivity, created by the exclusions and repudiations required of the subject in a binary system of identification (*Bodies* 3). Through the representation of these abject figures, the author constructs what one of the voices in the text suggests:

Se trata de penetrar las sendas rutinarias con el deseo de una vía subterránea por donde los trenes de la normalidad choquen y los descarrilamientos muestran otras voces, otros gestos, otros rostros. (231)

It's about penetrating the routine paths with a desire for a subterranean route where the trains of normality crash and the derailments show other voices, other gestures, other faces.

By giving voice to the marginalized sectors of Costa Rican society, Naranjo pushes back against "normality" and the violence with which it is enforced.

Because the popular subject consists of disparate beings, embodiment as well as internal discursive coherence is an impossibility. No one figure can stand in or speak for the collectivity. The disembodied subject's unruly discourse demonstrates that, as Rodríguez suggests: "Systems, taxonomies, classifications are no longer part of the everyday" (117). If differential categories do not exist, then, neither do the regulatory regimes governing them. Naranjo chooses to represent disparate voices rather than individual subjectivities because, as Butler puts it in *Bodies That Matter*, "...regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the

service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative” (2). The denial of embodiment in the text, then, also resists the binary norms established through compulsory heterosexuality, opening up the possibility for the legitimacy of other modalities of desire. While Naranjo does not explicitly refer to lesbian sexuality as an alternative to the heterosexual matrix, her rejection of this regulatory fiction does hint at the potentiality of other categories of identification. Refusing to name the lesbian is a manner of evading the violence that definition according to the heterosexual paradigm perpetrates on the subject.

Conversely, this refusal effectively obscures the lesbian and reflects the continuing hostility of Costa Rican society to non-normative sexual practices. While Naranjo does not talk about the lesbian, she does include references to male homosexuality throughout the text. Castle points out that the lesbian subject “has seldom seemed as accessible, for instance, as her ingratiating twin brother, the male homosexual” (2). Although male homosexuality is certainly not considered acceptable, he still possesses a modicum of legibility that the female homosexual does not. In this way, it seems safer to explicitly refer to the male homosexual while still choosing to disappear the lesbian.

Each mention of a *maricón* ‘fag’ is pejorative and reinforces the violence with which *machista* society seeks to repress non-normative sexualities. The anxiety produced by the visibility of gay men is articulated by one of the male voices in the text:

Ya no se sabe quién es quién... Estamos nadando entre puros maricones. Ya ni siquiera se esconden... Los ves en la calle, sonrientes, muy bien vestidos, en grupitos... Te aseguro que da miedo. En el cine no sabés si estás sentado a la par de uno de esos. Entonces, si tropiezan los pies o sentís un codazo, debés estar listo al puñetazo. (188)

Now you can't tell who is who... We're swimming in fags. Now they don't even hide... You see them in the street, smiling, very well dressed, in little groups... I assure you it's frightening. At the movies you don't know if you're sitting next to one of them. So, if they bump your feet or you feel the nudge of an elbow, you should

be ready to punch.

The lack of overt classificatory markers makes it difficult to distinguish between gender and sexual categories, and the inability of the heterosexual male to firmly place other male subjects either inside or outside the binary, causes him to contemplate literal physical force. While it is clear that homosexual males have cultural visibility, it is equally obvious that they are still violently denied cultural legitimacy. There is the possibility that, consciously or not, the author construes the lesbian as a phantasmic non-entity to point to the even more violent suppression of lesbian desire that absolutely refuses cultural intelligibility of any sort.

Another factor that contributes to the invisibility of the lesbian in *Diario* is the increasing lack of privacy in Costa Rican society. Near the beginning of the text, one of the voices laments the constant intrusions of others: “Esas puertas, esa ficción del cierre y un lugar propio, ese rectángulo laberinto que se va gastando con el tiempo, con la huella de las manos que toca, interrumpen, se atreven a interrumpir” (14) ‘These doors, this fiction of the lock and a place of one’s own, this rectangular labyrinth that is wearing out over time, with the mark of the hands that knock, interrupt, dare to interrupt.’ When doors and walls are not sufficient barriers to keep others out, private lives are guarded even more jealously, so much so in fact that the lesbian does not even dare to speak of the existence of her desire, obscuring it so that she will not suffer the potentially brutal consequences of its discovery. This kind of denial speaks to what Butler in *Gender Trouble* calls “the self-punishing melancholia of internalized identifications” (83). For the homosexual, she says: “both the desire and the object require renunciation and so become subject to the internalizing strategies of melancholia” (79). The power of prohibition causes the lesbian subject to sublimate her desire, thereby effectively disappearing any trace of her non-normativity and falling into psychosis.

Naranjo does not depict the lesbian’s melancholia at all. Instead, she replaces it with the melancholy of the urban masses. The generalized pessimism articulated by these similarly abject beings is an effect of the artificiality of classificatory schematics, described as

...un esquema escueto y frío de miles de seres con nombre y

apellidos, con problemas sexuales, ontológicos, sociológicos, y sobre todo con apetitos de vivir una vida no esquemática, una vida real, que en alguna forma sea su propia creación. (39-40)

...a plain and cold diagram of thousands of beings with first and last names, with sexual, ontological, sociological problems, and above all with an appetite for living a non-schematic life, a real life, that in one way or another may be their own creation.

The abject beings that constitute the multitude are divested of the opportunity for self-determination within the parameters of hegemonic social structures, just as much as the lesbian is denied this same opportunity by the heterosexual matrix. Placing the resulting melancholy in the mouths of these diverse and splintered subjectivities allows Naranjo to acknowledge the unfair imposition of hegemonic norms on subordinate subjectivities without specifically citing the lesbian.

The closing section of the novel, as already indicated, is a carnivalesque depiction of the mass mayhem ensuing as a result of a political rally gone terribly awry. The marginalized sectors gain control of the city center, looting and setting fires, and the authorities cannot stop them. As stated previously, this inversion of social hierarchies gestures briefly at the possibility of subverting hegemonic norms. However, it also works as liberation of suppressed sexual desires. In the end, the multitude ceases its rebellion “por el efecto mismo de la rapiña” (295) ‘through the effect of the pillaging itself.’ The solidarity among the urban masses may be fleeting at best, as they disperse while weighing the destruction caused by their collective outburst. But it is, without question, and even more significantly, a loosening of the libido, and its fleeting nature makes it, however demure, the equivalent of an invisible lesbian’s orgasm.

Because the lesbian is absent and, therefore, so is her body, a performative subversion of binary gender construction is foreclosed as a solution. While Naranjo admits that solidarity among marginalized groups is possible, she does not portray it as a viable means of liberating these subjects. Instead, what she stages is a faux orgasm. This suggests that the text articulates discursively that the representation of both the lesbian subject and her desire remains invisible. Nevertheless, the text also evidences that a queer logic



refigures heteronormativity. In this latter sense, *Diario* launches the first Central American critique of heterosexist constructions of nation by signaling the impossibility of a lesbian subject within 1970s Costa Rica.

Naranjo's *Diario* is a groundbreaking text because the author undertakes the project of undermining traditional modes of identity construction, positing the possibility of employing other, non-normative means of constructing individual subjectivities. Naranjo dismantles the myth of *tico* exceptionalism, and rends asunder the binary norms of the heterosexual matrix. *Ticos* are revealed as a heterogeneous group comprised of myriad subjectivities defying the homogenization implied by the myth of exceptionalism by their differing attitudes and social positions, and also impinged by a non-heterosexual sector in its midst. The ghosted lesbian subject further demystifies the lie of exceptionality by denying the inclusive, pacific image of the country as well as by resisting the heterosexual matrix promoted by patriarchy. While Naranjo does not propose effective means of successfully subverting the norms that govern identity construction, she does make a clear case for a radical reconstruction of subjectivity that will eventually admit other voices that have previously been relegated to the periphery.

#### Notes

1 Costa Ricans frequently refer to themselves as *ticos*. Its origin is frequently linked to the predilection in Costa Rican Spanish for the diminutive suffix *-itico*, instead of the more common *-itito* (for example, *chiquitico* instead of *chiquitito* as the diminutive form of *chico* 'small.' *Tico* is also often said to be derived from *hermanitico* (Helmuth xvi, Rankin 6). *Tico* is a colloquialism that contrasts with the more formal appellation *costarricense*.

2 Arias's complete discussion of *Diario* is in Chapter 4 of *Gestos ceremoniales*.

3 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

4 Ríos Quesada cites Felipe Molina's 1850 pamphlet *Bosquejo histórico de Costa Rica* as the primary propagandistic text that consolidated the image of Costa Rica as white and as "industrioso, emprendedor, económico y pacífico, hospitalario con los extranjeros" (Diss.) 'industrious, enterprising, economic and pacific, hospitable to foreigners.'

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