

Université de Montréal

**Redefining U.S. Borders: A Reading of Sandra Cisneros's
Caramelo, Cristina Garcia's *The Agüero Sisters*, and David
Plante's *The Family* and *The Native***

par

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Abstract

This thesis suggests a redefinition of the concept of the border in the context of the United States starting from the novels of three minority American writers, namely Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*, Cristina Garcia's *The Agüero Sisters*, and David Plante's *The Family* and *The Native*. I read the border in terms of movement between stasis and movement, between porousness and impermeability. In the first chapter of the dissertation, I situate border theory and analyse the progression of the field from borderland theories to immigration narratives. I introduce what I call "writing the border from the perspective of the border" as a conceptual frame from which to read border narratives and to redefine the border. Border perspective is a living dynamic that resists final resolutions. Border narratives represent a plethora of experiences that are moment-related and perspective bound. In the second chapter, I analyse the crossability of borders in the contemporary geopolitical scene. I highlight colonization, economic globalization, and immigration as instances of border crossing dynamics that function along transnational, denational, and postnational lines. In the third chapter, I analyse the movement of borders back into the life of immigrants in the United States. I identify capital insecurity and the commodification of space and ethnicity as reasons behind the tightening of the borders of the ghetto, the barrio, and the enclave. The clear-cut boundaries of the ethnic neighborhood become a technology of seclusion, stereotyping, and social injustice. The last chapter of this dissertation is a reading of border aesthetics and their contribution to writing the border from the perspective of the border. I analyse most prominently the novels' problematization of the concept of representation and their focus on the multiplicity of perspectives and the inaccessibility of the real and the partiality of mediation.

Key words: border theory and literatures, ethnic minorities in the U.S., multiculturalism, culture, immigration, globalization, space, place, territory, nation-state, nationalism, history, language, representation, community, social justice, citizenship

Résumé

Cette thèse propose une redéfinition de la notion de *frontière* dans le contexte américain, avec pour point de départ les romans de trois voix littéraires issues de trois minorités ethniques : Sandra Cisneros (*Caramelo*), Cristina Garcia (*The Agüero Sisters*) et David Plante (*The Family* et *The Native*). Je conceptualise la frontière comme fluctuation entre mouvement et immobilité, entre porosité et imperméabilité.

Dans le premier chapitre, je fournis des repères sur la théorie des frontières et j'analyse les avancées de ce champ d'étude, du concept de terre frontalière ("Borderland Theories") jusqu'aux récits d'immigration. Je propose un cadre conceptuel que j'appelle « *Écrire la frontière à partir de la perspective de la frontière* », lequel permet une lecture neuve des récits de frontière, et une redéfinition de la notion elle-même. Prise comme perspective, la frontière est une dynamique vivante, ce qui la rend plurielle et impossible à fixer définitivement; aussi les récits de frontière présentent-ils une grande variété d'expériences, toutes liées à des moments et à des points de vue uniques.

Dans le second chapitre, j'analyse la porosité des frontières dans le contexte géopolitique contemporain, en mettant en lumière comment la colonisation, la mondialisation économique et l'immigration sont autant de mécanismes de transgression des frontières qui suivent des orientations transnationales, dénationales et postnationales.

Dans le troisième chapitre, j'étudie la résurgence des frontières dans la vie des immigrants qui habitent aux États-Unis. J'identifie l'insécurité capitaliste ainsi que la marchandisation de l'espace et de l'ethnicité comme étant à l'origine du renforcement des frontières délimitant les

quartiers ethniques; génératrices de stéréotypes négatifs, ces divisions physiques deviennent une technologie d'exclusion et d'injustice sociale.

Le dernier chapitre présente une lecture des aspects esthétiques de la frontière, voyant comment ils peuvent contribuer à *écrire la frontière à partir de la perspective de la frontière*. Dans les textes à l'étude, j'examine de près la problématisation du concept de représentation, la multiplicité des points de vue narratifs, l'inaccessibilité du réel, et la partialité de la médiation.

Mots clés : Théories et écrits sur les frontières, minorités ethniques aux États-Unis, multiculturalisme, culture, immigration, mondialisation, espace, place, territoire, état-nation, nationalisme, histoire, langue et langage, représentation, communauté, justice sociale, citoyenneté

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Dedication

To my mother,
who taught me to think for myself...

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Introduction:

1. Border Gnosis and Border Genealogy

The production of border theory and the critical engagement with border fiction have become growing concerns of scholars in the last three decades. The border as such is a relatively new theme in scholarly production and fiction. It remains under-theorized and even controversial. As Connie Jeanette Herndon asserts in her dissertation, “A lack of theoretical codification leaves border theory vulnerable to criticism of cultural essentialism and exclusionism” (226). This lack of “theoretical codification” is due to the location of border theory at the intersection of different disciplines and different theories. As a result, border narratives come across as very large in scope and lacking focus. In *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Walter D. Mignolo elaborates an interesting understanding of the border as a locus of enunciation. He sets it at the core of knowledge production operations and knowledge production machines and proposes it as an alternative to traditional modes of thinking and their epistemes. Mignolo favors “gnosis” and “gnoseology” over “epistemology” and “hermeneutics” and explains that: “*Gnosis* and *gnoseology* are not familiar words nowadays within cultures of scholarship. The familiar words are those like epistemology and hermeneutics, which are the foundations of the ‘two cultures’, sciences and the humanities” (9).

In Mignolo’s analysis both epistemology and hermeneutics are Western modes of knowledge production, they are disciplinary and hegemonic. On the other hand, gnosis andgnoseology “would take us away from the confrontation – in Western epistemology, between

epistemology and hermeneutics” (Mignolo 9). They hold the promise of “open[ing] up the notion of ‘knowledge’ beyond cultures of scholarships” (Mignolo 9) and “absorbing and displacing hegemonic forms of knowledge into the perspective of the subaltern” (Mignolo 12). Mignolo links gnosis and gnoseology to border thinking and its critical potential. He argues:

Border gnoseology is a critical reflection on knowledge production from both the interior borders of the modern/colonial world system (imperial conflicts, hegemonic languages, directionality of translations etc.) and its exterior borders (imperial conflicts with cultures being colonized as well as the subsequent stages of independence or decolonization) (Mignolo 11).

My dissertation shares Mignolo’s concern with the gnoseological potential of borders and their capacity to transform hegemonic thought patterns and to revise logocentric culture production apparatuses. Indeed my project aims to introduce a new understanding of the concept of the border itself, which is geared towards telling border realities anew and revolutionizing border related narratives.

My project highlights the gnoseological potential of borders, yet it shows that this potential can be fully explored only by focusing on borders as territorial in the first place. Any other approach to the concept of the border remains partial and curtails the knowledge production capacities of the border. I part company with Mignolo when he asserts:

Border thinking from a territorial perspective becomes a machine of appropriation of the colonial difference/a/nces; the colonial difference as an object of study rather than as an epistemic potential. Border thinking from the perspective of subalternity is a machine for intellectual decolonization. (Mignolo 45)

Mignolo’s project sets border thinking from a territorial perspective against border thinking from the perspective of subalternity, and he favors the latter over the former. He claims that by embracing border thinking from the perspective of subalternity he moves from the

logocentrism of colonial difference towards intellectual decolonization. The terms of “the perspective of *subalternity*” do not seem to me that free of the logic of colonial difference. Attempting to resist colonial thinking, the terms of Mignolo’s project become very similar to those of “colonial difference”. They reproduce them by the very fact of attempting to counter them.

In their article “Rethinking Border Thinking”, Scott Michaelsen and Scott Cutler Shershow elaborate a very interesting critique of the premises of Mignolo’s theory in *Local Histories/ Global Designs*. They highlight the self-contradictory aspect of the terms of Mignolo’s project by analysing his “vision of the radical alterity of Amerindian signifying practices” (Michaelsen and Shershow 48). According to Michaelsen and Shershow, a sense of identity coherence and binary identity models still undergird Mignolo’s project as he “comprehends Amerindian ‘gnosis’ as fundamentally different from a Western or European one” (52). In this sense, at some moments of Mignolo’s text “border thinking seems conversely to be little more than a displacing or replacing of European thought by its Amerindian counterpart” (Michaelsen and Shershow 54). In directions akin to my argument’s, Michaelsen and Shershow’s argue that a presumed radical complementarity of identity patterns is not only intellectually counterproductive but also politically disengaged. “In other words, complementarity rather than fundamentally *opposing* binarity, leaves every available term of discrimination in place, ‘preventing any means of *intervening* in the field effectively” (Michaelsen and Shershow 53). Identities are rather about identifications. Identities are relational and differences are relative. Maintaining a territorial frame for identity debates enables political positioning and allows critical debates to take place according to a dynamic

pattern. This pattern takes into consideration space as a cornerstone in identity formation processes and hence goes beyond the limits of traditional concepts of inherited ethnic identities and fixed definitions of communities.

It is my claim that a conscious and strategic endorsement of the terms of colonial difference holds the promise of moving beyond them only by subverting them from within. For this reason, my approach to the concept of the border is primarily territorial. My project attempts to re-define territorial borders in such a way as to show the intellectual flaws on which colonial difference and border machinery are built. My dissertation does not shy away from asserting the materiality of borders and it is only by doing so that it aspires to intellectual decolonization and to resetting the terms of modern knowledge production machines.

Most border theorists and scholars agree that the “place of birth” of border theory is the Mexican-American border. One of the major works that ushered the theme of the border into scholarly discourse as an autonomous field of study is Chicana poet and critic Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). *Borderlands* deals with the U.S.-Mexico geopolitical border while arguing for its constructedness and arbitrariness. *Borderlands* is a cornerstone in border studies insofar as it inspired many critics and authors to pursue border theory and fiction as an autonomous and rich field of study within the scope of cultural and literary studies. *Borderlands* is also foundational in the sense that it introduces a different mode of articulation, border language, and aesthetics, which have been appropriated by many authors and analysed by many critics.

In *Rewriting North American Borders in Chicano and Chicana Narratives* (2001), Monika Kaup identifies two different phases in border fiction: a first phase where the border is

portrayed as a “home territory” and a second phase where it becomes a “line” (10). This distinction is very important as it marks the difference between a “nationalist borderland vision” and an “immigrant vision”. The former perspective conceives of the border as a third space to be celebrated by placing the focus on the distinctiveness of native symbols and indigenous cultures. As for the latter, the border is portrayed as a line that can be crossed and hence the focus is placed instead on “temporal poetics of spatial mobility and change”. Another important critical production in the field is *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, edited by Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson (1997). This book warns against “the re-inscription of various disciplines as instances of border studies” (Michaelsen and Johnson 2). Interestingly enough, the authors of this study argue that borders are a pre-condition for the articulation of cultural difference. Consequently, cultures are interlocked and cannot be described separately because all modes of cultural identity are relational (Michaelsen and Johnson 9-10). Indeed, following the same logic, my dissertation will show that borders produce cultures and cultural difference instead of being produced by them.

Claudia Sadowski-Smith’s *Border Fiction: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States* (2008) is closely aligned with my project’s scope and concerns. It is one of the rare studies that brings together the Southern and Northern boundaries of the United States; it deals with the Canadian-U.S. border as well as the U.S.-Mexican border. Yet, Sadowski-Smith’s concern with the Canadian-American border is limited to the role it plays as a crossing way for undocumented immigrants due to its relative lack of militarization. She draws an analogy between Latin-American texts written in languages other

than English and French-Canadian texts, but she fails to focus on Franco-American texts that are written in English with the recurrence of French words.

2. U.S. Borders: Of Dislocation and Relocation

My dissertation studies David Plante's novels *The Family* (1978) and *The Native* (1988), Cristina Garcia's *The Agüero Sisters* (1997), and Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo* (2003). The works of these three authors negotiate the contemporary American map in ways that lead us to reconsider the dominant critical discourse on the United States' borders and borderlands. The four novels delve into personal and communal histories of immigrant families. Springing from different genealogies and following different trajectories, these histories evoke multiple crossings of the U.S. borders and different modes of (de)constructing these borders. *Caramelo* tells the story of the Reyes family that travels constantly between Chicago and Mexico City and through it the history of the Mexican-American border. The novel narrates the Mexican-American war (1846-1848) that ended up with Mexico losing half of its territories to the U.S. Garcia's novel portrays the Agüero sisters' voyages between Miami and Havana while telling the story of the different modern geopolitical interactions between the United States and Cuba, including the U.S. invasion of Cuba in 1899 and the Platt Amendment (1902) that gave the U.S. the right to intervene militarily in Cuba even after the formation of a Cuban government. The novel is equally critical of the legalization of the U.S. dollar in Cuba in 1994, and the phenomenon of Cuban immigration to the U.S. as a result of Fidel Castro's communist regime. Plante's novels tell another border story, that of the Quebec diaspora of the 19th and early 20th centuries (1840s -1930s). By narrating the lives of the members of the Francoeur family, Plante

tells the story of many rural Quebecers who crossed the Canadian-American border to seek better economic opportunities in industrial New England.

By narrating these crossings, the four novels point to the dislocation and relocation of cultures through colonization, globalization, and immigration. They are preoccupied with this logic of “Empire” as defined by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their seminal work *Empire*, especially its consequential erasure of boundaries and frontiers. *Empire* analyses U.S. contemporary global politics against the background of an earlier European imperialism arguing that “in contrast to Imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial centers of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentred and deterritorialized apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its expanding frontiers” (Hardt and Negri xii). Within this logic of global politics, borders between different geopolitical entities, or “nation-states”, appear even more arbitrary. Yet, my dissertation will also show how the four narratives suggest the pertinence of an alternative discourse that reveals the ideological impulse behind the increasingly deterritorialized perception of culture in the contemporary geopolitical scene.

These novels bespeak another aspect that is equally elemental to the definition of the border. As much as they foreground the abstraction of the border through the practice of crossing, these narratives also point to important enactments of the limiting, material, and concrete aspects of space. In this sense, they reveal a geography of superimposed maps that relocates cultures and resets borders. Significantly, the novels address very specific locations *within* the United States, namely Chicago in *Caramelo*, Miami in *The Agüero Sisters*, and Rhode Island in *The Family* and *The Native*. The characters, I will argue, are global subjects

insofar as they perform spatial mobility between their countries of origin and the U.S., but their movements are ultimately curtailed by the highly disciplined internal space of the U.S. that resets borders and re-enforces differences in terms of economic opportunity and social progress. The culture of origin is re-created within a very specific location that limits the possibilities of intercultural exchange.

My dissertation maintains that a full definition of the border requires accounting for these different aspects of contemporary geopolitical mapping. The novels under consideration help us understand that even if borders are arbitrary constructions and spaces of continuity that are constantly crossed, they remain above all symptomatic of difference and discontinuity since they continue to impose limits on cultural integration and social mobility. Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante thoroughly narrate the border by acknowledging both of its moves: unsettling and resettling. On the one hand, they portray immigrant families whose lives are stories of daily crossings that generate hybrid identities and global selves in permanent acts of self-translation. For example, when little Celaya is at school in Chicago, she is surrounded by friends who want to know more about her family's Mexican way of life. When she goes back to Mexico, she is the American child who is unable to get along with the Mexican cousins who are curious about her life in *el otro lado* (the other side). Yet, the putative hybridity that results from the permeability of borders is questioned by the limits imposed on this "hybrid status". These families' lives barely take shape outside their ethnic neighborhoods. A full understanding of the concept of the border requires reading it as an unceasing oscillation between the *deconstruction* of self-contained geographical and cultural entities and the *construction* of social differences and historical conflicts. In this sense, the four novels

analyzed in this dissertation contribute to a discourse that redefines the border and recreates border aesthetics.

3. Redefining the Border: A Deconstructive Strategy:

My project contributes to what Edward W. Soja called “a spatial turn” and described as one of “the most important intellectual renewals of the 20th century” (Soja, “Third Space” 49). Soja stresses the importance of readdressing spatiality and redefining space-related concepts. His words are worth quoting at length because they help situate my project and define its scope. Soja affirms:

Space and spatiality have long been muddled and misconstrued either by the baggage of tradition, by older definitions that no longer fit the changing contexts of the contemporary moment, or by faddish buzzwords that substitute apparently current relevance for deeper understanding. It thus becomes more urgent than ever to keep our contemporary consciousness of spatiality – our critical geographical imagination – creatively open to redefinition and expansion in new directions; and to resist any attempt to narrow or confine its scope. (Soja, “Third Space” 49)

Indeed, I set it as the objective of this dissertation to redefine the concept of the border in such a way as to reveal its formerly obscured facets and hence to push forward the limits of border discussions and border theories. Soja’s attempt to expand critical geographical imagination was achieved most clearly through his concept of “thirdspace”. He defines it “in its broadest sense” as “a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings” (Soja, “Third Space” 50). Soja acknowledges the affinities his concept of “thirdspace” has with Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of liminality as developed in *The Location of Culture*. Soja’s “thirdspace” can also be associated with Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands as analysed in *Borderlands/ La*

Frontera. All these projects share an attempt to put forward a new spatial concept that transcends differences and moves beyond clear-cut geographies and cultural demarcations.

Among other theorists contributing to this “spatial turn”, Soja, Bhabha, and Anzaldúa claim that their new spatial configurations open up geographic and cultural imaginaries by completely moving beyond dualisms. Soja asserts:

Thirdspace is a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other; where one can be Marxist and post-Marxist, materialist and idealist, structuralist and humanist, discipline and transdisciplinary at the same time. Thirdspace is rooted in just such a recombinational and radically open perspective. (“Third Space” 50)

Ironically, “thirdspace” turns out to be dualistic. The aforementioned passage for example lists a series of expressions in an oppositional mode and claims that thirdspace combines all of them together and hence it moves beyond dualistic logic. Yet, by invoking these terms in an oppositional pattern, Soja is more likely to resuscitate dualistic thinking. This pitfall might be traced back to a linguistic impasse, i.e. to the limits of language itself and not to some inherent logical flaw. Yet, theories are discursive formations that do not exist outside language. This recurrent flaw in border narratives bespeaks the limits of Soja’s thirdspace logic and all projects with similar objectives and rhetorics. My dissertation proposes a different methodology of expanding the scope of our geographical imaginaries and understanding human spatiality without falling into such logical impasses. I propose to redefine classical concepts, such as the concept of the border, to widen our understanding of space and to push forward its limits. This redefining methodology allows for a deeper critical dynamic to take place. It is a deconstructive methodology that enables an inside out subversion of older discourses and their corresponding enterprises. By redefining the concept of the border I aim to

question logocentrism, racism, colonialism and many other isms by laying bare their internal decadence. As it unfolds, my redefinition of the border expresses its disillusionment with the possibility of going beyond the dualistic terms of language and referential logic. Indeed, “Movement is only possible in reference to place. Boundaries can only be crossed if boundaries exist. Mobility ontologically implies its twin, stasis” (*Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle 1*).

My dissertation strives to strategically draw clear boundaries between the physical and the metaphorical facets of the border, in an attempt to resolve some of the problems and difficulties in the field of border theory. The conflation and equation of the metaphor of the border with the border as a material construction has resulted in the opacity of some border narratives and the depolitization of others. I will try to achieve this task primarily by engaging issues of globalization, immigration, border theory, nationalism and nation-state rather than issues of cultural diversity, or the ethnic “mosaic” of the United States. Consequently, my research will be engaged with spatial theories as well as postcolonial theories in addition to theories of ethnicity and cultural hybridity that are often deployed in the context of “non-mainstream” American fiction. These theories are filtered through my focus on the characters’ interaction with their space, i.e. their constant spatial movements and temporal fluctuations as they negotiate and construct their spaces.

My focus on the United States’ bordering countries, Canada and Mexico, will not be approached from the perspective of borderland theory, but rather from the perspective of border theory. It is at this point that I part company with Anzaldúa and many theorists of the Mexican-American border. Most of these analyses have dealt with the Mexican-American

border from the perspective of *Chicanismo*, a movement that calls for the celebration of the specificity of Chicana\o culture based on its difference from both American and Mexican cultures and its rootedness in Aztlan cultural heritage. However, the border as negotiated by Sandra Cisneros in her novel *Caramelo* and as discussed in my thesis will not occur as “home” but rather as a “line”. Both the novel and my thesis look at the border from the perspective of Mexican-American immigrants and Mexican-Americans born in the U.S. instead of the perspective of Chicana\o inhabitants of the borderlands. One of the key concerns of my dissertation is to assert that a counter-statement to theories of cultural essentialism cannot be articulated from the locus of a “borderland” culture and philosophy. Ultimately, these do not deconstruct the essentializing claims about bordering cultures simply by materializing a possible encounter between them in the space of the border\ borderland. In the logic of my thesis, breaking through essentialist discourses is possible only through the assertion of a to and fro movement between two *sides* of a border. The possibility of such a movement is the confirmation of the dysfunction of cultural and racial essences.

This deconstructive gesture of the political and cultural essences of nations and nationalism through different forms of movement across borders is not the only movement that defines the border. Indeed, most studies in the field have pointed clearly to the constructedness of the border and its arbitrariness. My dissertation will attempt to extend this definition of the border by pointing to how the border, though constructed by nation-states, is constantly displaced and (re)placed by cosmopolitan dynamics. The border is similarly constructive of cultural categories and life conditions. Through immigrant narratives, ethnic literatures break through monolithic constructions of spatial as well as cultural categories and affirm the multi-

directional aspect of cultural exchange and the permeability of physical and metaphorical borders. Yet, these narratives subvert border dialectics without overlooking the effects that borders engender on the life of immigrants and the negotiation of their identities in the adopted country. *Caramelo* for instance suggests that the border is an arbitrary line. Its literal crossing is a daily practice, yet its metaphorical crossing remains a luxury that is afforded only by upper class Mexicans. It is in this sense that the border appears to be constructive of cultural differences and disruptive of geographical continuities. Similarly, Plante's novels portray the possibility of cross-cultural intermarriages and feelings of belonging to both mainstream American culture and to a French-Canadian heritage. At the same time, moments of breaking off all these cultural ties are inevitable. It is at these moments that the border reveals its constructive aspect and sentiments of liminality and mental unbalance take over. *The Aguero Sisters* equally points to the constructedness of the border by showing how assuming an American identity becomes a mechanism used to pass in Cuban society, even as the assimilation of Cuban immigrants within the Anglo-American culture makes it difficult for them to integrate into the Cuban-American community of Miami.

4. U.S. Borders Redefined: Roadmap

Rather than analyzing the four novels separately, I will discuss them according to their contribution to the exploration of certain key concepts. Each chapter develops a distinct argument, yet the three chapters work together to advance the dissertation's overall concerns. From different angles, the following chapters will contribute to my redefinition of the border in terms of a movement not between two different geopolitical entities, but a movement between movement and stasis, between arbitrariness and fixity. The first chapter deals with border

theory in order to better position my research and define my contribution to the field. It discusses the major approaches to border theory and their different shortcomings. It comes up with an alternative to classical approaches and definitions of the border and calls for what I call theorizing the border from the perspective of the border itself. This approach deals with the border in its own terms as particular and material. It warns against indulging in narratives about the metaphoricity of the border, and calls for a more concrete approach to border studies and border definitions. Most particularly, I show the importance of moving beyond both the either/or logic that is often associated with the definition of the border, and also the syncretic logic of the borderlands. I highlight the multiple logics of the border and the different political stakes at play in different border contexts and realities. The border constructs some realities and deconstructs others and the game is far from being arbitrary.

The second chapter analyses the first aspect of the border, which is constructedness. It highlights the arbitrariness of the border by focusing on different modes of transcending it. Territorial annexation, cultural imperialism, and immigration are all modes of bridging cultures and territories either through violent historical impositions or personal life choices. Obviously all of these modes point to the arbitrariness of the borders of the nation-state and their constructedness as a materialization of power dynamics. Immigration and constant travels, in the case of the Francoeur and Reyes families and the Agüero sisters, evoke the historical fluctuations and constant movements of the American border. As a result, the analysis in this chapter will include references to historical events as well as to different theories of globalization, nationalism, and the nation-state.

Caramelo includes long footnotes that retell historical facts such as the invasion of the city of Tampico by the Americans (Cisneros 125) or the Vietnam War (246). Apart from colonization and military invasion, *Caramelo* portrays global economy as another mode of transgressing the U.S.-Mexican border. *The Agüero Sisters* narrates the U.S. invasion of Cuba and the legalization of the American dollar in Cuba. These instances of transnationalism are portrayed as destructive of the Cuban economy. Sex tourism is portrayed as another consequence of “global” economies. In *The Family* and *The Native*, exchange value mobilizes contemporary subjectivities and traces their trajectories. Jim Francoeur immigrates to the U.S. looking for a job in the mills of New England. He is ultimately laid off and has to bear the impact of unemployment on himself and his family.

The third chapter of my dissertation depicts the second aspect of the border which is fixity and determinism. At this level, the border is defined as a line that actually separates, rules, and creates cultural and social differences. This chapter delineates the effect of borders as tools of power in the construction of identities. Immigration as a mode of resistance to the nation-state depends on a conditioned process of integration. The analysis of the importance of cultural symbols, traditions and particularities points to the determinism of borders and the ways that they construct differences that delimit social interaction within the space of the adoptive nation-state. The analysis of the everyday lives of characters and their representation shows how borders enable the preservation of cultural specificities as much as they reinforce economic inequality and social injustice.

All characters in the novels suffer from a sense of duality that limits their integration into mainstream American culture as well as into their cultures of origin whenever they travel back

home. In *The Agüero Sisters*, Constantia, who considers herself American, is only successful in selling her cosmetics because her clients like her foreign accent. She is invited to American T.V. shows as representative of “Latino success stories” (Garcia 233). Exoticism becomes the only guarantee of success in American culture for hyphenated-identity subjectivities. Integration remains an unfulfilled American dream for these “flowers of exile” whose immigration documents “tell the story of their lives as nothing else does” (Garcia 72). Plante’s characters share a similar sense of non-belonging to mainstream American culture. In Providence, Rhode Island, they feel as if “they were in another country”. It is their foreignness that makes them global subjects: “because they were foreign, could be taken, not for a family from a small grey parish in providence, but a family from anywhere” (Plante 121). This sense of foreignness, symptomatic in all characters in the novels, bespeaks the schizophrenia of the adoptive society and its culture. The Francoeur parents for example cannot think of themselves except “in terms of something outside them” (Plante 125). Because of this overwhelming sense of foreignness, the characters in these novels are constantly preoccupied with family concerns. Celaya records Reyes family stories as facts that provide her with a certain sense of belonging and rootedness. The family, despite its deterioration in many instances, becomes the only frame capable of sustaining a certain sense of self by replacing national sentiments of belonging and integration.

The last chapter is devoted to investigating the aesthetic choices of the authors while pointing to their use of the border as both a constructed and a determinant element in their fiction. Cisneros’s usage of the *rebozo* as a central metaphor for Chicana culture in her novel *Caramelo* is an example of the importance of metaphors to border fiction and border

imaginary. “The rebozo was born in Mexico, but like all *mestizos*, it came from everywhere” (Cisneros 96). Interestingly, the fringe of the rebozo is unknotted just like the border between the U.S. and Mexico is indeterminate and unsettled. One of the most important metaphors in *The Agüero Sisters* is the metaphor of the mother, traditionally used in most nationalistic and patriotic discourses as a vehicle for the country of origin. Interestingly, Garcia twists the metaphor, and Cuba comes out as a step-mother unable to provide security and comfort. Similarly all female characters in the novel are murdered, sick, or loose. The female body is portrayed as disintegrated, a source of discomfort and malaise exactly as both Cuba and America are to Cuban-American characters in the novel. This sense of disintegration and doubleness is representative of feelings of alienation that the characters experience. Vomit, sickness, and death haunt the characters of *The Family* and *The Native* and reflect feelings of malaise and the deterioration of the human body. The body of the nation-state is a similarly deteriorated entity that seeks fluidity in a “global” era, but remains incapable of total dissolution. I will also focus on the linguistic and discursive variations present in the texts in such a way as to show the importance of the multiplicity of perspective in border narratives. Narrating the border is an image of the border concept itself: unsure, multiple, and perspective-related.

Chapter One

Writing the Border from the Perspective of the Border

“In light of a growing body of research, the world of empirical phenomena simply proves to be more complex than allowed for by the conceptual framework of the dominant research question.” – Oliver Schmidtke¹

This chapter focuses on the major approaches to border theory and highlights the way they contribute differently to advancing border debates in different contexts. It also discusses the major flaws of these theories in such a way as to propose an alternative. My major argument is that for border theory to survive as a field of critical theory, borders have to be accounted for in their own terms as territorial and grounded in the particularity of their material realities. To propose a new border narrative, the argument moves through three different, though intersecting, levels: the metaphorical, the conceptual, and the material. As my narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that these levels are by no means separate nor contradictory, yet a strategic separation between them is necessary in order to better come to grips with their (dis)junctions in border narratives and the stakes they bring into play. As a first step, I distance myself from some border discourses that deal with the border in metaphorical terms. I argue for the importance of unsettling these metaphorical discourses in order to achieve a better understanding of the concept of the border and a more accurate framing of border theory in particular and border narratives in general. The second part of this chapter deals with territorial boundaries and their conceptual separation of “inside” and “outside” as an ideal that leads to an abstraction of the debate on border realities. I examine multiculturalism as a deconstructive dynamic of border ideals. And, I argue that despite its transformative potential, the concept of multiculturalism has more often than not been misused and affected by the idealism of the

¹“Introduction: National Closure and Beyond”, 1

concept of the nation-state. The last part of the chapter focuses on the different material realities at the borders of the United States, while arguing for an alternative concept of the border that springs from these realities. I argue that the logic of the border is not the dualistic either/or model, nor the syncretic borderland promise. Instead the border is about multiple experiences where the local intersects with the global in a living dynamic that highlights some realities and obscures others. Thus, understanding the multiple logic of the border and the political stakes at the border are only possible through focusing on the material realities of the border. A close examination of those realities reveals that while the border is a constructed phenomenon, it ultimately constructs some realities and deconstructs others.

1.1. Decoupling the Metaphoric and the Territorial: a Strategic First Step

Interestingly, Ian Angus argues that the border is a moment of silence that allows for naming, and hence language, to take place. He argues: “As one struggles to describe this site [the border] one reaches beyond the babble of plural discourses towards a universal place whose silence situates them all, that allows a naming which is the origin of language” (Angus, “Crossing” 44). Indeed, borders are about silence, but I would argue that this silence is originally all about *silencing*. Unnatural as they are, borders come as an imposition of silence onto history and nature. The violent act of mapping and tracing borders and the segregationist discourses that accompany them necessitate silencing parts of the history of connections between both sides of the border. This silence is then utilized to categorize and label the natural space, as in Angus’s argument. One further step in silencing is preventing the border from speaking out its own *silencing* by virtue of obscuring the history of its space and connections. These accumulated layers of silence and violence make it a hard task to speak about the border, let alone to speak out its truths. Indeed, more often than not border theories fall into the trap of

silencing the border by misusing it as a concept and instrumentalizing it as a reality. The complexity of the concept of the border, and one of the reasons for which border theory remains a hazy and an undertheorized field as some critics argue, is the capacity of the border to bring together contradictions while annihilating dualities. The failure of border theorists is to fully and literally account for this capacity of the border. More often than not border critics actually fall into the trap of essentialism and binarism while attempting to deconstruct dualities. The instrumentality of the concept of the border in various intellectual debates has made border theory an amorphous field, prone to incorporation by any other field and any other approach to cultural studies.

It is indeed this aspect of border studies that Michaelson and Johnson consider the limit of the field. They argue in *Border theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*: “we imagine one possible meaning for our book’s title simply to be this: the ‘limit’ for Border theory’s growth is the reinscription of the various disciplines as instances of border studies” (2). I argue that this infiltration of border theory into other fields and the hitherto unformed concept of the border can be traced back to theorizing the border from perspectives and with terms other than its own. The metaphorization of the border is, in my view, a disease that plagues the field. Breaking through the limits of the metaphorical, I argue, is a necessary step if border theory is to advance. As many critics maintain, there is a lot unsaid about the border. In my view, a lot of the unsaid about the border has to do with the dualistic nature of language itself. Paradoxically, it is only by accounting for this unsaid that border theory can eschew the trap of essentialism. Accounting for the *unsaid* using *language* is one challenge, among others, that this chapter faces. Working through it is a primordial step in moving beyond the limits and

impasses of the field of border theory. This mental activity necessarily entails remaining conscious of the relativity of concepts and adopting a strategic approach to language. This chapter makes a conscious gesture of keeping the dualities inherent to border discourses while attempting to resolve the tensions related to them in an attempt to disentangle a very “tangled frontera” (Castillo 149).

It is important to maintain the distinction between the border as a line separating geographical entities on the one hand and current metaphoric uses of the border in cultural studies on the other. It is true that actual geographical borders are also entangled with and constructed by metaphors in border narratives and discourses. But such concepts as border and borderlands have also been used as metaphors in various cultural theories and political debates. In different narratives, borders come across as metaphors to speak about marginality, in-betweenness, indeterminacy and a wide range of other sentiments and realities. Disentangling the border as a metaphor from the border as a physical presence is, in my view, a necessary task that makes it possible to account for geographical borders in both their real and metaphorical aspects. Dismissing this task weakens the debate and leaves it open to easy cooption by other discourses and agendas. I shall be referring to the border as in Alison Mountz’s definition of it in *Key Concepts in Political Geography*: “The border certainly *is* a line that delineates here and there, separating an ‘us’ from ‘them’, one place from another. It is physical, tangible, material” (198). This tangibility of the border has been challenged even by authors who have attempted to talk about the complex realities of geographical borders. In this context one might refer most prominently to Anzaldúa and her groundbreaking work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. If we are to look at the critical and theoretical

aspects of *Borderlands*, one can make the case that Anzaldúa diffused her focus too much and ended up depoliticizing her own claims by stretching the border from its geographical aspect to its metaphoric one and attempting to deal with both in similar terms.

Indeed, Anzaldúa engaged the ethno-cultural debate about the U.S.-Mexico border in ways similar to her take on Queer theory and politics. For this reason, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* failed to do justice to the material realities of the Mexican-American border and was content to discuss the rhetorical side of the cultural debate. As Mary L. Dudziak and Leti Volpp argue in their article "Introduction: Legal Borderlands: Law and the Construction of American Borders", "Borderlands can also function not as literal physical spaces but as contact zones between ideas, as spaces of ideological ambiguity that can open up new possibilities of both repression and liberation" (596). *Borderlands/La Frontera*, it seems to me, was claiming too many "contact zones", ranging from the ethnic to the gendered and the cultural in the same piece of work. Attempting to find a common thread to address all these issues with the same gesture, Anzaldúa resorted to the metaphor of the border. By using the border as a metaphor to speak about the ethno-cultural border debate, Anzaldúa reduced her focus to the discussion of such concepts as cultural hybridity and métissage but failed to address such issues as violence and power imbalances at the Mexican-American border apart from a few, rather marginal, references.

At the basis of borderland theories in general lies this metaphoric perception of the border. The results are the abstraction of border debates and more often than not the depoliticization of the claims of real border dwellers. It is true that the 1980s theories of borderlands, despite their focus on cross-border flow and the trope of the bridge, did not

completely overlook the different power dynamics at stake in life at the border. Anzaldúa for example portrays the colonial history of the area and the politico-economic disparity between the U.S. and Mexico, yet she portrays them in metaphoric terms and reads them as the precondition for a third and singular culture of the borderlands. The border is portrayed as a wound. In Anzaldúa's words, "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms its haemorrhages again, the lifeblood of a two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (25). Elsewhere in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the border comes across as a "1,950 mile-long open wound\ dividing *a pueblo*, a culture" (24). At once tragic, romantic, and often celebratory, this depiction of the border is definitely attributable to the poetic language of *Borderlands*, but also to the political affiliation of the work. Indeed, Anzaldúa's project portrays the borderlands as a space of in-betweenness, essential to the development of a groundbreaking consciousness that she calls "the new mestiza". Born in the borderlands, the mestiza consciousness breaks through all forms of dualistic thinking by showing a strong capacity for bridging "differences" and "contradictions". Anzaldúa describes it as "a tolerance for ambiguity". She affirms:

[...] the new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance of ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view, she learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode (101)

According to Anzaldúa, this inclusive mode of thinking is the prerogative of the Chicano people acquired through a long history of in-betweenness and the different layers of cultural and linguistic differences that follow from it. At this level, one can argue that Anzaldúa's still dualistic terms of the mestiza bespeak the rootedness of her project in the earlier political

movement of *Chicanismo*, despite Anzaldúa's attempt to develop a counter discourse to its male-dominated version of nationalism.

Chicanismo crystallized into a theory of resistance in the 1960s and 1970s as part of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement. Formed as a discourse for demanding political and social equality, *Chicanismo* aimed to raise Chicanas' and Chicanos' political consciousness by capitalizing on Mexican ethnic and cultural heritage and its rootedness in Aztlán, the homeland of the Nahuatl peoples. The Chicano Movement was led by activists who called for the primordial right of the Chicanos/as to Aztlán, the land that now forms the southwestern states of the U.S. and was once part of Mexico. They even called for the formation of an independent *Republica del Norte* based on the distinctive cultural and ethnic heritage of the people of the region. This narrative of a different and unique identity of the area did not disappear with the end of the Civil Rights Movement. It continued to shape cultural debates and many cultural and literary narratives were saturated with the *Chicanismo* political imaginary. In his book *When We Arrive: A New Literary History of Mexican America*, José F. Aranda argues that "In the late 1980s the centrality and relevance of Aztlán to Chicano/a studies has slowly faded. In its place, the current ruling metaphor of borderlands emerged" (30). It is true that the metaphor of the borderlands came to the fore in the 1980s, but I would argue that Borderland narratives, despite their new rhetorics and socio-political agenda, did not actually question the relevance of Aztlán to Chicanos and Chicanas. Instead, they attempted to rewrite it from different angles. For instance, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* retells the stories of Aztlán female deities and capitalizes on their relevance to the Chicana cultural imaginary. I see her project more in

terms of an attempt to re-appropriate the indigenous history of the Mexico-U.S. border by rearticulating it in feminist terms.

The celebratory terms of *Chicanismo* did not disappear from the language of the 1980s border narratives, instead they were just expressed in different terms and for different ends. And it is for this particular reason that theories of the Mexican-American Borderlands came later to be criticized as essentialist. Speaking about Anzaldúa's and Emily Hicks's writings, Michaelsen and Johnson argue: "In sum, the borderlands belong to the Chicano culture, to Chicano cultural and self-expression. It is a right of property. As such, moreover, it must be constituted within a narrative of possession, a genealogy of occupation" (16). Anzaldúa's mestiza terms are indeed very evocative of the myth of origins, and her celebratory tone reveals the responsive dynamic of the earlier phase of Chicano/a political activism. Pablo Vila refers to this problematic aspect of borderland poetics in his conclusion to *ethnography on the border*. He asserts:

One sometimes feels that Chicanos are the only people capable of taking full advantage of the border and its opportunities, leaving out not only Anglos, blacks, American Indians, and Asians who also 'experience' the border, but also Mexicans who are not Chicanos and therefore cannot fully be 'border crossers' or 'hybrids' (327)

Indeed, despite their inclusive endeavors, theories of the borderlands failed to maintain different sites of cultural "hybridity" and different mestiza possibilities. Hence, they revealed a foundational side that later trends in Border theory attempted to eschew by setting aside the metaphoric language and the celebratory tones of the 1980s borderland narratives.

1.2. Inside/Outside and Inside-Outside: Of Tangible borders and Conceptual Manias

Early human societies had their own versions of territorial demarcations, but those were constantly changing, rather flexible, and definitely less politicized than today's borders. Some present-day borders follow natural features. Some European countries for example are separated by mountains and rivers. Continents and islands are separated by oceans. Yet, what this discussion concerns itself with is the civic function allocated to borders since even those natural separators have more often than not been instrumentalized in the geo-political act of drawing maps. Territorial borders, regardless of their particularities, whether stable or changing, ancient or modern, pertaining to continents or to nation-states, set between cities or neighborhoods; all share a common aspect that marks the universality of the concept of the border. This common element is their attempt to conceptually separate an inside from an outside, regardless of any actual continuities between both sides. Thus, at the basis of the concept of the border lies this performance of a separation between two distinct spaces. Attached to this is the debate on identity and difference, as the identity or the content of the inside is supposed to be different from the outside. As Angus argues in "Crossing the Border", "If there is a civilizing moment here, it is in the drawing of a line, a border that separates here from there, that lets there appear an Other, a mismatch, a difference" (40-1). Angus calls it a "civilizing moment" in reference to the intervention of human beings in the act of setting borders. His statement is as well inspired by the context of early Canadian communities and the border between the settled territories and the extreme north that they perceived in terms of wilderness. I would describe the act of setting borders in a slightly different way, in terms of a "civic moment" that refers to human societies' pursuit of order and consistency.

In his article “Border Incidence”, Tom Conley focuses on this link between territorial borders and human societies’ concern with order and power. Conley distinguishes between the concept of extension, as ‘indifferent spatiality’, and the concept of space. In terms of this difference, borders come across as “extremities” imbued with power. Conley asserts: “Space is made manifest when extremities – borders – are set in relation with axes or centers, and where limits describe the surface area they contain” (100). The act of setting a border is an act of appropriation of space. At the intersection of space and borders the concept of territory is born. “When power is exerted on space so as to define its perimeters, a territory is born” (Conley 100). In this context Conley reads natural borders like mountains, forests, and rivers in opposition to their “conventional” counterparts that are indicated by walls, ditches, or canals (101). He argues that the latter are meant to make differences formal and to enable political and civic operations. He asserts: “[...] formerly pliable and flexible boundaries, different cultures, and idioms met and mixed, slowly became formalized. With established barriers, a nation was enabled to delimit itself as a territory and to corral and control its resident subjects.” (Conley 102). Power and authority enable territories to exist through border tracing operations. Yet, borders do not operate as power tools only within territories, but also between territories, “outside” each and every single territory.

According to Angus the border actually *enacts* difference. Indeed, the border begins as a mere convention but ends up marking both its sides in terms of difference, if not opposition. In Angus’s words, the border “lets there appear an Other, a mismatch, a difference” (41). Johnson refers to this aspect of the border in the Mexican-American context in terms of a mirror that reflects back the image of what is inside to the outside and what is outside to the

inside. He argues: “The border produces self-consciousness; it enables the reflection that translates without remainder: Mexico will know itself, will find itself, will see itself reflected in the mirror of North American life, the United States will present Mexico to itself” (131). It is not for nothing that Johnson excludes Mexico from North America and renders North America synonymous with the United States. Indeed, his statement makes sense as politico-economic imbalances intervene at the border to foreground differences at the expenses of similarities. What is stressed at the Mexican-American border is the difference of Mexico from its North American neighbors. The logic of difference at the border functions in rather opposite terms at the U.S. northern frontier where Canadians, in the words of Russell Brown, seem to be “[...] aspiring to no higher status than that of being a ‘not-America’” (2). Though the terms of Brown’s comment might sound rather outrageous to a Canadian reader, his argument makes sense with regard to the additional importance that borders acquire when the politico-economic and socio-cultural aspects on both sides seem to have more similarities than differences. At the Canadian-American border Johnson’s aforementioned category of North America is more likely to be deconstructed than maintained, for as Brown argues with reference to the Canadian-American context, “when a potential for confusion of nationalities grows this serious the border becomes an important symbol” (6). Obviously, the border acquires this importance because of its capacity to conceptually separate an outside from an inside.

In *Aporias*, Jacques Derrida reads borders in terms of the logic of indivisibility. According to Derrida’s deconstructive method, divisibility, represented here by the border, is *always already* interlocked with indivisibility. Indivisibility is the very condition of divisibility and that is the inner logic of the border. “Customs, police, visa or passport, passenger

identification”, asserts Derrida, “all of that is established upon this institution of the indivisible, the institution therefore of the step that is related to it, whether the step crosses it or not” (*Aporias* 11). This indivisibility might be more obvious at the U.S.-Canada border, yet it is determinant in any act of border tracing. It lies at the basis of the institution of the border itself and plagues borders with barbed wires, fences, walls, checkpoints, all of which are symptomatic of fear and insecurity. Derrida describes this sense of insecurity:

There is a *problem* as soon as the edge-line is threatened. And it is threatened from its first tracing. This tracing can only institute the line by dividing it intrinsically into two sides. There is a *problem* as soon as this intrinsic division divides the relation to itself of the border and therefore divides the being-one-self of anything” (*Aporias* 11).

Indivisibility is thus the condition that lies at the basis of the border. A border is an acknowledgement that space is naturally indivisible and that divisibility is a conscious choice produced by power, fear, and political stakes.

The separation between the inside and outside relies on some selective mental gymnastics, conscious or unconscious, which foreground some elements over others. Apart from its holistic nature, this conceptual activity leads to essentialism and sustains it. As Johnson asserts: “The border essentializes ‘our’ identity: its imposition and our crossing over enable us to know who ‘we’ are, to know then where ‘we’ are” (Johnson 134). The border becomes a generator of a sense of identity and location, yet it does so through essentialism and hence results in stereotyping. Robert Schwartzwald cites a very interesting example from the U.S.-Canada context:

If Canadians, as Ian Angus playfully suggests in his contribution, ‘are of course, more peaceable, less greedy, more concerned with justice, and so on – just naturally better than Americans’, the odd thing is that most Americans, at least in a conversation with a

Canadian, will not disagree. Americans seem to want and need Canadians to be all these things [...] (9)

This desire and need to keep the attributes of “the other” unchanging is rather a matter of stereotyping that goes on by virtue of mental lethargy. It is an identity debate that produces an ahistorical and congealed perception of “the other” in order to get a reversed image about the self. But what is at stake is not just this sense of insecurity about one’s national identity. A lot of political and economic issues are also attached to it. At other borders, these politico-economic issues are so striking and articulate that identity debates seem to be less purely conceptual. In these instances, politico-cultural debates take on more material aspects, as in the case of the Mexican-American border. Yet the “necessity” of demarcating the limit between Self and Other is rarely questioned. Angus sums it up well enough in his article “Crossing the Border”. He states: “By drawing a border between self and other, the other is allowed to show difference such that the danger of ‘either *fear* or *assimilation*’ is circumvented” (emphases mine 42). Be it for “national security” or identity insecurities, the border as a concept seems to play a very important role in keeping the distinction clear between the outside and the inside. Given the conceptual clarity of the picture and its sway, one wonders if it can be proved true on real grounds!

Actually, this ideal delineation of inside from outside in the logic of the border of the nation-state is questioned by an on-going practice of multiculturalism. Referring to the Canadian context, Angus asserts: “Plurality of emigration means that the ‘other’ is now inside” (“Crossing” 33). But one has to be careful and remember the distinction between civic nationalism that attaches to the concept of the nation-state and ethno-cultural nationalism that emerges and comes to the fore most prominently in a multicultural context. One of the pitfalls

of the borders of the nation-state is that they attempt to bring together and equate both sorts of nationalisms, which is rarely the case in present day societies. An ideal aspect of the nation-state and its borders is thus revealed as in Joseph Nevins's statement: "In the ideal, the *nation-state* is a bounded and sovereign political unit in which the members of the *nation* and the citizens of the *state* are synonymous" (9). Multiculturalism lays bare this conceptual flaw by showing that the nation and the state are not actually synonymous, yet it creates other issues and hence other borders to (un)settle. Most importantly, by showing the frailty of the inside\outside dyad upon what the ideal of the nation-state legitimizes, multiculturalism seems to bring the border into the nation-state itself. It raises the issue of the interaction between the different ethno-cultural components of the nation-state and how that puts pressure on the concept of civic nationalism. Theorizing the Canadian model of multiculturalism and the interaction between the different constituents of Canadian civil society, Angus asserts: "[...] the paradox emerges: if something is unique to Canada, then it must exist nowhere else on the planet; if something is not unique, then its existence in Canada seems to be of no importance for the national identity" (*A Border* 106). Thus, what is at stake in the multicultural debate is not only the interaction between different ethno-cultural identities but also to what extent this affects national identities and the frontiers of the nation-state.

According to Angus, different approaches to multiculturalism become particularly relevant to marking the distinction between the U.S. and Canada. He proposes to "pose the issue of inside versus outside in another way", and he draws our attention to the fact that "what is inside is separated from the outside, not by a unique content, but by a distinctive relation between contents" (Angus, *A Border* 106). Angus's argument is that the U.S. and Canada

might not be different in terms of their ethno-cultural composition since they both share immigrant histories, but what marks them as different are their different approaches to multiculturalism. In Angus's analysis Canada's model of multiculturalism is centered on the ideal of keeping the borders of the different ethno-cultural identities clear. This is most obviously confirmed by the Province of Quebec with its mostly French linguistic and ethno-cultural heritage. The presence of Quebec within the Canadian federal space is one of the markers of the difference of Canada from the U.S. As Schwartzwald asserts: "[...] many Quebecois feel they are held hostage by English Canada which, unsure of its identity, 'needs' Quebec to prove its difference" (18). Yet, this difference is also carried out by the interaction of the different ethnic groups within the space of English Canada itself, as Angus observes: "English Canadian philosophy motivates this step back [from involvements between the self and Other] through its defence of particularity and articulates its ethics of preserving the Other through maintaining the border" (*A Border* 134). Angus reads the Canadian approach to multiculturalism and its maintenance of the limits between self and other in terms of a necessary element for an ethical exchange between the different components of the nation-state.

The United States, on the other hand, comes across as more of a "modern, universal, and homogenous state" (Angus, "Crossing" 41). Indeed, in its abstract theoretical version, the U.S. model of multiculturalism has long been described as a "melting pot" due to its monolingual, read monocultural, ideal. Yet, things seem to be different when tested on real grounds, as many U.S.-based critics argue. In his introduction to *The Ethnic Canon*, David Palumbo-Liu elaborates an interesting criticism of the U.S. model of multiculturalism. He

reads it more in terms of a “pluralism” (Palumbo-Liu 3) that is no more than a compilation of different ethno-cultural components. This compilation dynamic does not allow for a critical perception of U.S. civic nationalism and its myths to take place. Hence it fails to do justice to the different components of the national space. In this context, Palumbo-Liu asserts: “multiculturalism cum ‘pluralism’ may well be co-opted and contained” (3). He suggests a critical version of multiculturalism and describes it as follows:

[It] explores the fissures, tensions, and sometimes contradictory demands of multiple cultures, rather than (only) celebrating the plurality of cultures by pressing through them appreciatively. It instead maps out the terrain of common interest while being attentive to the different angles of entry into this terrain. (Palumbo-Liu 4-5)

Palumbo-Liu’s alternative is an interactive model of multiculturalism, a “critical multiculturalism” (2), that actually revolutionizes the self/other dichotomy and allows for the questioning of the traditional New England-centric version of U.S. nationalism. Interestingly, Palumbo-Liu sees the task of *The Ethnic Canon* as to question the “mainstreaming” (18) of ethnic narratives and their co-option by multicultural discourses that remain silent as to the particularities of the material realities of different ethnicities in the U.S. Obviously, this presence of difference within the federation does not always reveal a proactive reworking of the inside/outside dichotomy imposed by national borders. Instead, in many cases it results in reproducing the exclusionary logic of the border within the federal space itself. In the conceptual terms of national myths, these tensions are well resolved through such concepts as the “melting pot” or the ethical encounter with the other at the border of difference, yet when it comes to material realities things might well be different.

Michaelsen and Johnson on the other hand criticise Palumbo-Liu for reproducing culture as an “epistemological object”, even through his model of “critical multiculturalism”

(Michaelsen and Johnson 4). Instead they propose two different patterns of multiculturalism. The first one is that of interaction and cultural exchange free of judgements, but they deem this unrealistic (Michaelsen and Johnson 4). They seem to be more in favor of a second model where the judgement is there, but it is anti-foundational. They describe this model as follows:

The second model does not begin with the principle of identity. It is no longer a question of inclusion or exclusion, no longer a question of taking it personally, no longer a question of affiliation (brotherhood) or identity. Differences make no difference and cannot, as a consequence, secure legislation against anyone. This is not to say that there is no judgement, only, rather, that judgement will be unfounded, without precedent, and fraught with typically unthought ideological implications (Michaelsen and Johnson 5)

This model of multiculturalism is particularly interesting for the way it incorporates Jean-Luc Nancy's theorizing of the communal sense as emanating from the condition of "being-in-common" (Michaelsen and Johnson 5). Indeed, regardless of their respective cultures of origin and their personal trajectories, the dwellers of any given national space share in common the context that brings them together and shapes their present lives. Yet, one major criticism of this model is that it may result in a depoliticized approach to culture and a disengaged and even unethical encounter with the so-called other that is now within. As much as Michaelsen and Johnson's project is in favor of a living approach to culture, they seem to disregard that cultures of origin continue to live in and through transcultural subjects. It is indeed that living prerogative of culture that allows for a transformative concept of multiculturalism that should, in my view, be about the ways that both cultures interact through the lives of "ethnic individuals".

It is only through such an interactive perception of culture that both sides of the border are allowed to experience a natural and ethical sense of contamination and exchange that can

radically change concepts such as nationalism and the borders of the nation-state. Yet, humanity seems to have failed so far to put into practice this approach to multiculturalism, if ever it managed to fully conceive of it at all. Indeed, one can distinguish two major tendencies in cultural theory with regards to the debate on multiculturalism. The first tendency insists on seeing the culture of origin of ethnic subjectivities in terms of a conceptual shell that just falls off as soon as one crosses the border. The second tendency sees culture as unchanging despite the change in location and despite the new socio-cultural space. The major problem with both tendencies is, in my view, the same: both see “culture-as-lived” and “culture-as-constituted” (Lugo 48) in dichotomous terms. For a more comprehensive perception of culture, it is important to see the constituted aspects of culture within its lived aspects and the lived aspects of culture within its constituted aspects. Indeed, ethnic subjectivities inscribe their identities differently at the intersection of four cultural presences and not just two: their culture of origin as constituted and as lived, and their new national culture also as constituted and as lived. The sum of these elements results in a contingent and ever-changing interaction that greatly depends on the borders of the nation-states and the spaces they open and those they close. As long as both mainstream and ethnic narratives fail to thoroughly account for the complexity of the ethnic experience, the ethnic contribution to national culture will remain understated and co-opted, and theories of multiculturalism will continue to be burdened by idealism and essentialism. I suggest that a way around these impasses is to be found in focusing once again on territorial borders, and more specifically on their lived realities.

1.3. Border-lands: A Politico-Economic Reality

As a solution to the conceptual impasses of border theory, I propose the adoption of a strategic stance that brings the border back to its material reality and deals with its day-to-day

unravelling. This is not to create a dichotomy between the real² and the conceptual, nor to downplay the importance of such debates as the one on multiculturalism. Instead, I adopt the material as a vantage point that best allows for a fuller understanding of the concomitance of the conceptual and the real and the way they affect and shape each other. I suggest that there is no way we can approach the debate on the concept of the border before fully understanding the particularities of the material experience at the border itself. It is only by focusing on the material experience of the border in detail that one can engage the conceptual discussion on the borders of identity and culture, and thus address the border on its own terms. The logic of the border, I argue, is neither the dualistic either/or model nor that of a synthesis as in borderland theory. Theorizing the border in terms of a symbolic synthesis as in Anzaldúa, even if it strives to relativize both inside and outside, results in a congealed version of both that is removed from the actual interaction between them. The logic of the border is instead that of immanence and punctual interaction; it is about the contingency of the encounter of the outside and the inside. The logic of the border is a living reality that registers the temporality and historicity of both what is inside and outside the border. Far from essentializing both sides of the border, this approach always already deconstructs both inside and outside by exposing the myriad interactions possible between them. It also eschews the impasses of a dualistic mode of thinking. Instead of constructing the inside and the outside in terms of essence, the border traces them back to perspective and temporality. This is what I refer to as theorizing the border

² I use the word “real” in my dissertation in a linguistically plain fashion. I am aware that the real as a concept is problematized by many critics, most prominently by Jacques Lacan. Yet, I do not intend to partake in the debate of the real as a concept. Discussing the conceptual and metaphoric levels of the real goes against the purpose and strategy of my dissertation. Instead, by using the word “real”, I intend to bring to the fore the importance of the concrete and the material sides of existence. I use the term “real” as is defined in the *OED* as “Having an objective existence; actually existing physically as a thing, substantial; not imaginary.”

from the perspective of the border itself. It involves observing interacting facts and realities at the border for a better understanding of border lives and border identities. This approach holds the promise of doing justice to the particularity of each border without overlooking the universal aspect inherent to the concept of the border itself. It enables the border to show that it is both local and global, a land and a line, a barrier and a gate without necessarily attempting to reach any synthesis between all these components. This method seeks to do justice to the different realities that crystallize at the border while attempting to move beyond both celebration and political co-option. It enables the reality of the border to remain tangible and grounded in history and hence is punctual and anti-foundational. It is only after having come to grips with the logic of the border in its own terms that one can engage the debate on border identities and cultural histories.

One of the flaws of the early borderland theory as applied to the Mexican-American border is its focus on the experience of binationalism at the borderlands and its disregard of what is a politically complex reality. Even though Anzaldúa, for example, does portray some of the political imbalances that mark the past as well as the present of the Mexican-American border, she always interprets this in terms of her ethno-cultural focus. The sense of a shared culture of the borderlands is also common on the Northern border of the U.S. where some critics talk about “the St. Lawrence borderlands” as made up of the “Ontario-Quebec-New York-Vermont” (Ghandi 201). These northern borderlands also share a set of historical experiences and cultural characteristics, according to Victor Konrad:

[...] borderlands regions have emerged, more or less, among peoples with common characteristics, in spite of the political boundary delineated between them. In an extreme sense, borderlands exist when shared characteristics set a region apart from the

countries that contain it, and residents share more with each other than with members of their respective national cultures (viii).

Obviously, sharing cultural traits and economic patterns at the borderlands is a tangible reality. Yet, as the aforementioned juxtaposition reveals, it is very important to account for the particularities of those shared patterns at each border since they can be drastically different depending on the relation and histories that (dis)unite both sides of the border. Failing to account for these historical complexities produces an abstract, speculative version of the border. As David Staines points out: “Superficial parallels exist, but they reveal, on close examination, major distinctions and differences” (8). Obviously, if border theory is meant to discuss abstract reflections on universal borders, it is also meant to do so in reference to the lived realities of these borders and to ground itself back into them.

Indeed, early borderland theories have been criticized for ungrounding border theory by extrapolating its claims from the political to the cultural without focusing on the material connections of both. Sadowski-Smith highlights this problematic in *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States*. She affirms:

The larger group of border writing from the 1980s and 1990s most famously exemplified by Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, employs the border as a starting point of discussions of Chicana/o quotidian life, culture, and identity. This literature recognizes the deepening divisions between Mexico and the United States, manifested, for example, by the intensified U.S. border militarization. But border writing ultimately emphasizes the openness of the southwestern boundary as crucial to processes of Chicana/o identity and cultural formation (22)

Indeed, the focus on the cultural debates about origins and ancestry prevented those early borderland theorists from testing their concept of binationalism on its own grounds. Consequently, borderlands remained purely conceptual and borderlands theories failed to concretize their claims. Borders first emerged by virtue of politico-economic necessity and

survived as a geo-political convention, in spite of the surrounding ethno-cultural debate. Thus, it remains very important to deal with them in those terms in order to avoid displacing the focus and deepening border injustices by obscuring some historical realities and adding to the fuzziness of the cultural debate. The purpose of this approach is definitely not to inscribe the political and the cultural in dichotomous terms, instead it is meant to take a strategic stance with regards to the debate to better reveal border convulsions and the way they (mis)use cultural debates. Speaking of the particular intricacies of the border and their constructive effects revolutionizes the cultural debate. It makes it possible to account for culture as a living body rather than a dead museum-commodity.

While it is certainly true that *border-landers* share varied ethno-cultural and politico-economic backgrounds that have to be accounted for by border theorists, I maintain that this task has to be achieved with reference to its material manifestations at the *border-lands*. The later wave of Mexican-American theory and fiction did indeed undertake this task by shifting the focus from the importance of the history of the border as Chicanas/os' homeland to the experience of the border as a frontier crossed by both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in their journeys to and fro across the border. The new border narratives focus on the influences that the maquila industry and cross-border agreements such as NAFTA brought to the area. Maquiladoras – assembly plants along the U.S. and Mexico border – are not new. They first appeared in the U.S.-Mexico twin cities of San Diego and Tijuana, El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, by the second half of the twentieth century. As David E. Lorey asserts: “By the midcentury [20th century] a pattern of twin cities had emerged all along the international boundary from Tijuana-San Diego on the pacific to Matamoros-Brownsville on the Gulf Coast” (125). The

twin cities experienced a similar pattern of industrialization, which made the region share some economic and ecological debates about the material realities of lives on the U.S.-Mexico border-lands. Also, pollution is a shared issue at some locations on both sides of the Mexican-American border, as critic José Saldívar asserts in *Border Matters*: “In my childhood in Cameron County in South Texas, I saw the Texas-Mexico borderlands turn into an ecological wasteland, with more than ninety-three maquiladoras pouring out toxic waste and endangering life chances and life experiences on both sides of the border” (19). In the same vein, Nestor Rodriguez and Jacqueline Hagan document, in *Caught in the Middle*, a local pattern of regulation in the borderlands from which the federal governments of both the U.S. and Mexico are removed. Rodriguez and Hagan’s article lists many transborder activities taking place between border twin-cities in such fields as ecology and public health and explains this in terms of a sense of “inner-city solidarity”. These activities are “a product of local relational styles and local problem solving approaches, owing nothing to formal, federal agreement between the United States and Mexico”. Instead, they are based on “informal relations and interpersonal contacts” (Rodriguez and Hagan 107).

The Northern border of the U.S. also shows instances of cross-border activities. According to Brown, “American states and Canadian provinces have found it advantageous to directly address numerous cross-boundary issues, including developments affecting boundary waters” (80). These cross-border operations destabilize the rigidity of the borders of the nation-state, yet do so by remaining aware of the political implications at play at the border. Indeed, these cross-border exchanges are far from promising full politico-economic integration at the border. They still operate *across* national boundaries that influence them and are influenced by

them in turn. Ghandi articulates this paradox at the basis of borderland rhetoric: “Although borderlands can be approached as discrete, physical regions that can be charted, classified, and bounded, the word and, thus, the concept is primarily relational” (243). Indeed, we cannot speak about borderlands without speaking about the federal borders that allow for *border-lands* to assume the shape of a single reality of the “borderlands”. That is, we need the terms of the nation-state to be able to articulate the terms of the borderlands. Thus, it is interesting to portray the patterns of interaction inside-outside the border while avoiding the partial approach of borderland theories. It is important to remain conscious of the complexity of the superimposed maps that allow for borderlands to exist as a reality and a concept.

1.4.Border Contingencies: No Absolute Resolutions

Borders have a local culture of their own, yet they are international demarcations, heavily marked by global politics and international traffic. This claim is not meant to homogenize borders all over the globe, but it is a call to focus on the particularity of the different ways that the local interacts with the global. Thus we substitute the celebration of a borderland consciousness with a more mature and living version that focuses on the daily realities of the border and the complexity of the material experiences of border-crossers. This critical standpoint shrugs off the metaphors of borderland theories and focuses more on daily stories of crossings and/or failed crossings. The new border concept results in a more thorough representation of border experiences and a more truthful articulation of the border on its own terms. Jose Aranda discusses the late twenty and early twenty-first century Mexican-American border narratives in these terms, asserting: “In general Chicano/a studies is still activist but antiromantic, historical but antiprogressive, communitarian but transnational” (xxiv).

Consequently, the hyphen bridging both parts of the “Mexican-American” identity disappears and we rarely speak about Chicana/o literature and theory as such, in the language of present day criticism. Melting both components of the “Chicana/o” identity into a singular signifier referring to the history of the borderlands is no longer very current. Instead, the experience of the Mexican-American identity is more marked by a space that sets the Mexican and the American experiences apart. That space or gap is the experience of crossing to *el otro lado* that not only marks the difference between two geographical spaces but also a plethora of experiences that attach to them. It also registers in terms of a blank because large parts of it are not about writing or recording, and any kind of *re*-presentation is prone to fail to give justice to them. Instead, they are daily realities that struggle to preserve the imminent sense of the lived. The earlier promise of binationalism as a model of belonging other than national citizenship (Sadowski-Smith 24) is criticized and put under scrutiny. The borders of the federation come across more as determinants of a large set of (im)possibilities, because binationalism and cultural hybridity do not necessarily figure in the official documents needed to cross the border. The new Mexican-American narratives show that the material realities of daily lives on the Mexican and/or the American side of the border, when added to assigned paper identities, mark border-crossers differently. They navigate different spaces that construct their identities in different ways. Paradoxically enough, it is at this very particular moment of history that borders matter more and more as markers of identity and accessibility. By embracing such a position, the latest trend in border narratives does not aim to depoliticize the earlier cultural debates and their focus on cultural differences and syncretic possibilities. Instead, the latest narratives point out the intricacy of dealing with such issues as culture and identity in the

contemporary geopolitical scene. They shy away from the simplistic interpretations of the effect of borders on identities and identity formation processes.

As a result, the border starts taking shape more as a dividing line than as a third country or a borderland. Consequently, border discourse and representation come to focus more on the tensions between local and global politics that crystallize at the border. The underlying argument is that border cities have a local reality of their own, but that these realities are fashioned by a global dynamic. The latter does not only create border issues but also centers and decentres some of them over others. Coming to grips with the reality of the border is only possible by developing a discourse that takes into consideration the global and the local dynamics as they intersect and transect through the daily lives of the people navigating the border. Hence the importance of narrating the border as a line that is constantly crossed and trespassed. Attached to this concept of the border is a varied set of thematics ranging from pollution at border cities to immigration and the global traffic of capital and labor. Consequently, the focus on the variants of the border and border inequalities becomes more current in border discourses. Mexican-American narratives for example capitalize on the power inequalities at stake in the daily dynamics of the Mexican-American border including northward immigration and the increasing militarization of the border. Again, the shared culture of consumerism in the twin-cities does not prevent further inequalities. Critic David Lorey points out the imbalances implied in this consumerist border culture: “In the twin-city complexes Mexican consumers on both sides of the border became an important market for North American business” (129). Many more imbalances are indeed implied in the common issues of the twin cities across the border. The flow of labor is unidirectional, coming from the

South, going to the North. People who cross over looking for better job opportunities on the other side of the border are not only immigrants. There is a similar flow of seasonal labor, people coming from Mexican border towns to work in the harvests in the U.S. Many critics argue that the southward flow of capital and consumer culture and the northward flow of labor make the Mexican border cities appear to be more a part of the U.S. than either a part of Mexico or a separate “third country”. As Nevins states, “The U.S.-Mexico border region became more integrated in the American national center” (10). Though the maquilas marked the border twin-cities with a shared economic pattern and shared economic crises, it deepened the power imbalances already implied in the history of the area. These imbalances became even more obvious with the advent of NAFTA agreement. NAFTA made it clear that local realities and global priorities grate against each other in the border-lands. This interaction of the local and the global and the disproportions implied in the history of the region combine to increase tension in the area and reveal border (dys)functionings.

The border is also always a meeting line between two different levels of governance, the state or provincial one and the federal one. This meeting place does not always entail peaceful co-existence, a shared vision and similar priorities. On the Mexican-American border for example, new border operations were not always in tune with the local needs and realities of the border-lands. Lorey expresses the new tensions at work in this locality:

The geographical isolation of the U.S. and Mexican states from the centers of political power – Washington, DC, and Mexico City – complicates the resolution of problems stemming from domestic trends and bilateral relations. Residents of the border region have felt neglected and misunderstood by federal officials and policymakers (178)

Meanwhile, both federal governments continue to be engaged in different but parallel sets of interests. And despite NAFTA, other operations take place: “As election time neared, the

Clinton administration also appeased vegetable growers in Florida by pressurising Mexico to stop the shipment of 800 million dollars' worth of low-price tomatoes into the United States" (Lorey 177). Similarly, "Mexican government officials covertly withdrew from some of the NAFTA agreement [...] to limit imports and protect domestic enterprises in manufacturing and services" (Lorey 177). Other infringements of NAFTA terms took place as well vis-a-vis the U.S. northern neighbor, as Winfred Siemerling and Sarah Phillips Casteel assert: "American violations of provisions of NAFTA (most notably on soft-wood lumber and beef cattle) in response to domestic economic and political pressures have further entrenched concern on this side of the border about the idea of an open hemisphere, at least in economic terms" (50). It turns out that one has to ponder the on-ground unfolding of such cross-border conventions as NAFTA before being able to account for their contribution to (un)making borders. The practical functioning of the agreement reveals that it anticipates situations other than that of borderless North American world economies. The material realities of the border's local communities as well as the self-contradictory federal authorities are likely to suggest other geographies. Moreover, despite its concern with an economically borderless North American *bloc*, supposedly concretized through NAFTA, the U.S. government has been engaged in a simultaneous discourse on *blockades* vis-a-vis its southern neighbor.

Paradoxically enough, stressing the border's porous potential underlies the need to "regulate" cross-border flows. Nevins expresses this sense of insecurity implied in debating free borders: "precisely because national boundaries are constructed and always contestable, the reproduction of the national and the alien requires constant practice" (177). The reality of a porous Mexico-U.S. border has always been problematic due to the inequalities and violences

entailed in the history of interaction between both countries. The free trade agreement stretched the possibilities of exchange beyond the “borders” of the border-lands and hence sharpened this sense of insecurity about the borders of the nation. This incited more and more interventions from the federal governments with the purpose of regulating cross-border operations while preserving national securities. It is no secret that implementing NAFTA brought to the fore the debate on undocumented immigrants, otherwise known as “illegal aliens”. Indeed, “In September 1993, on the eve of NAFTA, the new chief of El Paso sector of the Border Patrol launched Operation Blockade in an effort to prevent unauthorized border crossing by Mexican nationals in the area” (Spener 182). Ironically enough, the demographic realities of the border-lands made it hard for the authorities to tell “Mexican illegal entrants” from El Paso citizens because “70 percent of the population in El Paso [is] Mexican, either by birth or by ancestry” (Spener 182). Yet, operations with the purpose of regulating the cross-border flow of immigrants did not stop. After Operation Blockade in El Paso-Ciudad Juarez, came Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego-Tijuana. Initiated in September 1994, Operation Gatekeeper had almost the same goals of Operation Blockade. “The main achievement of Gatekeeper seems to be the same as that of the Blockade: convincing the public that the government has the ability to defend national territory against unarmed as well as armed incursions”, asserts Spener (194). Such regulations were accompanied by media manoeuvres that reinforced people’s thin-skininess about “national security” and re-presented the border as a gate of danger necessitating militarized surveillance. NAFTA, as many economists assert, did nothing to change the economic power imbalances between Mexico and its northern neighbor. As Lorey argues: “NAFTA did not change the difference in size between the two economies. The U.S. economy towered over its Mexican counterpart: the much ballyhooed

‘world’s biggest and richest market of \$6.2 trillion [1994 dollars]’ was actually the sum the United States’ 6-trillion-dollar and Mexico’s 0.2-trillion-dollar markets (176-7). In the meantime, the agreement did a lot in developing discourses and implementing measures that drove both countries apart, and overemphasized the importance of a militarized border in preserving peace and security in the area.

For a better understanding of the border it is important to acknowledge the complex realities that intersect at the border and the superimposed maps that frame border lives. From the perspective of the border, it is just as interesting to talk about militarized operations, barbed wire and undocumented crossings as it is to tell stories about different interactions at the border-lands. The new border fictions undertake the task of relating the obscured parts of those crossings by narrating the daily lives of border-crossers as well as border-landers. Yet, Border theory, it seems to me, is still struggling to produce a meta-discourse that thoroughly accounts for these realities while advancing a critical perception of it. Given the concrete realities and their respective particularities at each border, one can argue that territorial borders are constructed as much as they are constructive. They bear no organic relation whatsoever to natural landscape and to human history as such, yet they turn out to affect lives and mark identities and histories differently. The underlying map of the borders of the U.S. is one of a culture of exchange marked by a common history breaking through politico-economic disjunctures and their violent repercussions. Borders affect culture as much they are affected by it and the border is the meeting ground of the various facets of this interaction. It is a living dynamic that resists final resolutions. In geometrical terms, as a line, the border is a sum of countless spots. These spots stand for the varied realities that crystallize at the border. The

prominence of one reality over the other does not depend on which side of the border you stand, instead it depends on the perspective from which you look out and the moment in which you are grounded, or choose to ground yourself. And, in the logic of word-language, it also depends on the language and discourse you (mis)use and (ab)use.

Chapter two

Border Frailties: Cross-Border Mechanisms

The stories told in *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family* portray through their events and characterization the U.S. border as a porous border crossed at many points in history and through different geopolitical dynamics. Bringing the four novels together is particularly interesting because each one of them offers a different perspective on the permeability of the U.S. borders. The different historical facts and power interplays at work in the Mexican-American, Cuban-American and Quebecois-American interactions as portrayed in the four novels guide us towards an understanding of the different mechanisms that construct the U.S. border as expandable and crossable. This chapter analyses the synergy of the international, the transnational, the denational and the postnational dynamics as portrayed in the novels while arguing for the elasticity of the U.S. borders. Before engaging the discussion of the different cross-border dynamics, it is important to shed light on the borders of the nation-states and their history. To start with, the chapter discusses the importance of territorial borders to the nation-state and their link to the concept of nationalism in general and U.S. nationalism in particular. Then, I move to analysing the different cross-border dynamics portrayed in the novels by focusing respectively on colonialism, economic and cultural globalism, and immigration. By focusing on these three border-crossing dynamics the novels tell us a lot about nation building processes and reveal movement at the heart of the geopolitical institution of the border.

2.1. A Border on the Move: Military Crossings

2.1.1. The Territorial State: Historical Overview and Attributes

Territoriality, hence borders, is one of the major props of the nation-state. Indeed territories have never been as clearly demarcated and as clear-cut as they became with the advent of the nation-state. The nation-state, the mother institution of different state apparatuses and sub-institutions, contains and regulates the lives and interactions of a given people in a given territory as well their interactions with people from other territories. Referring to the origins of the nation-state, Paul Hirst maintains: “[...] the nation-state is a highly specific historical form, it developed between the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe [...] since the 17th century we have come to see political power as inherently territorial” (26). Indeed, what the concept of the nation-state added to human societies of the time was that the state started monopolizing power and authority over national territories. Saskia Sassen elaborates a very interesting reading of the nation-state in her book *Territory. Authority. Right*. She reads the changes brought to the nation-state after feudalism in terms of granting the “national sovereign” total authority over a given territory and giving him/her the power of granting rights. She asserts:

Where in the past most territories were subject to multiple systems of rule, the national sovereign gains exclusive authority over a given territory and at the same time this territory is constructed as coterminous with that authority, in principle ensuring a similar dynamic in other nation-states. This in turn gives the sovereign the possibility of functioning as the exclusive grantor of rights. (6)

Thus, the nation-state is par excellence the political form that brings together territory, authority and right by assigning them to a national sovereign.

The national sovereign power went through different historical phases. As Sassen asserts, “the transition from feudal lordship to territorial state required a change in the meaning of authority, as did the later move from a state dominated by the interests of the prince to those of the traders and manufacturers” (*Territory* 80). During the feudal epoch national unity and authority were based on the power of the monarch and his/her wealth. With the advent of the nation-state, the primary national power shifted to the public domain and became led by manufacturers, merchants, and bankers (Sassen, *Territory* 75). It is particularly for this reason that many critics link the sovereignty of the nation-state to the advent of capitalism and vice-versa. The decomposition of the feudal order meant that “the national territorial state became the final locus of authority rather than a monarch’s divinity, a lord’s mobility, or the claims of religious bodies” (Sassen, *Territory* 80). The authority of the nation-state and its shift to the public domain increasingly brought to the fore the importance of territory and its centrality to national authority. The different phases of the formation of the nation-state increasingly stressed the foundational character of territoriality. “The ‘territory’”, asserts Paul Dumouchel, “is a form of political and social organization at both the domestic and international levels that has profoundly shaped the world in which we live, and that we take for granted as the normal order of things” (175). Indeed, the territorial dimension of the nation-state is rather taken for granted despite the controversial status of the foundational theories of the nation-state.

The logic of the nation-state attaches national ideals to given territories. As Joseph Nevins asserts, “[...] nationalism is fundamentally about identity and the relation of a particular ‘people’ or ‘nation’ to a defined territory” (157). Scholarship on nationalism makes it clear that equating nation and territorial statehood is a political ideal. Arjun Appadurai, for example,

asserts: “state and nation are at each other’s throats, and the hyphen that links them is now less an icon of conjuncture than an index of disjuncture” (39). Yet, despite the imagined aspect of the national community³, the ideals of the nation-state were formative of international relations and history, and continue to be so at more than one level as I will show further in this chapter. Since its very beginning, the territorial state was associated with ideals about national culture and national economy. In the same way, these ideals helped sustain the territorial state and its authority. Indeed, since the sixteenth century, “the emergence of the state as the main economic actor capable of articulating global economic operations also carried with it the strengthening of territorial authority” (Sassen, *Territory* 76). International economic exchanges and foreign trade were conducted in the name of the nation-state. Building national economy became very important to the survival of the territorial state in a highly competitive interstate system. National economy ideals emerged in sixteenth century Europe, after the decomposition of the feudal order, and marked the early beginnings of what will later develop into industrial capitalism (Sassen, *Territory* 82). Preserving national economy became the ideal towards which all production forces and contributors strived. It increasingly took over internal struggles between the different social actors. Coming to the 20th century, Sassen asserts: “class antagonisms disappear and are transcended in the service of the collectivity. The common action of the nation, united by a common goal of national greatness, replaces class struggle” (Sassen, *Territory* 139). Though Sassen’s notion of disappearance of class struggle is controversial, it is noteworthy that in the 19th century nationalist discourses started to hold sway over the geopolitical scene mainly due to wars and cultural insecurities. The potency of

³ I am referring to Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities”.

national ideals in the logic of the territorial state were not only politico-economic, they were also cultural.

Analysing the mechanics of the territorial state in his book *Consumers and citizens*, Néstor García Canclini denotes the sway of territorial demarcations to nation-state formation by referring to nations in terms of “juridico-territorial containers” (78). Explaining the attributes of the “national container”, Canclini asserts: “a culture of one’s own was to be created in connection with a territory and organized conceptually and practically in relation to collections of objects, texts, and rituals that would enable the affirmation and reproduction of the signs of distinction for each group” (78). Obviously, at the heart of the nation-state conception since its very early phases was the uniqueness of national culture and its different attributes ranging from flags to rituals and museum collections. Of course, the cultural aspect of the territorial state is by no means uncontested. It implies that a lot of differences are being glossed over and sacrificed for the sake of maintaining the sense of cultural collectivity. Appadurai summarizes this continuous tension between the cultural ideals of the territorial state and its much more diverse reality: “while nations (or more properly groups with less ideas about nationhood) seek to capture or co-opt states and state power, states simultaneously seek to capture and monopolize ideas about nationhood” (39). Nation-states devised the concept of ethno-cultural minorities in an attempt to recognize difference *within* its borders, yet in more than one instance the claims of these “groups” seriously destabilize the authority of the nation-state. Appadurai cites some of these instances:

Sikhs, Tamil Sri Lankans, Basques, Moros, Quebecois – each of these represents imagined communities that seek to create states of their own or carve pieces out of existing states. States, on the other hand, are everywhere seeking to monopolize the moral resources of community. (39)

The continuing conflict between the nation-state and its different “nations” further confirms the importance of the cultural ideal to the territorial state and its influence despite its contested realities.

2.1.2. Borders of U.S.: Turner’s Frontier Thesis

Many critics contrast American identity and nationalism to European identities and their nationalisms. They argue that European countries contested territories to defend already constructed nationalisms. The Americans’ boundary-contests on the contrary were meant to construct American nationalism and a unique American identity. Unclear boundaries and constant territorial movements are thus elemental to the construction of American nationalism. Since the historian Frederick Jackson Turner talked about “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”, discussions about American nationalism started prompting the idea of a U.S. mobile frontier.

Turner was one of the first theorists to describe the American border in terms of a moving line. What he described as “the American intellect” came later to host discourses about American identity upon which U.S. nationalism was built and U.S. wars were fought. One has to keep some critical distance from Dr. Turner’s sweeping generalizations and his celebratory tone, but his definition of the American intellect in relation to the Western moving frontier is worth quoting at length:

From the conditions of the frontier life came intellectual traits of profound importance. The works of traveler along each frontier from colonial days onward describe certain common traits, and these traits have, while softening down, still persisted as survivals in the place of their origin, even when a higher social organization succeeded. The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, intensive turn of the mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material

things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. (Turner 17-8)

The most important aspect of Turner's theory is his articulation of the construction of American identity on the grounds of a moving frontier.

The indeterminacy of the national space and the "amorphous" concept of the boundaries of the "nation-state" are thus the major mechanisms of the technology of American nationalism. Dr. Turner expected rightly enough that after the American Westward expansion came to an end around 1849, more expansions were going to take place:

He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand wider field of its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. (Turner 18)

The "gifts of free land" had become a part of the past. Consequently, the "American energy" had to find new outlets. "How propitious that Cuba should appear as a 'new frontier' at about the time Frederick Jackson Turner was lamenting the passing of the old one", comments Louis A. Pérez (231-2). Indeed, U.S. territorial annexations and colonial interventions proliferated as soon as the Westward movement came to an end, and the U.S. was soon on the way to building its own empire. "To be sure, the end of that continental expansion – the end of that life-giving frontier in the 1890s – spawned a copycat overseas expansionism that seemed to ape the New Imperialism that had gripped Europe in the late nineteenth century" (McCormick 63).

2.1.3. U.S. Territorial Expansion:

I introduced the importance of national borders to the institution of the nation-state and the role they are meant to play in preserving economic and cultural nationalism. I also

summarized the historical particularity of U.S. borders and U.S. nationalism. Now, I move to analysing the first cross-border mechanism in this chapter which is imperialism. Each from a different perspective, *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family* display different phases of the constant (de)construction of the U.S. border through various colonial activities. This part of the chapter analyses the novels' references to the constructedness of the U.S. border through their display of different colonial cross-border operations. I argue that colonialism and imperialism enact the crossability of borders by mapping out international space. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the "international" is that which is "existing, constituted or carried on between different nations; pertaining to the relations between different nations". In this sense, colonialism breaks through the frontiers of the nation-state by introducing an inter-state dynamic that makes the integrity of the nation-state and national culture questionable. Obviously, by studying the different cross-border dynamics, my aim is not to argue that the nation-state is an old institution that belongs to the past. Instead, I attempt to show that nation-states persist at the heart of the geopolitical scene, yet they are constantly questioned by different cross-border dynamics. Colonialism is an interstate dynamic and one among these cross-border mechanisms. To argue so, I start by analysing how characters in the four novels negotiate their different identities in reference to their colonial histories. Then, I discuss these colonial histories and international identities in relation to the U.S. "civilizing mission" and Manifest Destiny. At the end of my analysis of colonial identity formations, I discuss their role in the formation of an economic and cultural world scale and how they break through the borders of the nation-state.

Common to *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family*, is the perception of borders as human constructions, lines of division imposed on the seamless world of nature. Little Celaya explains that winds are the same everywhere around the globe. Demarcating borders by humans establishes references and gives different meanings and names to the winds depending on where one is located on the map. Celaya asserts: “[...] A norther [un norte] here in Texas is a mean wind from across Canada. And up in Canada it’s the North Pole wind, and who knows what people up in the North Pole call this. Probably summer” (Cisneros 331). A more explicit critical statement comes in the next page where Celaya’s mom notes: “It’s not normal for it to freeze in Texas [...] if you ask me, must be more of that nuclear monkey business. That what causes the planet to act weird” (Cisneros 332). Both comments complete each other and the underlying argument is that if we start countering nature by establishing boundaries and labelling territories and winds, we will end up destroying nature through the likes of nuclear and chemical industries. From the same Mexican-American context, Anzaldúa lamented in 1987, “But the skin of the Earth is seamless/ The sea cannot be fenced, / *el mar* does not stop at borders” (25). Similarly, *The Agüero Sisters* supports the idea of absence of borders in natural phenomena including the human body itself. Dulce donates skin from her thigh to heal her mother’s burnt flesh (Garcia 147). The skin transplant shows that even human flesh can supersede the boundaries of individual bodies. In short, borders and their limitations are foreign to the logic of natural landscape and natural phenomena.

Caramelo narrates the different moments in history when American troops crossed the Mexican-American border to seek more land. Celaya’s narrative about her grandparents’ life includes references to the horrors of the U.S. military interventions, the hunger of the Mexican

nation (Cisneros 135, 149), the death of civilians (Cisneros 133), and most importantly the repetitiveness of the invasions (Cisneros 125). The novel tells the story of the annexation of Texas in 1848 and the Mexican-American War that preceded it. It also refers to clandestine aspects of Mexican-American military encounters. Long footnotes assemble pieces of this border's history by referring to the annexation of former northern Mexican territories to the U.S. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) made American the former Mexican states of California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. The novel mentions the U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1914 which had as its pretext the political upheaval caused by the campaigns of the revolutionaries Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata against Porfirio Díaz and his government. In a highly ironic tone, Celaya recounts:

Narciso wandered the streets of Chicago, where recruitment posters shouted: WE MUST HAVE VILLA, CAPTURE VILLA, WHO DO WE WANT? – VILLA, LET'S GET HIM. [...] The invasion at Veracruz, the invasion sent to capture Villa, this was when the Mexicans began to name their dogs after Wilson. (Cisneros 135)

The U.S.-Mexican border was unset and reset for different reasons and in different contexts. Texas' annexation was one of the most problematic moments in the history of the border. Historians reported that it was inevitable because it was the result of purely demographic reasons. Walter Nugent avers: "Of all the American territorial acquisitions of the nineteenth century, Texas was the purest case of demography determining an area's destiny [...] the Anglos outnumbered the *tejanos* by 1835, perhaps earlier, by ten to one" (131). From a different perspective, McCormick argues:

Thomas Jefferson had sought to include Texas in the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 two decades before the first wave of American migration [...] James K. Polk made California his principal objective in the Mexican-American war in 1846 not because of the miniscule American presence in California but because the American navy had

determined a decade earlier that San Francisco Bay and San Diego Bay were “the windows to the orient” that held the key to America’s future in Asia. (64-5)

Narratives vary and it is difficult to have real access to the conditions surrounding wars and invasions. From Celaya’s child perspective however, Mexico’s *national* flag becomes synonymous with war, and Mexican *national* space is marked by indeterminacy due its northern neighbor’s insistent presence within. Celaya recounts: “For a long time I thought the eagle and the serpent on the Mexican flag were the United States and Mexico fighting” (Cisneros 235). When the Reyes family crosses the border on their trip northward, feelings of anxiety, discomfort, and uneasiness reign: “Whenever we are near the border”, asserts Celaya, “no one feels like moving” (Cisneros 276). Moving becomes particularly hard when border crossing has always been associated with wars, dispossessions, and murders. Stasis comes across as a refusal of movement and an expression of an unsettled need for settlement. The relation of stasis and movement is a troubled one.

Despite the fact that it does not share a land border with the United States, Cuba was considered very important to the construction of U.S. national space and was described as a “new frontier”. Indeed, “Writer George Reno depicted Eastern Cuba as a ‘new frontier’ and proclaimed ‘Oriente [province] is the California of Cuba’” (Pérez 232). The Ostend Manifesto made official claims to Cuban territories. It declared in 1854 that “the Union can never enjoy repose, nor possess reliable security, as long as Cuba is not embraced in its boundaries” (Pérez 230). The war between the Spanish Empire and the Americans broke out in 1898. It is widely known as “the Spanish-American war”, yet this war was also a struggle for the independence of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Garcia refers to these super-imposed histories through Ignacio’s narration of an anecdote about his father in Cuba. “One day”, says

Ignacio, “a young widow spat at him on the Paseo del Prado. Her husband had been killed in the Spanish-American war, and she could not stand to hear Papa’s Castilian accent” (Garcia 59). The war ended with the Spanish defeat and Cuba became American in 1899. But since Cuba “has served as something of a laboratory for the development of the methods by which the United States has pursued the creation of a global empire” (Pérez 1), it was allowed to create its own government in 1902 under the terms of the famous Platt Amendment (1902).

The Platt amendment, laments Reina in the novel, “permitted the Americans to intervene in our country from the day it was born” (Garcia 28). The primary purpose of the Platt Amendment was to maintain American military presence in Cuba. But can this be considered an end to U.S. colonization of Cuba? And is it really possible to talk about a Cuban declaration of independence in 1902? Guerrilla invasions and military interventions took different forms throughout the history of Cuban frontiers. Pérez asserts:

[..] the means used by the United States in Cuba constitute a microcosm of the American imperial experience: armed interventions and military occupation; nation-building and constitution writing; capital penetration and cultural saturation; the installation of puppet regimes, the formation of clientele political classes, and the organization of proxy armies; the imposition of binding treaties; the establishment of a permanent military base; economic assistance - or not- as circumstances warranted. And after 1959, trade sanctions, political isolation, covert operations, and economic embargo. All that is American imperialism has been practiced in Cuba. (1)

The U.S. northern border was also affected by U.S. colonial appetite in spite of the seeming more equal power balances. Nugent record: “two armies invaded Quebec in 1775-1776 and were thrown back. In the late 1770s and mid-1782, Benjamin Franklin included Canada on his list of war aims” (75). Canada at the time was still a British colony and the purpose of the newly independent U.S. forces was to completely expel Britain from North America. A second attempt to invade Quebec in 1812 led to the Anglo-American war between the United States

and Great Britain. This was also called the War of 1812 and it ended two years later with the withdrawal of the American forces. The closeness of the border and its accessibility were paramount for Thomas Jefferson as he wrote to William Duane in August 4, 1812: ‘The Acquisition of Canada, this year, as far as the neighbourhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of *marching*, and will give us experience for the attack of Halifax the next, and the final expulsion of England from the American continent’ (Nugent 73 emphasis mine). Jefferson’s plan was not realized and the American northern border was maintained as the one declared by the treaty of Paris in 1783. Yet, the border was militarily crossed during the war fought “on the north and south banks and on the water of St. Lawrence river, Lakes Ontario, and Lake Erie” (Nugent 74).

2.1.4. Imperialism: International Projections

These colonial endeavors and the U.S. imperial project stemmed from national ideals and were built on national interests, yet they represent instances of breaking through the national towards the international. As aforementioned, I am reading the colonial/imperial dynamic as international because it occurs at the intersection between different nation-states. This argument is not meant to pacify colonization, on the contrary, it is meant to bring to the fore its violent side by comparing the colonial order to the pre-colonial one⁴. For colonization to be possible, it is important that authority over given territories be already marked and set. In this sense, colonization can be described as an interstate or an international dynamic.

⁴ It is noteworthy that pre-colonial orders are different from one context to the other. In Africa for example, the borders of contemporary African states were set by the colonizers. African pre-colonial order had a sense of territory but it was more flexible and less built on invested interest than it became after colonization. In the context of Mexico, Canada, and Cuba the concept of the nation-state and present day borders did exist before 20th century colonial waves. They date back to the Portuguese and Spanish 16th century conquest. For this reason I am referring to colonization in terms of an international dynamic.

Territorial expansion is violent particularly for this reason: because it usurps authority and right⁵ from one already set territoriality and attributes them to another one. Armed conflicts, treaties, and coalitions further assert the international nature of the colonial enterprise. It is interesting to read imperialism from the perspective of organized violence before reading it from the economic perspective. Understanding mechanisms of violence that underlie colonial encounters not only helps separate them from more contemporary forms of globalism, it also makes clear the international aspect of colonial power relations.

In his introduction to *Globalization Theory: Approaches and Controversies*, Anthony McGrew stresses the importance of looking at imperialism from a perspective other than that of economic analyses. The latter fall short of the grade when attempting to analyse imperialism because they always focus on the economy and undertheorize other aspects of the colonial machine. McGrew asserts:

Hobson, Lenin and Bukharin identify monopoly capitalism as the principal source of imperialism, emphasizing the inevitability of great-power rivalry and war [...]. Others such as Kautsky, Hilferding, Angell and Schumpeter considered capitalism more pacific with the potential of generating zones of capitalist peace or a form of ultra-imperialism [...] Central to these classical accounts, to a varying degree is certain economism. (31)

Setting capitalism as the only reason behind colonization or setting it as the promise of more peaceful interstate relations is symptomatic of economism. Bringing organized violence back into the agenda (McGrew 36) is the alternative that McGrew proposes for a better understanding of imperialism and contemporary globalization.

⁵ I am using Sassen's previously discussed reading of political assemblages in terms of different combinations of territory, authority, and right (TAR)

I adopt an approach similar to McGrew's in my understanding of imperialism as a form of organized state violence. The violent aspect of colonial encounters is what distinguishes imperialism from more contemporary transnational power dynamics. McGrew asserts: "Military conquest and force have been vital instruments in drawing the world's distant regions and discrete civilizations into tightening webs of recursive interaction" (15). He makes it clear that this argument is not meant to overlook the importance of trade and capital to the imperial machinery, yet the primary role in driving the imperial process remains that of collective violence (McGrew 15). Both ancient and "new" imperialism took place because "states increasingly sought both to monopolize control over, and to nationalize the means and instruments of organized violence" (McGrew 20). Undoubtedly, the importance of land acquisition and militarism in U.S. history, as in the history of European imperialism, is linked as in McGrew's analysis to national ideals and to competition between nation-states. Yet, it is also important to look at the racial and ethnic aspects of state violence and the role they play in colonization. Theories of racial superiority have always been used to support colonial interventions. Since its very early phases, European imperialism was built upon "civilizing mission" ideals and continued to be so throughout its different phases. It eventually took the form of the European nineteenth century version of colonialism. I argue that in the U.S. context, Manifest Destiny can be perceived as the equivalent of the European "civilizing mission".

Manifest Destiny is a narrative about the leading role that the "American" nation was predestined to play in the Americas. "The belief that the United States was guided by a providential destiny, that the nation had a preordained, God-sanctioned mission to fulfill,"

asserts the historian Robert Johannsen, “formed a significant element in American Romantic thought” (Nugent 235). Later, “this duty of destiny [was] celebrated in hymns and prayer, in songs and poetry as well as fiction and film, in political discourse and historical scholarship” (Pérez 7). Manifest Destiny narratives provided a justification for the U.S.-Spanish war in 1898 and continued to justify U.S. colonial interventions till World War II. Mignolo refers to the racial aspect of Manifest Destiny: “the U.S.-Spanish War was justified, from the U.S. perspective, with reference to the superiority of the ‘white Anglo-Saxon race’ whose destiny was to civilize the world” (32). The *inter-national* aspect of the colonial encounter and the imperial phase are filtered through the dialectical aspect of this colonial imaginary. There is no actual exchange dynamic between the colonizer and colonized because the relationship is that of power and superiority. Only the violence of the colonial act makes the borders of the nation-state crossable and not a genuine interest in a transcultural project. Interestingly, Mignolo criticizes Fernando Ortiz’s concept of “transculturation” developed in his book *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1995). Ortiz’s “transculturation” focuses on economic exchanges in colonial encounters. Ortiz’s analysis is according to Mignolo so much preoccupied with national ideals that it fails to account for power relations at the heart of colonial encounters (Mignolo 14). Mignolo suggests the concept of “colonial semiosis” as an alternative to Ortiz’s “transculturation”. “Colonial Semiosis” is particularly relevant to my argument as it sends the observer back to the hierarchical aspect of the imperial imaginary and colonial “exchange”.

Introducing his concept of “colonial semiosis”, Mignolo asserts: “Ortiz conceived the entire history of Cuba as a long process of transculturation”. He adds: “Ortiz was interested in

defining a national feature of Cuban history, I am more interested in critically reflecting on coloniality and thinking from such an experience [...] this is the main reason why I prefer the term colonial semiosis to transculturation” (14). “Colonial semiosis” is articulated using different terms in postcolonial theories and theories of globalization. It highlights the uneven power dynamics at play in the colonial encounter. “Coloniality of power”⁶ has to be kept at the heart of every analysis that engages the terms of the early phase of present world order. “Coloniality of power” serves as a reminder that imperialism was not based on syncretism instead it was based on violence. In the context of dominated lands, it results in “a conflict between two local histories and knowledges, one responding to the movement forward of a global design that intended to impose itself, and those local histories and knowledges that are forced to accommodate themselves to such new realities” (Mignolo 17). Thus, imperialism did not change the nation-state from within; instead it violently crossed territorial borders to export its industrial products as well as its cultural and national ideals.

At the economic level, imperialism was also operating along international rather than transnational lines. Though imperialism brought the economies of the competing superpowers and the subjugated territories together, its nucleus was still the nation-state. Sassen puts it succinctly: “we see the emergence of nationally based but internationally coordinated corporate capitalisms” (*Territory* 133). In the logic of imperial powers, expansion was meant to strengthen the national economy by creating new commercial circuits. Imperial maps brought

⁶ The concept of “coloniality of power” was first introduced by Anibal Quijano (1997). Mignolo revisits the concept and explains it in terms of a “conflict of knowledges and structures of power.” He asserts: “My understanding of coloniality of power presupposes the colonial difference as its condition of possibility and as the legitimacy for the subalternization of knowledges and the subjugation of people” (Mignolo 16).

the world together, yet the nation-state was still at the heart of the operating world scale modalities. Sassen reads the imperial world scale in terms of “the projection of national capitalisms onto foreign geographic areas”. She explains: “colonization and foreign trade remained crucial components in the process of building national capitalism” (*Territory* 132). In the nineteenth century, the interstate dynamic was confirmed by the advent of public and private international organizations and international agreements. Describing “International coordination” in the nineteenth century, Sassen asserts: “one of the key features of this period, in contrast to earlier phases of the world scale, was an emerging orientation toward interstate coordination through both national legislation and international agreements” (*Territory* 136). To sum up, the nation-state was still central to imperial geographies at the economic and the cultural levels. Yet, colonial expansion and violent projection reflected the permeability of the borders of the nation-state. I consider the establishment of the different *inter*-national processes in the U.S. imperial phase as a marker of the constructedness of its borders. The interstate dynamic of the imperial phase was but a starting point and deeper cross-border interactions were to come in succeeding historical phases.

2.2. Globalization: Transnational Interactions:

Other cross-border movements in the novels are attached to what most cultural theorists consider a different stage of the development of a global world scale. I read instances of economic and cultural globalization in the novels in terms of interaction as opposed to the imperial projections analysed in the first part of the chapter. My argument is that globalization operates across borders in a more transformative way than imperialism. It is my contention in this part of the chapter that globalization transforms the institution of the nation-state and its borders from within through two major dynamics: the transnational and the denational. The

OED describes the transnational as that which is “extending or having interests beyond national bounds and frontiers, multinational”. It defines denationalization as “the action of denationalizing or the condition of being denationalized. The action of removing an industry etc. from national control and returning it to private ownership”. Both mechanisms, the transnational and the denational, go a step further in the process of redrawing borders. This section deals with the different global dynamics at play in the characters’ life trajectories and events in *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family*, and what they teach the reader about the borders of the U.S. I deal in the first part with economic globalization and how it operates along transnational and denational lines in the novels. Then, I move to analysing cultural globalism and the role it plays in breaking through national boundaries. I read cultural globalization as an instance of contemporary transnationalism.

2.2.1. Approach

Many critics argue that globalization with its neoliberal global market values is the heir to imperialism and its civilizing mission ideals. I take it for granted that what came ultimately to be called “globalization” is a long historical process that has roots in the imperialist economies, and I will analyse this in coming sections of the chapter. Yet, it is important for the purpose of the present discussion to make it clear that I read imperialism and globalization as different border crossing modalities. I argue with McGrew that “Globalization is undoubtedly a form of domination but [...] not every form of domination could be considered imperialism” (31). Some critics and historians argue that “the United States had an informal economic empire” (*Hoganson* 248) which crystallized in its most advanced stages in the phenomenon of globalization. Of course U.S. economic domination is not a new phenomenon, it goes back to U.S. military imperialism. Yet, reading economic domination in terms of imperialism masks

the military aspect of imperialism and fails to articulate the economic and cultural nature of globalization. Indeed, U.S. military interventions are still taking place and are linked to another facet of U.S. contemporary hegemonic status in the world. Yet, globalization is a more complex, often more subtle, cross border dynamic.

By separating globalization from imperialism, I do not intend to dehistoricize globalization and deal with it as an independent phenomenon. Instead, I argue that the cross-border dynamics generated by globalization are a lot more diverse than those generated by imperialism in its earlier stages. On the other hand, historicizing globalization is relevant to this study in the sense that it shows differences between border crossing mechanisms during these two historical phases. Mignolo succinctly outlines the different forces that brought the world together and redrew its map. He says: “[...] Christianity, Civilizing Mission, Development, and Global Market. Each moment corresponds to a particular global design and, certainly, originates different local histories responding to the same global designs” (Mignolo 279). “Civilizing mission” corresponds to imperialism and “global market” corresponds to contemporary globalization. “Civilizing Mission” discourse is obviously of a different nature from Global Market. The former was a colonial narrative developed to legitimate military aggression. The latter instead is a material reality that makes and is made by globalization at the same time. Focusing on contemporary global designs, Mignolo argues that globalization is the latest and third stage of development of the global geopolitical scene. He argues:

‘Globalization’ [...] is conceived as the last of three stages of global transformation since 1945: development and modernization after the end of World War II; the raising of the transnational corporation and the demise of the state after the world crisis of 1968 [...] and finally the fall of Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Mignolo 278)

Indeed, globalization is generally associated with U.S. unilateral economic power and hegemonic status in the world. Yet, I see the first two stages mentioned by Mignolo as part of the process of building up U.S. power and monopoly. Stemming from the novels, my reading of globalization will follow global dynamics through different stages of the process.

It is also important to mention that my analysis of the novels does not stop at the level of describing global patterns. Instead, I attempt to explain them and refer to the role they play in (de)constructing U.S. borders. In this respect, I subscribe to Sassen's perspective in *Territory, Authority, Right*:

A key proposition that has long guided my research is that we cannot understand the x – in this case globalization – by confining our study to the characteristics of the x – i.e. global processes and institutions. This type of confinement is a kind of endogeneity trap, one all too common in the social sciences and spectacularly so in the globalization literature [...] These various features of the global amount to a description but not an explanation of globalization". (4)

This section of the chapter undertakes the task of explaining the effects of globalization on the borders of the U.S. through the way they are narrated in the novels. To escape the trap of simplistic description and also because I am writing on globalization from the perspective of the border, my analysis deals with globalization in its relation to denationalization and to transnationalism. Thus, I subscribe to Sassen's historicizing globalization as a way of moving beyond descriptive tones to analytical ones. Far from presenting a comprehensive research on globalization, my contribution is formulated from the perspective of border studies.

Methodologically, my analysis of the mechanisms of globalization is not meant to argue for the complete withdrawal of the nation-state. Instead, as has been explained in the first section of this chapter, I argue for superimposed maps and I focus on the status of borders in

contemporary geographies. Globalization violates borders in ways more diverse than those utilized by imperialism. It violates them from without through transnational flows of capital, people, and products. And, it redraws them from within through economic denationalization.

As Sassen states:

My argument is that while some aspects of state participation are in fact instances of states adapting to and participating in the global, other components of the national state and of the larger nation-state are themselves strategic sites for the structuring of the global and in this process undergo foundational change (*Territory* 229)

Indeed nation-states structure the global by denationalizing their own capital. It is in this sense that borders are crossed from within. This chapter shows the different dynamics of restricting territorial borders in relation to different interplays of authority and right. Arguing for the power of global patterns is not meant to undermine the presence of the “national”. In this sense, my analysis sides with the view that the global and the national are not mutually exclusive.

2.2.2. Transnational Capital

The lives of the characters in the novels are transnational; they are shaped by economic and cultural globalization at more than one level. Their personal memories of the past and lived realities of the present draw transnational geographies and evoke global histories. Transnational capital flows are not only economic realities taking shape at the macro-economic level, they are also part of the lived realities of the characters. Narrating his family history in *The Agüero Sisters*, Ignacio says: “At El Cid, where my father continued to read at his lectern, half the cigar workers had lost their jobs to falling tobacco prices. Those who remained were fearful of losing them to the modern cigar-rolling machines from America” (Garcia 113). In

this instance, U.S. transnational firms in Cuba come across as a threat to local industries and to jobs opportunities in the hosting country. *Caramelo* tells a different story about transnational capital flows in wartime. Regina's little commerce profited from the internal political conflicts between Porfirio Díaz and his opponents, and the concomitant U.S. intervention to "save" the Mexican economy. "Regina's little commerce not only sustained the family through difficult times, but prospered and moved them up a notch in economic status" (Cisneros 149). Allowing oneself to be co-opted by foreign investors can also help local businesses flourish. McCormick offers a historical explanation of Mexican politico-economic choices under the rule of Díaz:

Mexico had seemed to be the perfect embodiment of informal empire. Since 1876, the dictator Porfirio Díaz had imposed stability through both co-option and repression. Moreover, he and his positivist advisors had embraced an ambitious scheme of modernization but one based on the assumption that only foreign [read U.S.] capital, technology, and entrepreneurship could bring Mexico into the twentieth century. (75)

These are instances of the early phases of U.S. trans-border investments. Implanting U.S. capital across borders has different effects on local histories, depending on whether it completely takes over local capital or co-opts it.

Another instance of transnational capital flow is tourism. Amalia L. Cabezas asserts: "U.S.-based transnational corporations were the main beneficiaries of the profits generated by the airlines, hotels, car rental companies, cruise ships, and entertainment establishments. Cuban tourism reeked of imperialism" (44). The flourishing tourism industry in Cuba is another consequence of the expansion of the U.S. national space across the island's borders. Indeed, "During a period in which the United States restricted 'pleasure' activities, Cuba provided an outlet to satisfy the demand." (Cabezas 43). Cuban tourism was associated with all sorts of pleasure and most particularly with clubs and brothels. Reina ironically comments: "Sex is the

only thing that can't ration in Havana. It is the next best currency after dollars [...] the foreigners like us because it is supposed there is no AIDS in Cuba. That's probably EL Commandante's most successful propaganda campaign yet" (Garcia 51). Cisneros also refers to the importance of tourism in the Mexican context, especially in Acapulco "with its fancy hotels where the rich people stay – Reforma, Casablanca, Las Americas, El Mirado, La Bahia, Los Flamings, Papagayo, La Riviera, Las Anclas, Las Palmas, Mozimba" (Cisneros 81). Hotels make money from foreign tourists and not from the local population. "The hotel Majestic", Celaya asserts, "makes its money on Mexico City tourists, and not on honeymooners" (Cisneros 76). Tourism does not only mean foreign capital, but also foreign consumers. The "national" space becomes a market for entrepreneurs and a space of leisure for the tourist.

Exoticism is an integral part of transnational capitalism. It allows for capital and products to travel across borders. Constantia's beauty products industry makes money out of eroticizing Cuba. Her factory is named "Cuerpo de Cuba" and it produces face and body products labelled after the different "body parts" of the island: Cuello de Cuba, Senos de Cuba, Codos de Cuba, Muslos de Cuba, and so on (Garcia 131). Her industry is successful, and her products are marketable. "My products", Constantia asserts, "bring back that feeling. The beauty of scent and sensation, the mingling of memory and imagination" (Garcia 162). She participates in this in-home exoticism made possible by the transnational traffic of products, peoples, and images. "It might be nearer the mark", asserts John Tomlinson, "to say that the paradigmatic experience of global modernity for most people [...] is that of staying in one place but experiencing the 'dis-placement' that global modernity *brings to them*" (9). That

displacement can be brought to a place sounds counter-intuitive, but it is totally possible in the logic of transnational capitalism. Appadurai asserts in *Modernity at Large*: “imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency and globally defined fields of possibility” (31). Imagination becomes a profit making engine and an endlessly commercialized field. Appadurai even describes imagination as “the key component of the new global order” (31).

Transnational capitalism is not a contemporary phenomenon as mentioned earlier in this section. Yet, transnational capitalism in its contemporary shape is linked in most socio-economic critiques to U.S. leadership of the modern world system. In his article “Globalization as American Hegemony”, G. John Ikenberry asserts: “I argue that America’s postwar hegemonic project was a decisive source of support for the construction of an open world economy in the 1940s and the successive decades of expanding global economic integration” (42). Ikenberry’s analysis advances that the powerful position in which the U.S. found itself after World War II made it ideally ranked to redraw global geographies. My argument is that the open world ideal preached by U.S. has always underlined its political agenda since its earliest colonial expeditions. On the geopolitical scene, U.S. leadership took a different form starting from World War II and in a much more articulate way after the end of Cold War. “The cold war”, asserts Ikenberry, “served to draw the United States into a more active leadership of the world economy”. He adds: “It also gave the United States an additional reason to support European integration and agree to the building of Atlantic political and security institutions that in turn supported economic openness” (49). The new economic world order and transnational

capitalism played an important role of redrawing U.S. national borders. Yet, the latter were also redrawn from without the U.S. due to the denationalization of the economies of other countries. Undoubtedly, denationalization itself is triggered by transnational capitalism, the new world order, and its neoliberal ideals.

2.2.3. Denationalization:

In addition to the transnational dynamic of expanding U.S. borders into foreign territories, a parallel dynamic of denationalization was taking place within those countries. I am studying this dynamic here as part of U.S. border crossings because it helps define U.S. borders from without. At this level my approach is similar to Sassen's, who stresses the necessity of researching a given subject from different perspectives in such a way as to develop a comprehensive view of it. The denationalizing of the economies of countries with transnational economic ties with the U.S. should not be unexpected. *The Agüero Sisters* tells stories of denationalizing the Cuban economy, from small businesses to national currency. Ikenberry reads the primacy of U.S. dollar in the world in terms of U.S. hegemonic status in the global economy. He asserts: "America's hegemonic position has been backed by the reserve and transaction-currency of the dollar. The dollar's special status gives the United States the rights of 'seigniorage' [...] Other countries would have to adjust their currencies, which were linked to the dollar" (47). Legalizing the use of U.S. currency abroad is a step further in the process. I read it as an instance of denationalization because it does not function through the state's yielding or sharing its authority. Instead, it functions through state institutions themselves. Analysing electronic financial markets, Sassen asserts: "The relationship between territory and state authority today can accommodate the existence inside

national territory of denationalized spatialities” (*Territory* 418). The legal use of U.S. currency within Cuba works along these lines.

In *The Native*, Jenny, Plante’s American character par excellence, has cancer. Generally, illness as a metaphor in literature points to a sense of discomfort and a lack of integrity. As Susan Sontag argues: “Illness has always been used as metaphors to enliven charges that a society was corrupt” (71). Typically, cancer expresses a sense of emergency and increased threat, since “cancer could be described as a triumphant mutation, and mutation is now mainly an image for cancer” (Sontag 67). Capitalist economies supplant local production machines and replace them with new models of mass production, a process that may be seen as analogous to the way Sontag regards cancer and its uses in literature. Sontag holds:

Cancer cells ‘colonize’ from the original tumor to far sites in the body [...] Rarely are the body’s ‘defences’ vigorous enough to obliterate a tumor that has established its own blood supply and consists of billions of destructive cells (63)

Cancer is metaphorized in terms of global wars of expansion, or more accurately, as “colonization” from within as it destroys the cells from within. It is my reading that the process of denationalization, akin to cancerous cells, destroys national economies from within and expands to tackle national sovereignty at different levels. Denationalization, a globalizing dynamic, violates borders with the prospect of constructing a global open market. Plante chooses Jenny, an Anglo Protestant character, to bear this sick body as a metaphor for the dysfunction of U.S. national narratives and the collapse of its ideals of ethno-cultural purity under the decolonizing patterns of a global world order. Paul Dumouchel argues: “Globalization (whatever else it may be) is a totalizing process in the sense that there is nowhere that is not part of the globalized world” (172). It “has no outside” (Dumouchel 173).

In the same vein, Hardt and Negri's theory of "empire" describes the contemporary geopolitical scene in terms of a decentred profusion of power. "In contrast to imperialism", they assert, "empire establishes no territorial centers of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (xii).

In her analysis of denational processes and the way they break through national institutions and territories from within, Sassen asserts: "It is also easy to overlook how critical components of the global are structured inside the national, producing multiple specialized denationalizations" (*Territory* 6). Indeed, transnational forces are a lot easier to perceive as analysed in the previous section of this chapter. Globalization scholars have different opinions about the effect of denationalization on local economies. Some scholars, like Sassen, argue that denationalization leads to convergence among world economies in terms of their policies. And, due to the dominant status of the U.S. and its neoliberal ideals, denationalization results in the triumph of neoliberalism across the globe. Sassen asserts:

A key issue in the scholarship on the contemporary state and globalization is the power of global capital to constrain and even force national states to adopt particular policies. [...] The result is a convergence on neoliberalism: growing state acceptance of U.D. ideals of low taxes, market-based policies, shrinking welfare states, and elimination of industrial policy. (*Territory* 224)

Obviously Sassen does not argue for a complete convergence of neoliberal ideals across the globe, yet she stresses their predominance due to the unequal status of the different global agents.

Indeed, this global policy convergence results from global inequalities as much as it confirms them. In his analysis of global policy convergence, Branko Milanovic emphasises the

importance for less advantaged economies of applying a mix of policies instead of abiding with the U.S. model. He asserts:

Since efficiency of policies is not independent of the environment where they are applied, the same policies will produce inferior outcomes in countries that are institutionally very different from the advanced market economies. According to Mukand and Rodrik, some poor countries would have been better off had they followed a ‘heterodox’ mix of policies, that is policies not identical to the ones contained in the Washington Consensus package. (34)

Some other critics believe that it is still possible in the current global phase to adopt different policies and systems varying according to national realities. “It is still possible for different states to follow different development trajectories, determined by internal political processes and choices”, asserts Diane Perrons in *Globalization and Social Change*. She refers to Gosta Esping-Andersen’s theory that states can apply one of three different welfare regimes – social and democratic, conservative corporatist or liberal market – according to the extent to which the state provides resources to people as social rights (Perrons 18). Obviously, despite transnationalism and denationalization, different policies are being applied across the globe. Yet, the trend of policy convergence introduced by U.S. capitalism and neo-liberal ideals is not to be ignored. Some critics like Thomas W. Pogge and Robert H. Wade argue that neoliberal policies are even being sometimes pushed on poor countries by such global institutions as the WTO and the World Bank. “He [Thomas W. Pogge] agrees with Wade that the pervasive way of thinking in major global institutions, such as the WTO and the World Bank, perpetuates its own existence and a certain ideology (neoliberal convictions) without adequately delivering to the poor” (Held and Kaya 15). In the same vein, Perrons argues that the World Bank supports the prevalence of neo-liberal ideology “by making increased openness a condition for financial assistance” (2).

To resolve whether global economic policy convergence results in more equal power divisions or accentuates global inequality is beyond the scope of the present discussion. It is important however to stress that the nation-state is being transformed by both transnational and denational dynamics. These dynamics are being enacted by different agents and due to different circumstances ranging from ancient imperialism to contemporary globalization. Transnationalism and denationalization remain the major operating mechanisms of economic globalization. Sassen summarizes the role of these two global energies in drawing global designs:

There are two distinct sets of dynamics driving globalization. One of these involves the formation of explicitly global institutions and processes, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), global financial markets, the new cosmopolitanism, and the war crimes tribunals. [...] but there is a second set of processes that does not necessarily scale at the global level as such, yet, I argue, is part of globalization. These processes take place deep inside territories and institutional domains that have largely been constructed in national terms in much of the world. (Territory 3)

Transnational and denational dynamics are very important to global capitalism today. It is true that they do not completely set aside the nation-state, yet they violate its borders on different scales.

2.2.4. Modernity cum Transnational Culture

Culture is another important field of border crossing flows, and of transnational cultural dynamics are going to be discussed in the coming section of the chapter from the perspective of the immigrant experience. This section engages the discussion of global culture from the perspective of economic globalization. *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family* display instances of the spread of such values as consumerism, high technologies, media and world connectivity. This section deals with the different ways the novels negotiate

this culture and through it modernity at large, from a transnational space. Writing *Caramelo* from the perspective of a child is particularly revealing at this level. It surprises the reader with a vivid description of the market and of consumer culture. Describing her parents' house in Chicago, Celaya says:

All the rooms in our house filled up with too many things. Things Father bought at Maxwell Street, things Mother buys at the second hand stores when Father isn't looking, things bought here to take to the other side and things bought on the other side to bring here, so that it always feels as if our house is a storage room. (Cisneros 14)

Celaya is very confused about her father's aversion to second hand products as opposed to his fondness for shopping on Maxwell Street. "When we bring home toys from the goodwill and the Salvation Army, we have to lie when he asks where we got them", she says, "This? You bought it for us, remember?" and she adds, "But Maxwell Street is different. It reminds Father of the open-air markets in Mexico" (Cisneros 295). To Celaya, second-hand products and brand new products are the same; they are all "things" with which global dwellers fill up their "storage rooms".

In another passage little Celaya is impressed with 'Uncle Fat-Face's brand-new used Cadillac, Uncle Baby's green Impala, Father's red Chevrolet station wagon", all of which are "bought that summer on credit" and "are racing to the little Grandfather's and Awful Grandmother's house in Mexico City" (Cisneros 5). Commercial products cross the border as their owners do, yet their transnational histories started some time ago. Canclini interestingly discusses this point as he refers to products' loss of ties to territorial origins due to transnational production chains and multinational assemblage. He argues that under economic globalization the "opposition between what is one's own and what is foreign no longer seems to hold any meaning". His example is "a Ford assembled in Spain, with a Canadian windshield,

and an Italian carburetor, an Austrian radiator, English cylinders and battery, and a French transmission” (Canclini 17). In the same vein, Appadurai suggests that Karl Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism can be further developed in light of modern production networks. Appadurai’s new concepts, “production fetishism” and “consumer fetishism”, are well to the point in the present discussion. He says: “By *production fetishism* I mean the illusion created by contemporary trans-national production loci that masks translocal capital, and often faraway workers [...] in the idiom and spectacle of local [...] control, national productivity, and territorial sovereignty” (Appadurai 42). Indeed, products lose ties to particular territoriality and become simply a global product though they continue to be tagged as “made somewhere”. Appadurai’s second concept is “*fetishism of the consumer*”. Consumers themselves are transformed through commodity flows. They play the role of signs that mask “the real seat of agency”, which “is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production” (Appadurai 42). Indeed, consumers’ choices are, more often than not, preconceived by market planners and manufacturers.

In *The Family*, Albert joins the American army and fights against Japan in World War II. He returns home with plenty of Japanese gifts for his family members. When he goes home, Albert drinks his Japanese tea and wears “a long blue Japanese robe with Japanese characters on each breast and tied at the waist with a black belt” (Plante 65). Overwhelmed with Japanese gifts, Albert’s mother says: “I don’t think I’ll ever get to Japan, but you’ve sent so much of it here maybe I don’t need to go” (Plante 65). He replies: “I thought you might be interested. I thought too, the kids might learn a little about another country” (Plante 66). The narrator comments on the scene: “The very small island of Japan floated just an inch above the table”

(Plante 65). These travelling cultural “products” create the oft-preached illusion of closeness of the different parts of the “global village”, the “*appearance* of the world as more intimate, more compressed, more part of everyday reckoning” (Tomlinson 3). All that Albert’s family knows about Japan are these gifts, still Japan becomes a part of their daily life. The presence of these products in their living-room creates the illusion of knowledge of Japan. Knowledge and culture are reified by the logic of the market. The latter reduces a whole culture and a long history to a product that it sells to tourists making them believe that by owning it they truly experience that culture and know all about it. The primacy of consumption is so imposing in this particular scene of the novel that it hides the element of war which is the actual back story. The scene might as well have been presented from the same perspective and with the same terms if Albert were returning from some overseas holidays and not from the battle field. *The Agüero Sisters* offers another perspective on the transnational aspect of cultural products. Ignacio Agüero and his wife work as naturalists, they supply the American Museum of Natural History and World of Birds with Cuba’s rich specimens (Garcia 177). Among others, “a haughty-looking bird with fuchsia plumage; another with stalk legs” (Garcia 177) are shipped to the U.S. These “specimens” ultimately settle in a museum to accommodate the visitors’ eyes and make them enjoy the illusion of knowledge about Cuba and the illusion of walking in Cuban forests. Culture is transformed by the transnational logic of consumption and by the entertainment industry into a product to consume like any other product.

While addressing consumerism as a separate instance of transnational patterns under contemporary globalization, I do not intend to homogenize life styles across the globe. Instead, the argument is that economic globalization has succeeded in creating and exporting a

transnational consumer culture. This culture results from economic globalization as much as it regenerates it. Yet, the way consumerism intersects with specific local cultures is definitely different from one context to the next. As Canclini asserts: “homogenization is not the way in which it [globalization] relates to local and regional cultures” (19). What immigrates is consumer culture but not necessarily the histories of the products and their contexts. In the same vein, Appadurai argues:

Most often, the homogenization argument subspecies into either an argument about Americanization or an argument about commoditization, and very often the two arguments are closely linked. What these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenized in one or another way. (32)

Indeed, “commoditization” is a border crossing force that is often combined with global consumer culture. The practice of commoditization travels across borders, yet the way it is practiced and the fields it affects vary according to specific local realities. As for Americanization, in my view, it is generally equated with consumer culture by the global imaginary and by the ways different media discourses present and represent the U.S. to the world. Americanization then appears under the practice of consumerism in large parts of the globe regardless of the type of products that are consumed and their histories. This is triggered and confirmed by the U.S.’s leading status in the global economy. Yet, here again, the ways this consumer culture is practiced across the globe is far from being undifferentiated.

2.3. Immigration: Transnational Lives, Postnational Identities:

Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante tell different stories of immigration emerging from different localities and different histories. Discussing these different stories together contributes to a definition of the U.S. border in reference to different contexts that contribute to

its (de)construction. Immigration is another form of border crossing and bridging different territories and cultures. In this section, I argue that two different deterritorializing mechanisms are at play in the experience of immigration. The characters in the novels lead transnational⁷ lives and express their identities more often than not in postnational terms. The *OED* defines the “postnational” as that “of or relating to a time or society in which national identity has become less important”. In 2009, Mark Rifkin argued that “internalized people are presented within U.S. legal discourses as always-already having accepted their place within national space, a process that involves constructing subjectivities for them that confirm the obviousness of U.S. administrative mapping” (14). Legal and administrative machineries produce a nationalist narrative that is a cornerstone of international affairs, yet immigrant realities narrated from the immigrant perspective have a different story to tell. Interestingly, the novels represent a counter- or a para-discourse to nationalist discourses by presenting the reader with fragments of immigrants’ lives and by constantly reminding them that these narratives are themselves another form of representation. Immigration turns out to be a challenge to the territorial state as it deconstructs and violates borders through different dynamics, transnational and postnational. I introduce the different historical backgrounds necessary to understand the different immigration stories told in the novels. Then, I move to analyse the transnational and the postnational dynamics as portrayed in the novels and their border crossing effect.

2.3.1. Historical Backgrounds:

Reading the different immigrant experiences presented in the novels, each within its own terms, is very important to understand the different immigrant inputs and their role in the

⁷ See the second section of this chapter for a definition of the “transnational”.

(re)definition of U.S. borders. In this sense, my approach corresponds to Sassen's in *A Sociology of Globalization*, where she insists on the diversity of the immigrant experience and the importance of accounting for it from the perspective of diversity rather than similarity. She asserts: "Each country is unique, and each migration flow is produced by specific conditions in time and place" (132). She sets a framework for her research:

If we are to understand the possible effects of larger conditions, such as economic and cultural globalization, on the formation and reproduction of migration flows, we need to abstract from these particularities so as to examine more general tendencies. The emphasis should be on the specificity and complexity of migrations, as distinct from more general and simplified accounts. This emphasis entails assembling the variables that contribute to an explanation of the features of specific migration flows rather than generalized for all times and places or particularizing every migration history (*Sociology* 132).

Indeed, it is very important for research concerned with immigration, regardless of its perspective, to demonstrate diversity of input since immigrant waves and experiences are far from being undifferentiated. Starting from this assumption, I expose the different historical backgrounds at play in the novels in the Quebecois-American, Mexican-American and Cuban-American experiences before moving to areas of intersection between them.

The historical background of Plante's novels is the immigration of Quebecers to the United States of America and their settlement mainly in the states of New England. What came later to be known as the "Quebec Diaspora" (1840s - 1930s) was basically motivated by the industrial development of New England and the relative poverty of French-Canadian rural areas. "In 1860s as a result of the unbalancing effects of the civil war, about 20 percent of the Quebecois may have crossed the border to find industrial work. Between 1880 and 1900 a new wave of similar proportion have left the province" (Anctil 37). *The Agüero Sisters* refers to a different pattern of immigration that arose as a result of a different historical context. In

addition to the already established and aforementioned historical ties between the U.S. and Cuba, many Cubans immigrated to the States because of Fidel Castro's communist regime. When Castro took command of the country in 1959, many Cubans decided to flee. The United States was at the top of their destination list due to its overarching presence in Cuba throughout different historical phases, especially at the time of the Cold War. Historians report that the United States even organized airlifts for Cubans who decided to immigrate. Commenting on the circumstances of Cuban immigration, Constanca asserts: "there is nothing left to inherit in Cuba, nothing left to divide" (Garcia 77). Constanca clearly indicts the socialist regime and its politics of sharing. Elsewhere in the novel Dulce bitterly comments: "The people who make it to Miami become the real heroes of the revolution. [...] Leaving. Leaving and dollars. That's all anybody ever talks about anymore" (Garcia 54).

Just as it welcomed these Cuban exiles, the United States welcomed the labor force coming from Mexico. "Franklin Roosevelt's 'Good Neighbor policy' invited Mexican workers to harvest U.S. crops, since the U.S. labor force was depleted by the draft" (Cisneros 206). Interestingly, *Caramelo* describes Mexican immigration to Southern U.S. as a counter-invasion of the states that were once Mexican. Celaya asserts: "He [Narciso] could not know that by 1914 the marines would again invade Mexico, and once again in 1916. By then Narciso Reyes would be involved in his own U.S. invasion by immigrating to Chicago" (Cisneros 125). The juxtaposition of these two journeys highlights the connection between immigration and the colonial background of U.S. southern territories. The use of the word "invasion" in reference to one person (Narciso), as opposed to the earlier invasion of U.S. military troops, ironically suggests the uneven energies of this act of reverse invasion. Narciso is, like many other

immigrants, a dreamer in pursuit of his “American dream”. Despite their different historical and political backgrounds and circumstances, these immigrant stories intersect at many levels on the personal side of the experience. “To return to the question of what unifies Americans”, Yu Fu Tuan affirms, “two answers- two kinds of experiences and values [...] One is the image of America as ‘golden land’, a term often used by immigrants themselves [...] the other answer is the inherited democratic practices and institutions of basically British origin” (*Cosmos* 102-3).

2.3.2. Approach:

In methodological terms, it is important to clarify some of the links between the aforementioned imperial and global dynamics on the one hand and immigration on the other. Sassen describes two major tendencies in the scholarship about globalization. The first one incorporates immigration in a sociology of globalization and the second one reads immigration as a result of globalization. Sassen argues that “while the first scholarship is a critical source of data and research techniques that need to be incorporated into sociological studies of globalization, the second is extremely problematic and to be avoided” (*Sociology* 129). I set my research within the first trend as I do not regard immigration as a result of globalization. Indeed, as Sassen asserts: “Cross-border migrations existed long before the current phase of globalization” (*Sociology* 129). Actually, one might as well argue that imperialism was the earliest form of immigration, a violent form that relied on military forces. Yet, I am analysing immigration here separately from imperialism and globalization because I am dealing with some cross border facets it does not share with imperialism nor with globalization. This division is set up strategically in order to advance in a more frontal manner the argument of the

chapter. Thus, while I maintain that immigration is not a new phenomenon and that it is not a result of globalization, it is important to acknowledge that contemporary globalization plays an important role in diversifying immigration and in some cases in accelerating its pace.

Economic globalization played an important role in building global networks and infrastructure that are instrumental in both legal and illegal immigration. Sassen avers:

The organized export of workers, whether legal or illegal, is facilitated in part by the organizational and technical infrastructure of the global economy: the formation of global markets, the intensification of transnational and translocal networks, the development of communications technologies that easily escape conventional surveillance practices. (*Sociology* 151)

Economic globalization also encouraged immigration through international agreements and transnational firms. Sassen mentions for instance the escalation of Mexican immigration to the U.S. as a result of NAFTA's implementation (*Sociology* 137). Sassen also explains that the growing reliance on offshoring to reduce production costs can lead to the creation of a need for low-wage workers within developed countries as well. She asserts: "The growing use of offshore production to lower costs also contributes to the creation of conditions in the highly developed countries that may lead to the demand for and recruitment of low-wage immigrant workers" (*Sociology* 143). This search for low-wage workers inside the developed countries is but another connection between immigration and economic globalization.

In addition to personal reasons such as poverty and other hardships, and to colonial and neocolonial ties, contemporary globalization partakes in creating a culture of mobility favorable for immigration. In this context of global mobility, Appadurai has coined the term "ethnoscapes" to refer to the moving body of people across the globe. He defines "ethnoscape":

By *ethnoscape* I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree. This is not to say that there are no relatively stable communities and networks of kinship, friendship, work, and leisure, as well as of birth, residence and other filial forms. But, it is to say that the wrap of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move. (33-4)

“Ethnoscape” is a concept that is analytically revealing. It shows the importance of contemporary transnational traffic of people while referring to its diversity as well as the importance of contemporary globalization in empowering it. As Appadurai asserts, the argument is not that spatial stability has disappeared in the contemporary geopolitical scene. The argument instead is that humans are increasingly set on the move because of those global networks. Immigration is thus a complex phenomenon that has roots in ancient as well as contemporary geographies. It is the effect of diverse factors ranging from personal to political. What we have on view though is a diversified body of ethnoscape. The coming sections analyse respectively the transnational life style of these ethnoscares and the postnational modes according to which they build up their notions of identity and citizenship.

2.3.3. Transnational Lives:

Crossing the U.S. border prevents neither the Reyes nor the Francoeurs nor the Agüeros from experiencing continuity between their countries of origin and their life in the new land. Miami’s landscape is reminiscent of Cuba to Constanica’s eyes. With a majority of Cuban immigrants there, Miami becomes a duplication of the city of Havana. “She [Constancia] says that Miami’s seas and skies are just like Cuba’s, only fresher, bluer” (Garcia 209). Her sense of comfort in her new world is a bit problematic for the majority of Cubans in Miami though. For

them, crossing the border is even more trivial; they are simply ‘exiles’ in the U.S. and their Cuban nationalism is omnipresent. But, “Constantia does not consider herself an exile in the same way as many of the Cubans here [...] of course she wouldn’t say this aloud in Miami and expect to survive” (Garcia 45-6). Crossing the border increases these exiles’ sense of nationalism and makes them more and more critical of Castro’s revolution. According to Reina everyone in Miami is supposed to denounce the revolution, which for her is another sign of their “intolerance”. According to Reina, the exiles’ intolerance is but a parallel narrative to communist intolerance: “El exilio, Reina is convinced, is the virulent flip side of Communist intolerance” (Garcia 197). Whether or not they subscribe to nationalist discourses, Cuban exiles remain materially and emotionally linked to Cuba. Their lives are transnational and they produce their culture in transnational terms as they travel to and fro across the sea.

Religious and linguistic patterns travel as well across borders. Quebecois immigrants in the U.S. had a long tradition of implanting the Catholic religion and the French language in New England. This “Quebecois inspiration” of life in New England (Anctil 51) is portrayed in both *The Native* and *The Family*. Daniel takes Catechism classes in French at the parish school (Plante, *Family* 15) and “Antoinette didn’t become interested in finding out about her mother’s religion. She became and more devout in her father’s” (Plante, *Native* 43). She goes to the French church in Providence, and though “the sermon was in French, and she didn’t understand [...] she listened” (Plante, *Native* 43). Anctil’s study of Franco-America provides some figures that tell a lot about the life of Franco-Americans in New England:

In 1891 [...] there were eleven French-language newspapers published in New England, eighty-six national parishes with Quebecois clergy [...] there were thirty five convents and religious houses kept by French or Quebecois orders specializing in bilingual education for 26,050 primary-school pupils. (Anctil 39)

Language is another very important element to cross border lives. Jim and Reena speak French, but also English with no French-Canadian accent. Their son, Edmond speaks English and French, and he is also able to pick up the French-Canadian accent from his social milieu in Providence. Plante narrates: “At supper, Edmond spoke with a French Canadian accent he’d picked up during the afternoon at the ice-cream parlour near the church. Neither his mother nor his father spoke English with a French Canadian accent. Edmond switched accents easily” (*Family* 34-5).

Switching accents and languages is indicative of the permeability of borders, not only between languages, but also between different localities. Transporting the French language to Providence in *The Family* and *The Native* is as significant as transporting the Spanish language back to Chicago, and English back and forth to Mexico in *Caramelo*. Celaya describes the “roar” in the Reyes’s, “in Spanish from the kitchen radio, in English from T.V. cartoons, and in a mix of the two from her [Aunty Licha’s] boys begging for *Un nickel* for Italian lemonade” (Cisneros 6). Cisneros’s negotiation of the bilingualism of Mexican-American kids is very important in this scene because it reveals not just the capacity of speaking two languages, but also the importance of the territorial history responsible for this bilingualism. The kitchen radio is Spanish and the T.V. cartoons are English, and the kids are code-switching in both languages, as in words such as “*un nickel*”. Symbolically, the two languages are attributed to two different territories, Spanish in the kitchen and English in the living room. Situating language in space and recovering the territorial dimension of identities are very important to understanding border dynamics. As the kids mingle languages, they become transnational agents that create their own comfortable zone of intersection. Although languages are

originally assigned to specific locations, they only move by peoples' movement. It is important to consider Cisneros's allusion to the fact that languages are territorial: it is the human traffic between different territories – here the kids running between the kitchen and the living room – that makes languages cross-territorial. In terms of the transnational experience, language is a living body that does not necessarily abide by the institution and the status of national languages.

In this context, Mignolo coins the terms “(bi)linguaging” to reveal the fresh and lively nature of linguistic practices produced at the interstices of global interactions. He reads “(bi)linguaging” as a linguistic energy countering the inflexible status of national languages. He says: “Linguaging like thinking is beyond language and thought: linguaging is the moment in which ‘a living language’ (as Anzaldúa puts it) describes itself as a way of life (‘un modo de vivir’) at the intersection of two (or more) languages” (Mignolo 264). Mignolo locates this “bilanguaging” at the heart of the transnational experience, he asserts: “while the nation-state promotes love towards national cultures, bilanguaging love arises from and in the peripheries of national languages and in transnational experiences” (273). “Bilanguaging” is a linguistic practice that is necessarily connected to a different mode of thinking and living outside the confines of national boundaries and national languages. ‘Bilanguaging’ produces and is produced by a “bicultural mind”.

“The bicultural mind (in my terminology the ‘bilanguaging mind’), asserts Mignolo, “is the ‘mind’ inscribed in and produced by colonial conditions, although diverse colonial legacies engender dissimilar ‘bicultural minds’” (267). Mignolo links this bicultural mode of thinking to colonial histories and the consequent transnational experiences. Yet, under

economic and cultural globalization, the bicultural and even multi-cultural mind can emerge from interactions other than colonial. Mignolo's "bicultural mind" is very much like Anzaldúa's "mental *nepantilism*". Anzaldúa defines *nepantilism* as "an Aztec word meaning torn in between ways" (Anzaldúa 100). Anzaldúa emphasizes the creative aspect of "mental *nepantilism*" and praises its capacity to bridge differences and contradictions. She attributes the *nepantla* border consciousness to the dwellers of the borderlands. Anzaldúa refers to the colonial past of the U.S.-Mexico "borderlands", yet she stresses the different contemporary interactions at play in the area. Be it colonial or borderlander, the bicultural or the *nepantla* mode of thinking has a transnational nature and genealogy.

What is important about the transnational mind is its ability to bridge differences and to experience different localities in terms of connection. This connection is created at the moment of the transnational encounter and acquires a legacy from its continuous enactment in the lives of transnational agents. It disrupts the link between territories and languages, and dislodges national cultures. The aforementioned code-switching and accent mingling are instances of the fluid and dynamic nature of this bilanguaging energy and its transformative capacity. The fluid aspect of bilanguaging and what I would call "biculturing", taking after Mignolo's "bilanguaging", undergirds a process of cultural and linguistic deterritorialization. Appadurai describes the dislodging dynamic of transnational communication in the fast moving world of modernity in contrast to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus". In terms of Bourdieu's "habitus", culture is well confined within the boundaries of a specific locality. Appadurai asserts:

The search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication [...] culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called a

habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation. (44)

Thus, in terms of transnational communications, every single interaction is unique and unpredictable. Governed by bicultural or multicultural minds, transnational communications are boundaryless and always novel.

Transnational experiences mark more than one level of immigrant lives. Cross-breeding is at play in biological reproduction as much as it is in cultural production. In *The Native*, Philip marries Jenny, a protestant American Southerner, and gives birth to Antoinette. Antoinette is the result of this inter-ethnic marriage and hence the embodiment of the potential of immigration to cross over territorial identities and national histories. Antoinette is both a reflection of her parental grandmother's world and Indian ancestry as well as her mother's world and Western upbringing. Philip says: "It's just come to me how much Antoinette is like her [grandmother]", he adds "[...] together they make up a world I've always wanted to get off" (Plante, *Native* 33). But, Antoinette believes she is different from her grandmother. When the latter tells her: "you are like me", "Antoinette fe[els] a little pull as if someone is holding her back, and she th[inks], I am not, not really" (Plante, *Native* 49). Antoinette is instead a "mixture" of her mother and grandmother. She is impressed with her grandmother's "Canuck secret" (Plante, *Native* 44), but she "love[s] her mother for her love for the world [...] though her world had no secrets – and because no secrets, no possible meaning, it was what Antoinette wanted" (Plante, *Native* 61-2). She travels all the time back and forth between Providence where her grandmother lives and Boston where her parents live, and she is always indecisive about where to spend her weekends. "The voices of her grandmother and mother sound far, then near, then far" (Plante, *Native* 56-7). She is constantly oscillating between two worlds,

two different life-styles. She is the embodiment of the inevitable, though troubled, bridging between them.

2.3.4. Postnational Identities:

Transnational life and consciousness are not always experienced unproblematically, because they do not fit within the grid of pre-set national identity models. Instead they operate along postnational terms that are very important to consider for a further understanding of immigration and its border crossing mechanics. Whenever the characters in *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family* are confronted with clear-cut national identity models, they do not fit and seem unable to connect to official citizenship rhetorics. Antoinette “wonder[s] if he’d [her father] had the choice of believing in his wife or believing in his mother. She thought that her father must have been more divided than she is not knowing which country he was native of, as if belonging were a matter of choice” (Plante, *Native* 117). Immigration forms in *The Agüero Sisters* raise a troublesome question: “why do you wish to leave Cuba?” Reina thinks that this question “requires from her an answer lengthier than the inch of blank space provided”. And recalls her father “say[ing] that bureaucracies preferred the tyranny of clear-cut solutions, of irrefutable knowledge, a defined time and place. ‘True questions’, Papa told her repeatedly, ‘always insist on better questions’” (Garcia 101). To Ignacio Agüero, there should be better questions on an immigration form than the questions that refer to specific locations and modes of belonging. To Reina, there should be more space on the immigration form for her to write about her different loyalties and perhaps the historical trajectories of Cuba and the personal trajectory of the Agüero family. Celaya’s father in *Caramelo* declares: “[...] I am homesick for [a country], that doesn’t exist anymore. That never

existed. A country I invented. Like all emigrants caught between here and there” (Cisneros 434). It seems all these characters live their in-betweenness problematically one way or the other. Feelings of loss and shortage of space are always looming over their sense of self and identity. National narratives and imaginaries continue to haunt citizenship discourses from across transnational life trajectories.

In this sense, Schuck reads immigration as “a challenge to citizenship”, a challenge to the classical model of citizenship. Immigration creates “post-national membership” (Schuck 197) as a new pattern of citizenship and belonging. Studying the history of nationalism in *Territory. Authority. Right*, Sassen argues that the concept of dual nationalism was “generally undesirable” in the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries due to international competition between national powers (Sassen, *Territory* 282). Yet, she asserts that this situation started to change toward the late 1900s when political and economic transformations occurred and brought about a change in the legal content of nationality. Then, “nationality began to move to more flexible forms” (Sassen, *Territory* 283). Sassen reads the changes in the institution of citizenship not only in postnational and transnational terms, but also in denational terms since the changes are sometimes produced from within the nation-state and through its own institutions in such a way as to ensure a more transnational sense of citizenship. Sassen asserts:

I argued that such dynamics [formal and informal ways that signal such a partial shift out of the historically produced correspondence between the nation-state and citizenship] are taking place and that they are not confined to the much noted postnational and transnational citizenship identities but also include complex formalizations inside the state that partly denationalize various features of citizenship. (*Territory* 417)

Indeed, according to neoliberal political ideals, many of the state's duties towards its citizens are being transferred to, and held by, private institutions. These latter gradually reformulate the institution of citizenship and the terms of identity politics.

One of the major alternatives to state institutions is media technology and media discourses. Media increasingly open up spaces for citizens to express themselves in ways that are not always possible under states' conception of citizenship. Canclini analyses the displacement of state apparatuses and their replacement by private media in the enactment of citizenship and its attributes. He asserts:

Disillusioned with state, party, and union bureaucracies, the publics turn to radio and television to receive what citizen institutions could not deliver: services, justice, reparations, or just attention. Of course, one cannot claim that the mass media, with their call-in programs in live public forums, are any more successful than public institutions, but they fascinate because they listen. (Canclini 23)

In the context of ethnic minorities, media seem also to offer recognition and gratitude that mainstream state institutions fail more often than not to deliver. In *The Agüero Sisters*, for example, Constanca participates in "a Miami cable TV show called *Mi Fortuna*, about Latino success stories like hers" (García 232). This is an instance of "the collapse of traditional forms of representation, and the absorption of the public sphere by the mass media" (Canclini 26). As representation moves from public to private sectors, it takes forms less political than institutionalized citizenship. Hence, it moves away from national to postnational definitions of belonging.

Canclini reads this shift in the institution of citizenship in relation to consumer culture and argues in *Consumers and Citizens* that the classical definition of citizen is increasingly being replaced by that of a consumer. The consumption of media programming, through active

participation or watching, becomes a way of practicing one's citizenship in terms of a new definition of it. It is true that Canclini's analysis dates back to 2001, yet his definition of citizenship is still valid and survives among other definitions. Consumption is still a determining factor of allegiance and belonging. As analysed in the second section of this chapter, consumerism has become a culture around which self-definitions cluster. This same culture participates in creating postnational communities that displace the authority of the national realm. Canclini asserts:

The definition of a nation, for example, is given less at this stage by its territorial limits or its political history. It survives, rather, as an *interpretive community of consumers*, whose traditional – alimentary, linguistic – habits introduce them to relate in a peculiar way with the objects and information that circulate in international networks (43).

Consuming the same products brings the citizens of a given area together as it brings them together with consumers of the same product in other localities. In this sense, consumer citizenship transcends territorial boundaries and operates in an informal manner that restructures nationalism. Formal citizenship and national identity survive though as useful modalities of international encounters. As Sassen asserts: "For the immigrant who is naturalized, it [nationality] may be a useful instrument that allows more access to her country of origin rather than a matter of switching allegiance" (*Territory* 312). As nationality and allegiance decouple, identity becomes less and less defined by paper citizenship.

Another functioning mode of postnational identity is cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship, in contrast with political citizenship, is not built on nationalism. Instead it is a form of bonding set around cultural lines. As mentioned before, transnational agents cross the border with their cultural and religious paradigms. They implant them in the new context and seem to gain from them their major sense of belonging despite the fact that they are not always in tune

with the culture of the adoptive country and no longer exactly in tunes with the culture of origin. This alternative form of citizenship stems from dissatisfaction with national citizenship and its allusive status. Canclini asserts: “the dissatisfaction with the juridical-political sense of citizenship has led to advocacy for a notion of cultural citizenship, as well as forms of citizenship defined by race, gender, and ecology, to which we can add an infinite multiplicity of demands” (22). Fracturing national citizenship into micro identities has resulted in a postnational citizenship built on self-identification rather than identity and nationalism. Defining the terms of cultural studies in the U.S., Canclini asserts:

Citizenship is seen not only in relation to rights accorded by state institutions to those born within their territorial jurisdiction, but also as social and cultural practices that confer a sense of belonging, provide a sense of difference, and enable the satisfaction of the needs of those who possess a given language and organize themselves in certain ways. (20)

The different effects of this cultural form of citizenship on the integration of immigrants and their access to political equality are going to be discussed in the coming chapter of this dissertation. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that this alternative form of citizenship offers a cross border dynamic that allows for Mexicans, Cubans, and Quebecois to import their cultural norms as they immigrate to the U.S. As they live their U.S. citizenship, they also live other, different connections with their countries of origin and with those who share the same cultural values and practices in other locations. It is in this sense that immigrant identities are constructed according to a postnational dynamic that intersects with transnational life styles to make immigration a border crossing mechanism par excellence.

Chapter Three

From Space to Place: Global Subjects and Local Maps

*“Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed;
being mobile is not necessarily about
being detached.” – Sara Ahmed et al⁸.*

As argued in chapter two, the four novels under study point to the permeability of the United States’ boundaries. I highlighted different instances of border crossing across U.S. historical interactions with Cuba, Mexico, and Canada. The present chapter will highlight the counter movement to these crossings by pointing out the borders set within the space of the United States and around the lives of the global subjectivities portrayed in the novels. The major argument of this chapter is that borders are part of the material reality of immigrants to the United States. They construct their identities and determine their life conditions. Indeed, in addition to transnational chronicles, all novels under scrutiny tell stories that are lodged in particular settings with clear-cut boundaries. Accordingly, I will analyse the novels’ negotiation of the concept of the border through this movement from the notion of *space* as free and boundaryless to the notion of *place* as clear-cut and punctual. For this purpose, I begin by defining the difference between space and place in the context of the present study by highlighting instances of movement back to place in all novels. Then, I analyse the importance of the everyday, the neighbourhood, and the family in picturing space as particular and local with clear boundaries and the implication of that on identity debates in all novels. The last section of this chapter discusses the limits set by the boundaries of the neighborhood on the lives and potential of immigrants.

⁸ “Introduction”, 1

3.1. Of Places, Possibilities, and Boundaries:

3.1.1. Foreignness and Neighborhood Boundaries:

Caramelo, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Family*, and *The Native* tell immigration stories that involve a constant movement across U.S. borders. Yet, the novels remain tied at the same time to particular settings, as their events take place mostly in Chicago for *Caramelo*, Miami for *The Agüero Sisters*, and Providence for *The Family* and *The Native*. Indeed, in different instances the novels focus on the importance of setting in relation to characters' negotiation of their identities and their interactions with their immediate milieu. I argue that the concept of *foreignness* at the heart of all four novels questions the notion that global space is seamless. Instead, space comes across as fractured and marked by rigid boundaries that all characters are made to struggle with whenever they cross to the other side of the border. Plante refers to this notion of foreignness in more than one occasion. Reflecting upon the way his family members felt in Boston, outside "la paroisse de Notre Dame de Lourdes à Providence, Rhode Island", Daniel asserts in *The Family*: "they were foreign, could be taken, not for a family from a small grey parish in Providence, but a family from anywhere" (Plante, *Francoeur* 121). In *Caramelo*, Rafa, who was brought up in Mexico far from his siblings, experiences a similar sense of alienation when he comes back to his family in Chicago. Celaya relates:

When he [Rafa] comes back to us taller and quieter and strange, it's as if our other brother Rafa was kidnapped and this one sent back in exchange. He tried talking to us in Spanish, but we don't use that language with kids, we only use it with grown-ups. We ignore him and keep watching our television cartoons. (Cisneros 23)

It is interesting to note that Rafa felt similarly alienated when he first moved to Mexico and felt "abandoned by [his] parents and left in a country where [he] [doesn't] have enough words to speak the things inside [him]" (Cisneros 23). Juxtaposing both passages reveals the importance

of the immediate locale and its borders in shaping one's sense of self and belonging. Feeling foreign when he left, Rafa felt similarly foreign when he returned. Indeed, borders can be more assimilating than blood ties and family relations. In the same vein, *The Agüero Sisters* highlights this feeling of foreignness at the heart of the experience of border-crossers. In Key Biscayne, "Constantia does not believe these women [her acquaintances at the yacht club in Florida]. She knows she isn't one of them, that her life outside Miami will always mark her as a foreigner" (Garcia 45). The possibility of movement back and forth across the U.S. border is constrained by this experience of foreignness that marks space more as limited and limiting. The concept of foreignness reveals that borderless space is an abstract construction that is "put under erasure" by the material lives of these global subjects. The characters' experiences come across as anchored to particular settings and "structures of feeling", hence the importance of the concept of place as opposed to space.

Defining place as opposed to space in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan asserts, "Place is a pause in movement [...] the pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value" (Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space* 138). In their movement across the space of a seemingly borderless world, global subjects end up confined to specific places. Not only Chicago, Miami, and Providence, but also particular neighbourhoods and family dwellings become centers of a certain sense of self and identity for the characters in the four novels. My argument is that Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante tell stories about these "pauses in movement" when particular settings acquire particular meanings and confer a specific sense of identity to their dwellers. Indeed, the concept of space has always been linked to the concept of identity: "People do define themselves to a significant degree in terms of space, deriving

their sense of identity from specified tracts of land, be it the nation state, house and home, or their religion” (Blacksell 18). This connection between space and identity acquires a particular significance in the case of immigrants. In his reading of the experience of the local in the context of immigrants to the U.S., Yi-Fu Tuan asserts:

What holds them [Americans] together seems so impersonal [...] America so large and diverse, cannot be readily embraced as homeland or *patrie*, with a catch in the throat. The very name – The United States of America – says nothing very specific. It is not for instance the name of a people as in France, Germany, or Thailand. And the more Americans participate in, and indeed lead the world, in globalism, the more they yearn for locality, tradition, and roots – for the hearths and ethnos that they can directly experience and understand, for the small milieu that yields emotional satisfaction. (Tuan, *Cosmos* 104)

Though Tuan’s statement offers an interesting reading of the experience of the national, as opposed to the local and the regional in the context of the U.S., it is hard to read this yearning for the “small milieu” as linked to a simple need for “emotional satisfaction”. I argue that the sense of place in the immigrant experience also has to be read in relation to the possibilities that space provides or denies, as will be analysed in the coming sections of this chapter.

Indeed, a reading of the everyday lives of the Reyes in the barrios of San Antonio, the Agüeros in Miami, and the Francoeurs in Providence reveals that they do not live *place* unproblematically. Place is characterized by clear boundaries and those boundaries are determined by socio-economic realities and (im)possibilities. As Lefebvre asserts in his second volume of *The Critique of Everyday Life*, “Human actions always define themselves as choices, as a means of access to what is possible and as an option between those various possibilities [...] Without *possibility* there can be no activity, no *reality*” (Lefebvre, *Foundations* 195 emphasis mine). In short, the concept of place is linked to the notion of geographical boundaries, but these boundaries are not to be read as separate from some other

concrete and material boundaries that have to do with the limits of what is possible and what is not. For a full understanding of the experience of place, Garcia, Cisneros, and Plante focus on the everyday reality of their characters to portray their socio-economic contexts and the way they are (dis)allowed to navigate spaces. By focusing on the importance of the particular and the local in the experiences of Mexican-Americans living in the barrios of San Antonio, Cuban-Americans living in Miami, and Franco-Americans living in Providence, we see how the experience of the local is not neutral since it has to do with a larger socio-economic context. I read the local or the “punctual”, “in the sense of determined by a particular “point”” (Lefebvre, *Production* 88), as a *place* with clear-cut boundaries. These boundaries offer a specific set of possibilities and withhold others. A full understanding of the characters’ experience of place in the novels requires an analysis of the importance of everyday reality in addition to the geopolitical dynamics at play in global mapping.

3.1.2. Social Space: Approaches and Concepts

The study of space from the perspective of the local and the particular is a shared concern of philosophy, cultural studies, human geography, social geography and many other disciplines and subdisciplines. It is therefore of paramount importance to shed light on the history of spatial theory and its different branches in order to situate my approach and my take on the subject. In the language of planners, architects, and classical geographers space is represented as an object of knowledge, physical and detached. It is studied as a phenomenon that is external to human action and historical interaction. This approach to space overlooks its complexities and intricacies. Describing “city” in the language of city planners, Panu Lehtovuori asserts:

When this ‘Concept City’ (my term) or ‘city-subject’ (as de Certeau puts it) is established, it permits planners to bypass the complex, unpredictable city of countless actors and instead to understand and create space through finite, isolated properties that are linked to each other in a controlled manner” (22).

When it comes to human sciences, this subject-object relation to space becomes problematic to say the least. Lehtovuori calls it “a mistake” as he says: “The mistake is to equate ‘space’ and the graphic or map space of architecture and planning” (26). Literature on the other hand acts as a counterdiscourse to the scientifically exact discourse of space as it draws attention to the importance of representation in the construction of space. Space is represented differently in the narratives of different characters and it is lived differently not only at the individual level but also at the communal one. Metropolises like Chicago, cities like Providence, and states like Miami are not represented as abstract geographic units. Instead they are represented as discourses imbued with power and politics and filtered through personal and communal life experiences. In my study of these geographic units as present in the novels, I do not intend to separate their geographical presence from their narrative one and I argue that this is the vantage point of literary entry to space.

The concrete approach to space is not exclusive to the material sciences. It is also resonant in cultural studies and some philosophical discourses. In his article “The Socio-Spatial Dialectic”, Edward W. Soja links the prominence of the material approach to space to a sense of terminological insufficiency. He distinguishes between “*contextual space*” and “the *created space* of social organization and production” (“Socio-Spatial” 209). Then he argues that contextual space “has imbued all things spatial with a lingering sense of primordality and physical composition, objectivity, and inevitability” (“Socio-Spatial” 209). This concrete aspect of space has indeed migrated from material to human sciences despite its

inappropriateness to the analysis of human phenomena. Even in the approaches engaging deeper and more complex aspects of human production of space, a contextual concept of space always lies in the background. Soja links this conceptual impasse in human sciences to a terminological problem that makes space seem more of a container of human action rather than a product and a producer of it. He argues:

The dominance of the contextual view has so permeated spatial analysis that it distorts even our vocabulary. Thus, while such adjectives as ‘social’, ‘political’, ‘economic’, and even ‘historical’ generally suggest, unless otherwise specified, a link to human action and motivation, the term spatial typically evokes the image of something physical and external to the social context and to social action, a part of the ‘environment’, a context *for* society – its container – rather than a structure created *by* society. (“Socio-Spatial” 210)

Soja’s argument is that there is a contextual aspect that is always already inferred in the word “space” and that makes the terminological use of spatial vocabulary problematic even in the supposedly structural approaches to space. He criticizes the use of contextual space as a tool of analysis when things come to human phenomena or what he terms “created space”. Soja finds contextual space “an inappropriate and misleading foundation upon which to analyze the concrete and subjective meaning of human spatiality” (“Socio-Spatial” 209-10).

I argue together with Soja that it is incorrect to apply a contextual approach to the analysis of human space. Yet, I also argue that keeping this duality between contextual and created space lies at the basis of most of the methodological problems that Soja criticizes and attempts to eradicate in the analysis of human spatiality. Indeed, most of spatial theories were not misled by the terminological insufficiency diagnosed by Soja. Instead, humanist as well as historical materialist analyses and all the approaches in-between were able to take into consideration this contextual element inherent to spatial rhetorics. The problem that I would

diagnose, by extension of Soja's theory, is this dualism that Soja himself reiterates between the contextual and the structural aspects of space. Indeed, this dualism is a logical flaw that has accompanied the history of spatial analysis since its beginning. In the same vein, Steve Pile states his article "Human Geography and Human Geography Revisited: A Critique of 'New Models' of the Self" that "post-positivist social geography is taken to have two dominant perspectives: humanism and historical materialism" (122). Then he argues that "both humanist and historical materialist geography share a fatal splitting of structure from agency" (123). This splitting of structure from agency is the other face of the duality of contextual versus created space. Indeed, humanist analyses of space are more focused on the contextual aspect of space. They thereby address structural aspect of space and focus more on individual relationality to space. As Pile asserts: "Humanistic geography has already begun to describe our feelings towards landscapes coining terms such as topophilia (pleasure, love), topophobia (fear) and topocide (aggression, loss)" (134). On the other side of the spectrum, historical materialists focus more on the interplay of space and politico-economic structures. By focusing on this connection between agency and structure, despite their different approaches, both groups reiterate a dualistic perception of human space.

Structuralist approaches to human spatiality are but another example of the popularity of this dualism between space as a container of human action and space as a product and a producer of human action. Lehtovuori cites space syntax⁹ as an interesting example of structuralist approaches to space. He states that "in space syntax a deep structural similarity is assumed between the social form and the spatial configuration of a city, neighborhood, or any

⁹ "The idea of 'space syntax' was developed by the team of Bill Hillier and the Bartlett in London in the 1980s" (Lehtovuori 59)

other object of study” (59). Space syntax’s major assumption is that it is a fundamental mistake to study space and society as separate things (Lehtovuori 60). Yet, by attempting to trace similarities between spatial and social configurations, space syntax puts its own theory under erasure by confirming the dualism between spatial and social structures¹⁰. Engaging more thoroughly in the analysis of the different techniques by which society actually creates space and space creates society would have saved space syntax from this trap of dualism. Anne Stenros’ space theory is another structuralist theory that reproduces this dualism. “Instead of the interactions between many urban dwellers – the ‘social logic’ – it focuses on the individual experiences and the production of meaning, thus complementing space syntax” (Lehtovuori 64). Stenros focuses on individual experiences of space and the way human beings interact with their perceived space. Just like space syntax, Stenros reproduces this dualism between human phenomena and spatial phenomena while trying to go beyond it. At the end of his survey of the most prominent structuralist approaches to space, Lehtovuori concludes: “The structuralist approaches provide analytical tools and explanatory frameworks to see beyond the visible, to memories and meaning and to ideologies and economies” (72-3). Indeed, structuralist approaches display attempts to go beyond the dualism of contextual versus created space, yet they do not practically achieve a non-dualistic configuration of space. Lefebvre’s spatial criticism is, according to Lehtovuori and many other critics, the theory that first

¹⁰ Lehtovuori is not focusing on this aspect of dualism, yet he criticizes space syntax at many other levels. He criticizes it for example for the difficulty it has incorporating questions of politics, power and tactics of resistance (62). He also finds fault with it concentrating directly on the visual space, leaving the social off-hand out of the picture (63). Eventually he states “while most syntax applications do not address the notion of social space in a truly interesting way, they do provide a useful stepping-stone” (63).

succeeded in going beyond this trap of dualism. Lefebvre, as I will argue hereafter, did indeed produce an alternative to this dualism and moved spatial theory a step further towards a more theoretically encompassing yet still politically engaged configuration of space.

In his article “Thirdspace: towards a new consciousness of space and spatiality”, Soja applies a different terminology to contextual versus created space dualism. He designates the two sides of this dualism in terms of “firstspace” and “secondspace”. “Firstspace includes all forms of direct spatial experiences [...] Secondspace refers to the spatial representations, cognitive processes as well as modes of construction” (“Thirdspace” 51). Soja argues that “by introducing a third dimension, Lefebvre made it possible to escape the prison of the Firstspace-Secondspace dualism” (“Thirdspace” 52). Indeed, in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre theorizes space in terms of three dimensions, namely “conceived space”, “perceived space”, and “lived space”. He starts by criticizing the opposition between an objective physical space and a subjective mental one. Then, he fuses them into social space whereby he maintains the useful knowledge derived from the physical and the mental spaces while breaking down the rigid object-subject binarism (Soja, “Third Space” 52). Interestingly, Lefebvre does not present thirdspace as a synthesis of firstspace and secondspace. Instead, he introduces it as a separate concept that shapes a different level of human spatiality. It is a new dimension that is completely different from the two other spatial dimensions but shares a set of attributes with them. Indeed, as Soja asserts in his analysis of Lefebvre’s theory, the ‘physical’, the ‘mental’ and the ‘social’ are “simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical” (Soja, “Third Space” 53).

This concern with social space as immediate and particular was at first most apparent in Lefebvre's "trilectics of spatiality". In this sense, one can argue that Lefebvre set the basics of a new spatial analysis that goes beyond dualisms and mediates between the two extremes of spatial criticism, namely Humanism and Marxism. It is noteworthy though that Lefebvre offers this alternative starting from his background as a Marxist thinker. He thereby launches a new trend in spatial Marxist criticism that was further elaborated by a number of other spatial critics and Marxist social geographers. In *Fluidity of Place: Globalization and the Transformation of Urban Space*, Naoki Yoshihara distinguishes between Humanists' concern with "identity of place" as being historically built and Marxists' concern with capital flow as a "mechanism of place" construction. He then introduces the concern with the social and the particular as a new approach to spatial theory that is gaining grounds. He argues:

The understanding of place as something that 'is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of copresence' (Massey 1993: 66) is gathering momentum to contend with or even surpass these two positions. (Yoshihara 65)

The concept of social space revolutionized spatial thinking not only from Marxist perspectives but also from the perspective of human geography starting from 1970s onward (Lehtovuori 16). Space comes across as more than a container of social action external to politico-economic structures. Spatial analyses are increasingly concerned with space not just as physical and contextual or as mental and representational but also as social and relational. My argument is that literature is best positioned to deal with the different facets of space without polarizing and without claiming to own the truth. Literature is itself that thirdspace. Its claim to the daily and the particular argues full-fledgedly for a complex non-dualistic conception of space. Space in the novels is actually the materialization of the coming together of Lefebvre's perceived,

conceived and lived space, that is “spatial practice, the representations of space and representational spaces” (Soja, “Thirdspace” 51).

3.1.3. Place and its Attributes:

I understand the concept of place as necessarily linked to the material and the local. It implies a sense of identity and culture but without being fixed or monolithic. In that sense my definition of place and the way I deduce it from the novels under study intersects with some of the philosophical, sociological, and geographical concepts at some levels, and parts company with them at other levels. Linda M. Lobao, Gregory Hooks, and Ann R. Tickamyer explain:

In sociology, discourse about space and place sometimes considers them as fixed, binary concepts, in opposition to one another. This is particularly seen where place is narrowed to symbolic meaning and emotional attachment that a social actor has for a specific location, as in place authenticity or ‘sense of place’. By contrast, if space is defined to mean an abstract and dehumanized environment, it becomes of less interest than place. (8)

Obviously, literary representations of space and place do not see these two concepts as contradictory and binary. It is true that place in the novels has to do with emotional attachment and symbolic meaning and a lot of other elements that are far from being fixed and congealed in time. Place as Cisneros’, Garcia’s, and Plante’s characters live it and as this dissertation defines it is far from being permanent and authentic. Instead, it has to do with the material experiences of its dwellers as they daily perform and construct place. Place has also to do with deeper socio-economic levels and political strategies by which place is produced. The latter are also far from being stable and authentic, yet they do construct that “sense of place”. In that sense, I do not see space and place as dichotomous. Instead they both share this anti-foundational aspect. Yet, I am concerned with the specificity of place as represented in the novels in connection to borders, gates, and walls. I also do not conceive of space as “abstract

and dehumanized environment” despite the movement I trace in the lives of global subjects from space to place. This movement is linked to the specific and the daily and it is that element that produces borders as a lived reality.

On the other hand, “the view from geography varies [from that of sociology]. Rather than clear differences between the two concepts, geographers see tension and overlap [...] Places may be conceptualized as sites of materially based relationships as opposed to sites of community identity and culture” (Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 8). From the view of literature, space and place are two narratives which overlap indeed, especially in transnational lives and immigrant trajectories. Yet, place is more associated with a sense of locality and immanence. The characters still dwell in global space and it is as real to them before immigration as after it. Yet, place comes in when they cross the borders to the U.S. and adds a different layer to their daily lives. The new layer, or sense of place, is marked with clear-cut boundaries and that is what marks place as different from space. The characters are unable to carry the borders of a chosen place with them across space and at the same time it is not possible for them to live in a borderless place. Contrary to the concept of place as presented by geographers, I do not understand identity and culture as separate from materially based relationships. Instead, my reading of the novels introduces a sense of place where identity and culture are intertwined with material relations and daily routines. Community, culture, and identity are not predetermined concepts that are separate from daily lives. Instead they are produced and performed daily, hence their direct connection to the concept of place. Human geography on the other hand, defines “the identity of place” as “its physical character, its history, and how people make use of their past to foster regional consciousness” (Tuan,

“Humanistic” 272-3). In this sense, humanist geography offers a concept of place that is closer to that apparent from my study of the novels. Though, like many other humanist geographers, Tuan’s place concept has a phenomenological hue. Tuan mentions the importance of the physical aspect of place and its history, yet the politico-economic construction of space remains external to his account of place¹¹. In contrast, historical materialist views of place address politico-economic issues, yet they sometimes overemphasise the deterministic aspect of the production of space in such a way as to downplay human agency and potential change. It is the task of literature thus to negotiate and conceptualize both space and place in a more comprehensive way that takes into consideration the physical and the immediate, as well as the preconceived and the discursive. The particularities of literary discourse make it more appropriate to discuss all these superimposed levels and the way they intersect in the lives of characters as they navigate spaces and lead their daily lives.

Different spatial theories conceptualize place differently. In this study, I am interested in place in terms of its major attributes of physicality and relationality. I argue that place is a physical experience in the sense of being linked to daily experiences that mark it out as different and particular. As Yoshihara asserts in his explanation of the “physicalization” of place:

place found under global fluids and hybrid mobility is linked to the building of ‘successive stratified and tangled networks’ by people as they involve themselves with various elements of ‘dwelling’ through their five senses in their (highly contingent) practical life activities (events) (...). Here place is understood as bringing human

¹¹ Tuan defines the process of place production separately from city planning and the political stakes at work in it: “How mere space becomes an intensely human place is a task for the humanist geographer; it appeals to such distinctively humanistic interests as the nature of experience, the quality of the emotional bond to physical objects, and the role of concepts and symbols in the creation of place identity.” (Tuan, “Humanistic” 269)

interaction (communion) into existence through inhabiting, staying, resting, relaxing, and after all, “dwelling”. (65)

Indeed, inhabiting a place is an act of dwelling that brings to the fore the importance of the physical dimension of place. Place is lived through the five senses of individual dwellers who not only make sense of their immediate milieu but also give sense to it as they daily navigate it. Yet, as much as senses are individual, place is not an individual experience as some critics argue. Place is also communal and collective. It is a repository of communal values and experiences, not in the sense of fixed and congealed patterns, but of moving and performative dynamics.

Arguing after Marc Augé, Yoshihara asserts: “a place can be reinterpreted as ‘the relation that each of its inhabitants has to him or herself’, ‘the relation that each of its inhabitants has to the other occupants’, and ‘the relation that each of its inhabitants has to their common history’” (180). Indeed, Miami districts, Chicago barrios, and Providence parishes are pictured in the novels as a combination of this relational trio. It is noteworthy though that these relations are marked with contingency and mutability in a global context. Global subjects’ relations to themselves, to their neighbors, and to their history are complex and changeable. It is the daily performance of these relations that keeps them up and makes place possible as I argue in the coming sections. In opposition to many critics, I argue that the precariousness of place in the context of transnational subjects does not transform place to a “non place” nor to a “weak place”. Instead, this precariousness tightens the borders set up around that place. Elaborating on Augé’s argument, Yoshihara asserts: “a ‘non-place’ is ‘a space where neither identity, relation, or history are symbolized’. It means spaces where people coexist or cohabit without living together’, and according to Augé, proliferation of such ‘non-places’ is

characteristic of the contemporary world” (Yoshihara 180). It is true that transnational subjects have different relations to their identities and historical backgrounds even if they are from the same country of origin and the same culture. But the concept of “non-place” is based on the assumption that a common sense of history and identity is possible in absolute terms. I think of identity and culture more in non-foundational terms as different trajectories of different individuals coming together in a shared activity or daily routine. Accordingly, Chicago, Miami, and Providence are places and not “non-places”. The construction of these places is achieved by the performance of a common lifestyle and the similar daily routines of their inhabitants, and not by virtue of the common historical or cultural background of Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, and Quebecois-Americans. It is in that sense that the borders set around these places become even more rigid because of the insecurities resulting from an essentialist understanding of identity. A culture based on a daily performance of common activities and lifestyles calls forth the importance of borders to preserve the “identity” of a place and its reproduction.

Lehtovuori emphasises the interconnection of place and the meaning given to it through human activity when he argues: “Place and meaning are inseparable, also place-creation is a genuinely human activity. Places cannot be ‘found’, but rather they are ‘produced’. Therefore, places do not exist independently of human beings” (80). Indeed, place is a human creation and a daily production. Yet, it is important not to take the subjective dimension of places to an extreme whereby the concept is rendered uniquely individual and momentary. The non-foundational aspect of identity and culture in the contemporary global world has actually been utilized by capital spatial planning for foundational ends as will be discussed in the last section

of this chapter. For this reason, it is important to take into consideration both the performative aspect of place and also the political dynamics at stake in the production of postmodern places. Lehtovuori's concept of "weak place", for example, leaves out this second element pertaining to place production. It depoliticizes the discussion over contemporary places and does not provide a thorough understanding of place production dynamics. Defining "weak places", Lehtovuori asserts:

A place is no longer something that exists self-evidently or 'strongly' [...] Rather, a place is the experience of the individual. It is momentary and arbitrary in a certain way. An experience may or may not come; a place may or may not exist. A weak place does not exist outside ourselves, but it is always done, a creation, an *oeuvre*. (88)

Lehtovuori, as many other spatial critics, does not provide a thorough understanding of contemporary places. "Weak place" indulges so much in individuality that it turns a blind eye to other aspects of place. It is true that place experience is individual and moment-related, yet it is not the only dimension of a given place and it is by far not the defining dimension of the concept of place. There are superimposed aspects to place and they are not mutually exclusive. Place experience is necessarily subjective, yet place is not a completely internal reality. It is important to conceptualize place outside singular psyches and through the interaction of multiple subjects as they strive to produce a sense of place.

3.2. Locality: a Necessity or a Choice?

3.2.1. The Everyday

Common to *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family* is the concern with everyday lives of particular people. Be it through Celaya's narrative voice in *Caramelo*, or through the voices of multiple character-narrators in *The Agüero Sisters*, or through the voice of the omniscient narrator of *The Family* and *The Native*, the reader is introduced to the

minute details of the characters' lives, their daily practices, and their most intimate thoughts and concerns. In their representation of place, Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante re-appropriate some of the concerns of the realist novel while questioning it through their postmodernist narrative techniques. They display their disillusionment about verisimilitude and the authenticity of representation, and replace that with the postmodernist unreliable narrative posture, while remaining pre-occupied with the details of the everyday. Contrary to Lukacs's belief that "the great novel represents the triumph of the form over the mess of the everyday" (Sheringham 41), Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante seek to transmit the messiness of the daily in a shapeless form that questions the possibility of order and the transparency of representation. We sense this in Celaya's opening words: "the truth, these stories are nothing but story, bits of string, odds and ends found here and there, embroidered together to make something new. I have invented what I do not know and exaggerated what I do to continue the family tradition of telling healthy lies" (Cisneros 1). It is actually this fleeting aspect of the everyday and the unreliability of its discursive reproduction that the narrative techniques in these novels point out. It is at this level that the everyday in the postmodernist novel parts company with the everyday in the realist novel.

Analysing the modes and functions of the realist narration of the everyday, Michael Sheringham asserts in *Everyday Life: Theories and practices from Surrealism to the Present*:

The 'complex vision' of a sovereign author, is a mode of discourse with its own laws, conventions, and codes: it is by manipulating these, while at the same time failing to acknowledge their existence that the realist writer achieves his or her effects. Thus, the everyday, as constructed in the realist work, becomes part of a wider project where the presentation of everyday reality is clearly subservient to other ends, literary and ideological. (41)

The postmodernist narrator, on the contrary, does not “fail to acknowledge” the manipulation of codes and conventions, and overtly questions the position of the all-knowing narrator. Accordingly, the everyday comes to light in the novels more as a matter of varying perspectives, depending on who is in the position of “telling a story”. As in realism, however, the representation of the everyday in the postmodernist novel is “subservient to other ends, literary and ideological”. Clearly, this critical position vis-à-vis *the real* in minority American literatures, as in postcolonial literatures, does not aim to dismantle the materiality of the real and its authority. Instead, it is meant to reveal its immediacy as lived and its constructedness when narrated and represented. I argue, thus, that by writing the everyday while writing *in* its constructedness, Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante reveal the ideological impulse and the discursive game mapping out the real. For the purpose of this chapter, it is interesting to juxtapose the narration of the everyday and its constructedness with the constructedness of place through daily routines and practices. I read the focus on the everyday in *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Family*, and *The Native* as inherent to the poetics of place that the novels envision. I will highlight different everyday practices portrayed in the novels while arguing that they contribute to constructing space as local and particular. Then, I will move to reading the political stakes at play in this act of spatial appropriation within the context of U.S. “global cities”.

Inherent to the notion of place is the everyday as it takes place within the boundaries of a particular setting and deals with the particular. As Relph asserts: “Places represent ‘the focusing of experiences and intentions onto particular settings full with meanings with real objects, and with ongoing activities’” (Relph 141). Indeed, the four novels portray the everyday

as interlocked with space by showing how the everyday is lodged within the particularity of places. In the four novels under study, sharing daily routines marks people as similar. At the same time, having different lifestyles marks them as foreigners. Sharing daily routines comes across as more immediate than blood ties. In *The Native*, Antoinette becomes an alien to her parents, especially to her father, after she chooses to spend her time in Providence with her grandmother. “Antoinette had become a kind of non-person to him [her father], at best someone from some other country who was a foreigner in this one, and whom he wanted to remain a non-person, a foreigner” (Plante, *Native* 90). Similarly, when Reina first comes to visit her sister Constantia in Miami, she finds it hard to connect to her lifestyle. Even their memories of their mother are different: “During their first days together in Miami, Reina asked Constantia to grant her small intimacies. Intimacies that Reina and their mother had shared. But soon Constantia found this too upsetting to sustain. Her memories of Mama are altogether different from her sister’s hardly benign” (Garcia 174). In spite of their shared childhood, the distanced lives of the Agüero sisters make them think differently and even remember things differently. This sense of alienation from one’s family because of living a different reality was also expressed in the above-cited passage about Rafa in *Caramelo*, as he feels totally foreign among his siblings after his return from Mexico.

On a larger scale, in the novels, immigrants find it hard to relate to their original compatriots because of their different life contexts and realities. Describing Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, Celaya’s grandmother asserts: “People think because we carry the same blood we’re all brothers, but it’s impossible for us to get along, you have no idea.” (Cisneros 216). Doubtlessly, the lives of Mexican-Americans in the U.S. mark them with lifestyles and

routines other than those of Mexicans living in Mexico, in addition to internal differences within each group of them. Similarly, the immediate Mexican-American context of the barrio shows a number of differences from what is generally identified as mainstream American culture.

Cisneros's short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) is perhaps even more representative of the differences present among Mexican-American social groups in particular and Latin-American groups in more general terms. Narrating short stories about different characters of Mexican ancestry living in the U.S. capitalizes on the importance of the everyday in marking immigrant lives as different and far from being homogenous. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, by virtue of its short story format is best positioned to narrate the fractures of the Mexican-American community along such lines as social class, education, linguistic competences, gender etc. In this context, Harryette Mullen asserts:

Such stories and characters, juxtaposed as they are with stories of poor, immigrant, and working class Chicanos and Mexicanos, draw the reader's attention not only to the conflict of Hispanic and Anglo culture and their respective linguistic codes, but also to the tensions within Latino communities, of race, class, gender and ideology; of equal access to education, bilingual instruction, literacy, class mobility, and the rights and privileges of the U.S. citizenship. (16)

Different everyday life patterns and styles at once indicate and enact the differences of Mexican-American individuals despite their shared origins and ancestral backgrounds.

In *The Agüero Sisters*, the difference of context and lifestyle between Cubans and Cuban-Americans becomes a source of trouble to Cuban-Americans visiting Cuba. Nationals come to "blame El Commandante" thinking that "after all, it was he who invited the trouble by allowing the exiles to return to Cuba for visits" (Garcia 68). Reina thinks: "what those *gusanos*

brought in their crammed suitcases – photographs of ranch homes and Cadillacs, leather shoes in every color, watches that told the time in China, even extra-strength aspirin - began rapidly to unravel the revolution” (Garcia 68). Obviously, different immediate contexts and material realities create different identities and different cultures. In this regard, it is interesting to refer to Henri Lefebvre’s distinction between the macrosociological and the microsociological levels of human daily interaction in the second volume of *Critique of Everyday Life*, entitled *Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*. Lefebvre calls microsociological the “unmediated” level of relationships between people, in other words, relationships as they are actually lived on a daily basis. And he calls relationships on the conceptual level “macrosociological”, as in the notions of “consanguinity and territoriality”, “subordination and vassalage” (Lefebvre, *Foundations* 139-40). While I agree that these two levels of human relationships are distinct, I would argue that they are not separate and that they shape each other. Though Lefebvre does not state clearly enough that these two levels are not essentially different, his reading of their interaction on the material level is particularly relevant to the present study. Lefebvre argues that “[...] the macro makes every effort to contain, to absorb and reabsorb the ‘micro’ [...] It succeeds, but never totally. In spite of its ambiguities, or maybe because of them, the ‘micro’ puts up a resistance” (Lefebvre, *Foundations* 141). Much in this way, and in spite of shared family ties and origins, people produce place and culture differently, depending on the immediate realities of their everyday lives.

One of the most revealing daily practices in the novels is the use of language and linguistic variations. Though each novel handles it differently, they all show a certain level of bilingualism to be inherent to the lives of immigrants in the U.S., be it in the barrio of San

Antonio, in the Cuban districts of Miami city, or in the Franco parishes of Providence. In *Caramelo*, Celaya and her siblings use English to speak to each other and Spanish to speak to grown-ups (Cisneros 23). In Mexico, when “[they] first arrive at the Grandparents’ house [they] speak only to one another, in English” which is, in Celaya’s words, “rude” (Cisneros 28). In another scene in the novel, Celaya and her siblings watch TV cartoons in English while their mother listens to Spanish media in the kitchen (Cisneros 6). And despite their actual mix of Spanish and English, as when they beg for “*Un nickel* for Italian lemonade” (Cisneros 6), the kids think of Spanish and English in binary terms and use them to talk respectively to adults and to one another. The kids establish their tough linguistic codes, and Rafa’s position as an outsider makes him fail to communicate with his siblings. He speaks Spanish to them, and since they only use that language with grown-ups, they “ignore him and keep watching [their] television cartoons” (Cisneros 23). This conditioned perception of bilingualism is also revealed in the Franco-American context, as in Daniel’s reflections:

French was a *private* language, the language of his religion. English was the public language in which he would have to work, and religion and work, like church and state, were separate. No one in the English State, for which he would have to work, for which he would have to fight wars, would care what he felt in French. (Plante, *Francoeur* 192)

Again, bilingualism is not border-free, and the use of languages is contextualized. In *The Family*, the characters communicate in English from time to time, yet they believe French to be the “language of the family” (Plante, *Francoeur* 119). French is also set as the language of their religion. Antoinette, in *The Native*, does not understand French, yet she attends French sermons at the parish of Notre Dame de Lourdes and becomes “more and more devout in her father’s [religion]” (Plante, *Native* 43). The split between a private and intimate French language and a public and impersonal English language is expressed by the characters in both

novels. *The Agüero Sisters* also portrays Miami as a bilingual context. At more than one instance in the novel, Constanca switches on her radio to listen to her favourite show, *La Hora de los Migros* (García 25 and 129). The title of the show is revealing: Spanish is allowed for one hour and it is meant for immigrants. On the other hand, the Latino Success Stories T.V. show runs in English, though it takes its material from the life stories of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the U.S. To sum up, bilingualism is portrayed as a part of everyday life in Miami, Chicago, and Providence. Switching languages on the macrosociological level remains contextualized and highly codified though it is inherent to the microsociological level of daily interactions.

Another level of the everyday portrayed by *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Family*, and *The Native* is that of cultural practices and customs. I understand the concept of cultural practices much like Pierre Mayol in *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

The more or less coherent and fluid assemblage of elements that are concrete and everyday (a gourmet menu) or ideological (religious, political), at once coming from a tradition (that of a family or social group) and reactualized from day to day across behaviours translating fragments of this cultural device into social visibility. [...] A practice is what is decisive for the *identity* of a dweller or a group insofar as this identity allows him or her to take up a position in the network of social relations inscribed in the environment. (9)

In *The Native* and *The Family*, Catholicism comes across as one of the most important everyday practices around which life in the parish is structured. Sunday mass is part of the characters' weekly routine, and references to Catholic religious symbols are recurrent in the novels. At some point in *The Family*, Reena thinks that if Jenny, her Southerner daughter-in-law, had been Catholic, she "would have known how to deal with her; but because she was a Protestant and therefore, even after so many years in the family, a kind of foreigner, Reena was

unsure of herself, and she looked at Jenny with shifting eyes” (Plante, *Francoeur* 17). Catholicism is transformed into a culture through which a sense of identity is filtered. It enables or disables sentiments of belonging depending on whether it allows or prevents areas and possibilities of communication. Reena never manages to communicate with Jenny, not only because the latter is a Southerner but because she is a Protestant. In *The Native*, Antoinette sees her mother’s world (Jenny’s world) and her grandmother’s world (Reena’s world) in opposite terms and identifies more with Catholicism, the religion of her father and grandmother. She believes in “the Canuck secret” and thinks that “the secret was something in the religion which was Canuck Catholic, and being Canuck made the religion, the religion of this one small brick church, in this small clapboard parish” (Plante, *Native* 44). In this sense, Catholicism surfaces as an identity marker anchored in the history and culture of the parishes of Providence. Contrary to his daughter’s enthusiastic thoughts, Philip depicts the “Canuck secret” in rather negative terms as “Catholi[sm] from the Northern woods – woods where the French immigrants had been for so long they’d developed a closed, dark religion of their own, and had intermarried with the Indians” (Plante, *Francoeur* 25). Catholicism is thus portrayed in *The Native* and *The Family* as very particular to the Franco-American context of Providence. It is interesting to recall Lefebvre’s argument in his third volume of *Critique of Everyday Life* that “the everyday is [...] closely related to the modes of organization and existence of a (particular) society” (3). The contingency of everyday elements reveals the everyday as the epitome of the particular and the local par excellence. Canuck Catholicism marks Franco-Americans from Providence with a particular sense of religious and cultural identity, and marks the parishes of Providence with clear geographical boundaries.

In *The Agüero Sisters*, the anti-Castro attitude becomes a cultural marker of Cuban exiles in the U.S. Denouncing the revolution and its effects is a cultural ritual that brings Cuban-Miamians together. “The minute anyone learns that Reina recently arrived from Cuba, they expect her to roundly denounce the revolution. It isn’t enough for her simply to be in Miami, or even to remain silent” (Garcia 196-7). *Being in Miami* and condemning the Castro regime become intertwined. And since it is not the anti-Castro sentiment but the capacity to express it that marks Miamians as different, it is not enough to remain silent. The socio-economic aspect of everyday life of Cuban-Miamians is also a place marker. The novel portrays middle to upper class Cuban-Americans as business owners embracing capitalism wholeheartedly and indulging in its consumer culture. Miguel Gonzalez-Pando describes Miami as a “Cubanized cosmopolitan city” (121) asserting that:

it represented a vertical sampling of Cuba’s pre-Castro society, and, as such, it was capable of supplying almost all the basic goods and services demanded by the exiles; second, the economic system encountered by those exiles on their arrival in South Florida was not so much different from the one prevailing on the island before the revolution. (Gonzalez-Pando 123)

Cuban-Miamians could thus carry on consuming Cuban goods, while avoiding the inconveniences of the communist regime especially for business owners and the upper class in Cuba. Thus, Miami stands out as a very particular place where it is possible to be both Cuban and anti-communist, to consume Cuban products while preserving one’s wealth and enjoying the American politico-economic system. This marks Miami as a particular place with cultural attributes that cannot be found outside its boundaries, neither in Cuba nor in any other part of the U.S.

3.2.2. Social Space as Place:

The convergence of daily activities and linguistic and cultural practices in the novels necessarily takes on a geographical dimension as demonstrated above. Different spatial critics attribute different labels to these shared activities and life-ways. Lefebvre for example calls it “social space” and sets it as a third dimension in his “trilectics of spatiality”. The latter includes the spatial, the social, and the historical dimensions of human existence. Soja elaborates on Lefebvre’s “trilectics of spatiality” and uses the concept of “thirdspace” as a parallel to Lefebvre’s “social space” (Soja, “Third Space” 52). Defining “thirdspace”, Soja asserts: “Thirdspace retains the multiple meanings Lefebvre persistently ascribed to social space”. He explains: “It is both a space that is distinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental, or first and second) and a transcending composite of all spaces” (Soja, “Third Space” 52). Accordingly, “social space” or “thirdspace” is what brings history, sociality, and spatiality together. All three concepts relate to one another in both Soja’s and Lefebvre’s theories in a dialectical manner. Yet, they do not follow the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis classical pattern *à la lettre*. Instead, “social space” and “thirdspace” play the role of a third element that questions and breaks through binarism and transforms the two other elements, namely spatiality and historicity. As Soja explains:

[...] this thirding-as-Othering is much more than a dialectical synthesis *à la* Hegel or Marx, which is too predicated on the completeness and temporal sequencing of thesis/antithesis/synthesis. Thirding introduces a critical other-than choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness. That is to say, it does not derive simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different. (Soja, “Third Space” 55)

Place is social in the sense of being based on shared social activities. Place is also historical because it emanates from specific trajectories and historical backgrounds. It is also spatial in the sense of being material and concrete and having clear boundaries of its own.

On the spatiality of social life, many spatial critics agree about the necessity of having clear boundaries to social interaction. The latter is interpreted as a logical evidence in the accounts of many critics. John A. Agnew for example asserts in “Homeownership and the capitalist social order”: “People do not experience life in the abstract context of ‘mass society’. Their knowledge is acquired and they live their lives in the context of ‘social worlds’, in which meaning is attributed to acts and events through communication and interactions with rather limited numbers of people” (460). In the same vein, Michael D. Irwin asserts:

Even where physical barriers to interaction are minimal, spatial boundaries often mark social divisions and delimit the overall nature and frequency of daily interaction. For either reason, there are distances beyond which regular daily social interaction do not extend. Where these barriers occur, social organization coalesces into cohesive sociospatial units and the structure of human activity is more oriented within a geography than outside a geography. (86)

Obviously there is no way concrete social interaction can go beyond clear geographical boundaries. This results in the creation of geographical sociospatial units inside which daily social interaction takes place. Physical daily interaction occurs with a “limited number of people”, yet in my view it is not only spatial necessity that constructs these geographical units or places. Places are not randomly produced and they are not a simple fact of daily life even in the biggest global cities. Places emanate from human need for locality and from the utilization of this human need by politico-economic apparatuses.

The proliferation of some practices and daily routines in the lives of transnational subjects as analysed in the novels and the different discourses that the characters produce about them show that there is nothing essential about these sociospatial units. Despite their differences, the characters are brought together within the same practices and routines partly by virtue of their need for a sense of locality in their adoptive country. Even when the characters manifest an emotional detachment from their culture of origin, such as Reina in *The Agüero Sisters*, they still participate in a daily dynamic whereby they construct a sense of locality out of elements coming from both their country of origin and their new environment. Migration research has come increasingly to recognize the importance of locality in the experience of transnational subjects. Analysing the migrant experience in “Local Migrants and the Politics of Being in Place”, Brigitte *Bönisch*-Brednich and Catherine Trundle assert: “while we might define them as transnational, they may self-define as ‘locals’ or another place-based label” (4). Indeed, by bringing with them elements from their country of origin and incorporating them actively in their new locales, immigrants transform and are transformed by their immediate place experience. They produce places as much as they are produced by them. *Bönisch*-Brednich and Trundle go as far in their analysis as to suggest that this emplacement or place production process is actually the motive of transnational journeys. Defining their project, *Bönisch*-Brednich and Trundle assert: “We explore how place is experienced as constraining and producing identity, and how emplacement is a conscious goal and underlying experience of migration even for those who are mobile” (4). Indeed, migrant trajectories and their daily-activity-based sense of community prove that the desire for emplacement is not foreign to the migrant experience. Actually, immigrants strive to construct and live a certain sense of locality.

Place attachment and the experience of locality come across not only as a daily life consequence but also as an emotional investment. Indeed, the human sense of dwelling is also linked to emotions, beliefs, and a range of felt values that humans attach to places. Migrants are not an exception to this rule, as *Bönisch*-Brednich and Trundle assert in quoting from a number of other critics: “attachment to place is a significant aspect of modern migration. Place attachment involves ‘the interplay of affect and emotion, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviours and actions in reference to place’” (7). The migrant experience of locality comes across not only as a motive for transnational journeys, but also as a site of agency from which migrants claim control over their own destinies and life choices. Transnational subjects do indeed construct places and show a concrete sense of belonging. Their homes are not only located in memory, imagination, and virtual communities. They dwell in full-fledged localities with physical dimensions, clear boundaries, and emotional attributes. Celebrating the empowering potential of migrants’ chosen sense of locality, Harri Englund argues: “Rather than being a place in which migrants come to be situated, the local appears as an achievement that they carve out of the cultural materials that the fact of their movement provides” (267). The importance of locality to the migrant experience and this affirmed sense of place confirm the transformative potential of global flows on local environments and their potential for re-defining locality. Yet, it is important in terms of the present study to look beyond this apparent sense of achievement. The purpose is not to downplay the sense of agency of immigrant flows and their capacities at recreating place. Instead, for a better understanding of the interplay of place and migrant space in the novels, it is inevitable to look at the different dynamics at play in the construction of place. In the following section of this chapter, I attempt to go beyond the

simplistic celebration of immigrants' appropriation of place by analysing the politico-economic stakes at the basis of spatial planning and the production of place.

The analysis of the everyday in *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Family* and *The Native* through the linguistic, the religious, and the cultural shows that there is a deep sense of appropriation of place through everyday activities. In their appropriation of place, global subjects move from a free and boundaryless space to a material experience of place with concrete boundaries. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre considers the appropriation of space as pertaining to the “use value” of space and reads it as opposed to “exchange value” of space. He asserts: “use re-emerges sharply at odds with exchange in space for it implies not ‘property’ but ‘appropriation’” (Lefebvre, *Production* 356). The use value of space, I argue, is what demarcates place as particular and local, as appropriated. Yet, it is also conceptually productive to read place appropriation in relation to its exchange value. I understand exchange value and use value of space as inseparable in the experience of cross-border individuals navigating a capitalist global system. Indeed, as I will be arguing in the next part of this chapter, the appropriation of space (its use value) is only enabled by larger scale planning (exchange value). In the novels under consideration, the deeper structures at play in the everyday first appear spontaneous as in the characters' narration of the details of their everyday lives. Lefebvre maintains: “what appears most contingent and most accidental in the everyday can contain and translate – and sometimes traduce – group tactics and strategies” (Lefebvre, *Foundations* 164). The strategies at play in the contexts of Providence, Chicago, and Miami, I argue, are those of capital owners and politicians. In the first place, I read the borders set around the “ethnic neighborhoods” portrayed by Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante as grounded in a

politico-economic system of commodification of space. Then, I move to the analysis of the implications of setting rigid neighborhood boundaries on the life potential and possibilities of their dwellers.

3.3.The Neighborhood: Mapping and Potential

3.3.1. Place and the Commodification of Ethnicity

As we have seen, place is portrayed by Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante as particular and specific with concrete ties to different facets of the everyday. It allows different socio-cultural, economic, and religious structures to connect to one another and to take shape through everyday activities and routines. John Logan and Harvey Molotch stress the importance of place at the heart of this nexus:

One's home in a particular place, for example, provides access to school, friends, work place, and shops. Changing homes disrupts connections to these other places and their related use values as well. Place is thus not a discrete element [...] the precise conditions of its use determine how other elements, including other commodities, will be used [...] Any individual residential location connects people to a range of complementary persons, organizations, and physical resources. (18)

Weaving all these elements together makes place of paramount importance in a capitalist context based on “commodity fetishism”. Place is not only a commodity in itself, but it is also particularly *valuable* because it serves at the basis of larger commodity networks. “It infiltrates, even invades, the concept of production, becoming part – perhaps the essential part – of its content” (Lefebvre, *Production* 85). The centrality of place as a commodity in *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Family*, and *The Native* is inseparable from ethnicity as a carrier of specific cultural patterns and everyday routines. In this context, it is interesting to refer to Logan and Molotch's argument that “Ethnicity [...] does often actually represent a

shared life style, similar needs in the daily round, and the social boundaries for providing service and gaining interpersonal support” (Logan and Molotch 109). There is nothing essential about a shared life style among members of the same ethnic group. They do not share common daily routines and lifestyles because they have similar origins nor because they form a monolithic social group. Instead, the commonality of their lifestyle and needs is determined by the very fact of enforcing rigid neighborhood boundaries. These boundaries are set by the commodification of both ethnicity and place, and the instrumentalization of this commodification by place planning discourses and projects.

According to many critics, these ethnic clusters are enabled by both federal and state governments, despite their different authorities¹², because of their potential for investment. Logan and Molotch, for example, affirm in *Urban Fortunes*: “The concentration of a large number of similar people stimulates the development of agglomerations especially appropriate to their needs” (108). They give the example of Mexican-Americans asserting that “the presence of many Mexican-Americans in one place provides the necessary base for a bodega which then attracts still more Mexican-American residents, who then provide the still larger base needed to support a Spanish language movie theatre” (Logan and Molotch 108). At this point, it is noteworthy that different politics are at play in different city contexts and with regard to different ethnic and racial groups in the U.S. Taking the ghetto as a case study and analysing spatial segregation against African-American dwellers in *Separate Societies*, William Goldsmith and Edward Blakely interestingly warn against generalizing about the

¹² “The two levels of government [federal and state] pursue fundamentally different mixes of public policies, with the federal government specializing in consumption policies and the states and localities emphasizing investment policies.” (Baumgartner and Jones 233)

experiences of different minority groups. They consider African-Americans to be the most affected by the process of geographical segregation in the U.S. Yet, Goldsmith and Blakely assert that: “Historically, lease covenants and other legal restrictions directly excluded minority owners or renters; even the Federal Housing Administration prohibited integrated housing developments in the suburbs” (121). Undoubtedly, different geopolitical tools and impetuses are at play in mapping different ethnic clusters such as ghettos, barrios, and enclaves. Yet, discussing the differences and similarities of these ethnic experiences is not the immediate concern of my argument. Instead, this section is geared towards showing the importance of the ethnic element in the commodification of global city districts, ethnic neighborhoods, and economic enclaves across their differences¹³. Indeed, as Logan and Molotch assert, “[economic] growth machine coalition mobilizes these cultural motivations, legitimizes them, and channels them into activities that are consistent with growth goals” (62). It is at this level that the domain of everyday practice and the politico-economic system come together in the process of national space planning. Socio-cultural spaces disclose their political undercurrents, and the everyday is revealed as layered and complex. As Lefebvre asserts: “daily life cannot be defined as a ‘sub-system’ within a larger system. On the contrary: it is the ‘base’ from which

¹³ Juxtaposing Providence with Miami and Chicago is meant to show similar patterns of socio-spatial segregation. Yet, it is noteworthy that Chicago, Miami, and Providence represent different geographical scales and entail different political stakes. In “Advancing the Sociology of Spatial Inequality: Spaces, Places, and the Subnational Scale”, Linda M. Lobao and Gregory Hooks show the lack of concern about spatial units other than cities and nation-states in socio-spatial inequality research (31). This dissertation contributes to filling out this gap by addressing regional and other sub-national levels of socio-spatial inequality. The scarcity of research on such geographical units as states and towns led to a terminological imprecision whereby the word ‘urban’ for example is sometimes used to mean not just the city, but localities of larger scale that are similarly influenced by the urban syndrome (Lobao and Hooks 33). This study is not meant to contribute to this terminological and conceptual imprecision. I only use urban theories whenever they are applicable to social inequalities at play in the other spatial scales under study.

the mode of production endeavors to constitute itself as a system, by programming this base” (Lefebvre, *Modernity* 41).

Socio-spatial mapping touches upon the economic at more than one level and results in constructing rigid boundaries that are hard to transgress. In *The Agüero Sisters*, politico-economic mapping shapes Miami as an economic enclave. As Nestor asserts in the novel: “The Cubans own everything in Miami” (Garcia 288). Analysing this “Miami Cuban Economic Enclave”, Gonzalez-Pando states that:

after the Cubans arrived in the United States, contextual forces prompted, at first, the establishment of a sociocultural and economic enclave in Miami and, then, the City’s emergence as the gateway to Latin America. Both developments contributed to the so-called Cuban economic miracle”. (121)

In the novel, the Agüeros come across as successful business owners, and most of the characters are middle to upper class Cuban-Americans. *Cuerpo de Cuba*, Constantia’s beauty product factory, gains most of its income from marketing Cuba to Miamians. In this context, Gonzalez-Pando asserts: “Miami today remains an American city because it is located within U.S. territory and abides by its laws and political system. In other significant sociocultural and economic dimensions, however, it has become a Latin American metropolis” (122). Yet, laws and the political system are not all there is to the picture; the economic side is also interesting to ponder. The products are Cuban, the consumers and the business owners are Cuban-American but the economy is American. Enabling a Cuban-American economic enclave produces a closed socio-economic community and sustains it because of the high returns it guarantees to the U.S. economy. Yet, Miami is not completely independent and the largest businesses in Miami remain owned and run by Anglo-Americans. Despite his celebratory tone, Gonzalez-Pando acknowledges:

It must be granted, of course that although the Cuban business sector has grown faster than its non-Cuban counterpart, the largest firms in South Florida are still owned by the Anglo business establishment, even if Cuban Americans are often involved at their highest corporate levels. (126)

Cuban-Americans are excluded from being the real conceivers and leaders of this socio-economic pattern and they are not the ones who benefit the most from it.

In the Mexican-American context, socio-economic scales take shape differently. Crossing the Mexico-U.S. border 'upward' entails crossing a line 'downward' in the social ladder. For Celaya's grandmother: "Something happened when they crossed the border. Instead of being treated like the royalty they were, they were after all Mexicans, they were treated like Mexicans" (Cisneros 289). In Chicago, the grandmother has a hard time finding suitable housing. "In the neighborhoods she could afford, she could not stand being associated with these low-class Mexicans, but in the neighbourhoods she couldn't, her neighbors could not stand being associated with her" (Cisneros 289). She ends up living in the barrio where her sons dwell, but she cannot help nagging: "This isn't home. This is a slum, that's what it is" (Cisneros 289). Celaya, for her part, does not find the Mexican barrio accommodating at all. She asserts: "Apartments aren't built to sleep nine people. I sleep on a twin bed in the middle room, which would be all right if you didn't have to cross through to get to the other rooms." And laments: "All this traffic, and never any privacy, and noise all the time, and having to dress and undress in the bathroom, the only room with a lock on the door except for the exit doors" (Cisneros 301). Celaya goes on and on about the different flats her family rent in the barrio, "especially the ones [she] want[s] to forget":

Their hallways and their hallway smell, dank and dusty or reeking of Pine-Sol. A heavy door blunted with kicks, carved initials, and the scars from the changes of the locks like appendectomies. Fingerprints on the glass. No yard, or if there is a yard, no grass. A

darkness to the hallway, like a cave or an open mouth. Paint old and splinting off. A skinny lightbulb naked and giving off a sickly glow. A dirty cotton string hanging from the bulb. Dust in between the posts and the banister. High ceilings. Walls oiled with hands [...] voices behind the apartment doors [...] Holes shut over with nails and a piece of tin . A dark curve before you get up to the third flight [...] Dust and darkness and dust, no matter how many Saturdays we clean it. (Cisneros 301-2)

The deteriorated housing conditions of the barrio, and the economic constraints that prevent its dwellers from living elsewhere condition their lives and limit their opportunities to bring about change¹⁴.

In *The Family* and *The Native*, Plante narrates the economic hardships of the dwellers of the parishes of Providence. He tells the story of Richard who owns a small shop in Providence “in the midst of a sagging clapboard slum” (Plante, *Francoeur* 26). Richard’s passion for making grinders is curtailed by his inability to secure the necessary funding to keep up with the demand of his clients. When his father, Jim, asks him what he will do, Richard replies bitterly: “I am letting myself be bought by a bigger company. They’ll take over, and I will work for them. I’ll be a designer. It’ll mean moving the household out of Providence” (Plante, *Francoeur* 29). Small businesses are bound to fuse with larger businesses in the U.S., and better economic opportunities for individuals entail moving beyond the local. Economic conditions for employees are even harder than for small business owners. Their financial stability is bound to a changing capitalist job market, as in the case of Jim himself who is laid

¹⁴ The deteriorated housing conditions in the barrios is a recurrent theme in Cisneros’s novels. *The House on Mango Street* opens with Esperanza’s family move to a new place on Mango street and closes with Esperanza’s dreams to become a writer and to leave the street. In the beginning of the novel, Esperanza says: “we had to leave the flat on Loomis quick. The water pipes broke and the landlord wouldn’t fix them because the house was too old. We had to leave the house fast. We were using the washroom next door and carrying water over in empty milk gallons” (Cisneros 4). The house on Mango Street was but another disappointment. “Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in.” (Cisneros 4)

off because his employers are cutting back on expenses. The Francoeurs end up mortgaging their house in Providence to guarantee monthly payments and move to the country (Plante, *Francoeur* 149). The low financial status of parish dwellers produces a stereotypical perception of Franco-Americans as poor and unsuccessful immigrants. Their religion comes to be associated with a lower socio-economic condition, as in the case of ethnicity for Mexican-Americans. In *The Family*, Reena thinks: “we were told that Protestants were evil, but we knew they were better. They lived on the East Side. They were the doctors and lawyers and mayors. They were better than we were” (Plante, *Francoeur* 46). Her self-denigrating sentiments bring together the religious and the economic, and reproduce the stereotypical image of Franco-Americans as poor and failed individuals. The stereotypical representation of the poor Franco-American Catholic “from the woods” is thus created and sustained. What produces this stereotype and keeps it going, as the novels show, is the rigidity of the boundaries set around the parish and the precariousness of the process of socio-economic integration. In this context, one ought to question such statements as Tuan’s:

What is new [in the U.S.] since the 1960s is a cultural-political ideology that asserts that people ought to be able to retain almost all the accoutrements of their original culture (language, social custom, kinship networking, and so on) and still be fully American in the sense of enjoying the nation’s wealth, its full range of educational opportunities and political privileges. (Tuan, *Cosmos* 121)

In the context of Quebecois immigrants living in the parishes of Providence, as for Mexican immigrants in the barrios of Chicago, keeping one’s social customs and one’s kinship networking is not only socially isolating but also financially burdening. At this level, one is made to question the outcome of the ethnic and racial pride movements that Tuan’s statement addresses.

Analysing the contemporary spatial order of North American cities in *Globalizing Cities*, Logan asserts: “the lines of cleavage, stemming from its economy and reflected in spatial segregation, are overlaid by divisions of race and ethnicity” (164). Ethnically integrated neighborhoods and the borders set around them spring from larger economic maps. The apparent division according to ethnic and cultural differences serves as a cover for the politico-economic dynamics at play in both local and national spatial planning¹⁵. Yet, the economic imbalances between different ethnic groups are in their turn being re-enacted by the spatial order of the city, the state, and the town, and the logic of the ethnic neighborhood in general. Thus, for Logan and Molotch: “The inequality among individuals thus not only results from differentiation but also causes it. Similarly, place inequality is both cause and consequence of differences among places” (49). Goldsmith reads this model of spatial separation in combination with economic disparities between different neighbourhoods in terms of racism. He argues in *Globalizing Cities* that it is caused by racism as much as it generates racism: “The general failures at building cross-racial coalitions in cities played and still play a magic role in reinforcing the racism that exists at the deep core of U.S. national politics” (Goldsmith 43). At another point in his analysis, he refers to this geo-economic mapping in terms of “the anti-social character of U.S. politics” (Goldsmith 45). The interplay of economic, cultural and ethnic markers in neighborhoods makes spatial borders harder and more difficult to cross. In

¹⁵ In his article “The Socio-Spatial Dialectic”, Soja elaborates an interesting analysis of the importance of socio-spatial inequalities to the survival of capitalist economies. He explains that monopoly capitalism depends upon the extraction of ‘super-profits’ (i.e. more than average) that is why it requires sectoral and/or regional differentiation, unlike competitive capitalism that used to depend upon equalization of the rates of profit (220). As a result, “The capitalist mode of production actively creates, intensifies, and seeks to maintain regional or, more broadly, spatial inequalities as a means for its own survival” (Soja, “Socio-spatial” 220-1).

the same vein, Marcuse and Van Kempen argue: “Neighbourhoods are differentiated among each other by income, occupation, and ethnicity. In some cases the divisions are represented spatially by the hardening of the boundaries between them” (Marcuse and Van Kempen 4). The shared everyday activities and the common economic status of neighborhood dwellers make it hard for them to actually cross the border to other neighborhoods and to feel comfortable in other contexts.

Though she has lived for some time with her parents in Boston and studies there, Antoinette feels at home only in Providence with her grandmother. She asserts “I feel the life I am leading outside isn’t my life” (Plante, *Native* 53). The inside/outside poetics are recurrent in Plante’s novels. In *The Family*, Daniel contemplates his colleagues at La Salle Academy. Feeling “completely apart”, he wonders “why did he in a very clear way, stand outside them” (Plante, *Francoeur* 188). No wonder: “La Salle academy was *outside* the parish” (Plante, *Francoeur* 189; emphases mine). The borders of the neighborhood are revealed as markers of the chasm between an inner familiar world and an outer foreign one. As Mayol asserts: “the neighbourhood is the middle term in an existential dialectic (on a personal level) and a social level (on the level of a group of users), between inside and outside” (Mayol 11). In *Caramelo*, this inside/outside dialectic is translated by Celaya’s grandmother in terms of physical distance from necessary amenities. She experiences feelings of insecurity and discomfort when roaming the city. For her, “the city was such a nuisance. Everything was so far away and hard to get to. She could not take the bus – no, no, even though she had wandered about alone in Mexico” (Cisneros 290). *The Agüero Sisters*, on the other hand, articulates the rigidity of Miami’s borders through a sense of complete autonomy from the outer world. Contrary to *Caramelo*,

The Native, and *The Family* where the characters need to go beyond neighborhood boundaries, *The Agüero Sisters* portrays moving outside Miami as a luxury, not a necessity. When Constantia travels outside Miami to other parts of the U.S., it is either to try new markets for her beauty products or for tourism. In this context, one can refer to Marcuse and Van Kempen's note about some instances of cross-neighborhood contact: "Contact across the walls is minimal, and if it takes place, business-like and commodified" (Marcuse and Van Kempen 250). The "walls" of Miami are thick, and the Miamian economic enclave is so self-sufficient that the *outside* world seems almost to vanish. In sum, the Mexican-American barrio, the Quebecois-American parish, and the Cuban-American enclave are surrounded with clear-cut boundaries that materialize a "prison of space and resources" (Peet 484).

3.3.2. Community or Capital Insecurity:

Research on community, place, and social inequality has proliferated and is increasingly addressing its subject from a variety of angles and perspectives. The advantage of literary studies is that they deal with representation and hence have access to multidirectional approaches. At the level of the intersection between society and place, research on social inequality came up with two different approaches, namely society-in-place and place-in-society (Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 11). In the place-in-society approach, researchers focus on distinct characters in a place in comparison to other places. Explaining this approach, Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer assert: "Although starting out with place specificity, analysts are typically interested in generalizing upward, to say something about how a given place illuminates broader theory of societal processes" (11). On the other hand, the society-in-place approach "starts at the societal level and then moves to the level of specific places. Analysts

are less interested in the intrinsic quality of a given place and more interested in how social processes work out across them” (Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 11). Interestingly the novels under study bring the advantages of these two approaches together. They are narratives of place and society that do not have to provide scientific proof nor to start from one point and move to the other. They represent all the elements at the same time and display the synergy of place and society as they contribute to spatial segregation and social inequality. My critique of the novels on the other hand brings together society-in-place and place-in-society approaches. I focus on how certain social forces that generate inequality are manifest in given places, but I also show how they ultimately combine in the construction of a local identity and sense of identification. As in the society-in-place approach, the uniqueness of places is built on the uniqueness of social relations in them, as discussed in the section about everyday activities and life-ways in Chicago, Miami, and Providence. Yet, it is also important to look at place from the perspective of city planners and local policies. Place is not as spontaneous and transparent as the everyday suggests. Instead, as I demonstrated in the previous part of this section, there is a preconceived aspect to place. That preconceived aspect emanates from larger politico-economic plans and maps, hence the importance of the place-in-society approach. It is one-sided to look exclusively at a single dimension of place production energies.

This two-fold perception of place leads to a more encompassing concept of community and identity in the context of the contemporary U.S. scene. In his article “Capitalism and Conflict around the Communal Living Space”, Kevin R. Cox analyses the differences between communal living space as commodity and communal living space as community. He contradicts both and explains how the latter was drastically transformed into the former under

monopoly capitalism. “The meaning of the communal living space and its values derive in the first place from the mutually supporting ties of trust, friendship, sociability and predictability that they have created for each other” (Cox 433). On the other hand, in communal living space as commodity, the major value is home purchase and rent. It is the major attribute that defines the communal living space and the major focus of property capitals (Cox 434). According to Cox, under monopoly capitalism, “community becomes a mere shadow both of its pre-capitalist self and of the forms it assumes under competitive capitalism” (444). Cox’s analysis is interesting, yet it does not account for the more subtle ways capitalism functions in postmodern societies. I argue with Cox that communal living space as commodity has increasingly come to substitute communal living space as community and community consciousness that used to be dominant in pre-capitalist societies and under competitive capitalism. Yet, capitalism functions along different patterns in different contexts. In some contexts such as Chicago barrios, Providence parishes, and Miami economic enclaves, the community concept did not disappear. Instead, it has been used to make profit and to benefit housing markets and the national economy. Elsewhere in his article, Cox asserts: “residential development creates a demand for shopping, medical and recreational facilities, and shopping facilities increase the attractiveness of the area for apartment construction” (441). As has been demonstrated, these facilities are even more attractive when they are centered on communal activities and concerns, one more reason for planners and investors to keep up community spatial bonding.

Under these conditions and due to the intricacies of transnational lives in a succession of new localities, the concept of community has undergone a reformulation in community

studies and globalisation studies as well. In “Local Migrants and the Politics of Being in Place”, *Bönisch-Brednich* and Trundle survey the changes undergone by community studies as a result of the transformations of the community concept. They state:

Just as research on migration moved from integration studies to incorporate theories of transnationalism and globalisation, ‘community studies’ were largely abandoned in order to achieve approaches to understanding culture, society and place. Community studies, especially in anthropology and European ethnology, was rightly critiqued in the 1980s and 1990s for creating representations of communities as bounded, timeless, culturally consistent and geographically rooted. (5)

Obviously, my critique of *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Family* and *The Native* goes beyond the mythical definition of community as “bounded, timeless, culturally consistent”. My definition of community and the way the novels narrate it goes beyond all forms of essentialism. It is true that community in my analysis has a geographical dimension and is emplaced. Yet, this emplacement is highly conditional because it is linked to market rules and politico-economic mapping. I argue that romantic community narratives continue to fuel contemporary spatial politics. Yet, on the way, the community concept was redefined around the interests of capital. Community as a concept is no longer solid and self-contained and it is specifically for this reason that it is becoming increasingly place-bounded. The tough boundaries of the ghetto, the barrio, and the enclave reflect capital insecurities but also community inconsistencies. In this sense, my concept of community offers an answer to *Bönisch-Brednich* and Trundle’s question; “How then might we utilise ideas of ‘community’ without resurrecting the romantic, static or governmental meanings of the term?” (6). *Bönisch-Brednich* and Trundle’s own answer is “to focus on how ideas of community are used instrumentally, particularly in the construction of group identity boundaries” (6). This is exactly what my analysis of *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Family*, and *The Native* is

geared towards. This chapter has shown the importance of a concept of community based on the convergence of daily life patterns to the production of place and place boundaries. I present this new concept of community from the perspective of capital, and the border production industry in such a way as to prove that borders survive in this transnational world. Borders even become increasingly inflexible in this transnational context due to capital interests and insecurities.

Chapter Four

Border Aesthetics: Of Connections and Disconnections

4.1. Methodological Framework:

4.1.1. Ethnic Studies and Border Studies: Two Different Perspectives:

This chapter is a reading of the aesthetic choices of Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante in their novels *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family*. I argue that a full understanding of these novels requires reading them in terms of border texts that lie at the intersection of Minority American Studies¹⁶, Post-colonial Studies, Post-structuralism and Post-modernism. The border paradigm is very important in reading these texts because it allows for going beyond some of the limitations associated with traditional approaches to the field of Minority American Literatures. In their introduction to *Postcolonial Theory and the U.S.: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, Amrijit Singh and Peter Schmidt distinguish between two approaches to cultural studies in the U.S., namely American Ethnic Studies that are currently developing into a “postethnicity” school on one side, and a “borders school” on the other side (Introduction xi). Singh and Schmidt expand their argument in their article “On The Borders Between U.S. And Postcolonial theory”, asserting: “we represent the borders school as

¹⁶ “Minority American Studies” and “Ethnic American Studies” are broadly used interchangeably by critics. Yet, it is important to pay attention to the intricacies at stake in using each. As critic A. Robert Lee argues: “‘Ethnic’ [...] arouses suspicion, a WASP hegemony’s self-appointed rubric for patronage of minority culture” (322). Thus, the term ‘ethnic’ seems to erase the ethnicity of the WASP majority, and hence sounds compromising and hegemonic. Similarly, the term ‘minority’ American can be read in terms of a mainstream hegemonic strategy that functions by fracturing non-WASP communities and weakening some of their shared political claims. The ‘ethnic’ category seems more politically enabling from this perspective, so it can be read as a form of “strategic essentialism”. This dissertation uses both terms while remaining alert to the shortcomings of both and the discursive stakes imbricated in each one of them.

an important new paradigm for approaching the diasporic histories and constructions of the U.S. within and outside its geographical boundaries” (Borders 29). In this sense, the borders school goes beyond some of the limitations of the postethnicity school. The ethnic studies school limits its reading of the experience of non-mainstream Americans to within the borders of the U.S., without taking into consideration their connectedness to experience outside the U.S. In this respect, the border paradigm allows for a more comprehensive view of the ethnic experience while rooting it back in its historicity. While the Ethnic Studies School was more concerned with the themes of immigration, assimilation, and integration, the border studies school capitalizes more on the concepts of the border and border crossing. For Singh and Schmidt: “[...] border school analogies emphasize the in-betweenness, the migrant rather than *immigrant* displacements and crossings that many populations are currently living through” (Borders 43). It is in this sense that the border school comes across as more comprehensive in approaching the ethnic experience inside and outside the borders of the U.S.

In this context, Singh and Schmidt warn against the dangers of applying the *trope* of the border to the experience of all minority groups in the U.S. They remind us of the origins of the border school in writing about the U.S.-Mexico border. They assert: “Perhaps the most important question is: can a trope developed in context with Anglo U.S./Mexican border history really be applied to other interactions, even if the broad outlines of determination and resistance (for instance) may be similar” (Borders 42). Elsewhere, Singh and Schmidt’s inquiry takes the form of a self-critical statement as they affirm:

Our own essay’s claim that a borders paradigm is emerging in the U.S. ethnic studies may of course be just as dangerous as a form of overgeneralization as Frederic Jameson’s 1986 assertion that ‘national allegories’ and anti-colonial resistances were

shared strategies defining ‘Third World’ cultural production (Singh and Schmidt, *Borders* 43).

Certainly, it is important to acknowledge the historical fact that border studies sprang from the particularities of the context of the U.S.-Mexico border. Yet, as discussed in the first chapter, challenging the metaphoricity of the border is what can make the field more encompassing without falling into generalizations. It is important as Singh and Schmidt argue not to see the border as a *trope*, but instead as a historical reality. Indeed, the border is a reality in the lives of all minority individuals and communities in the U.S. Using it simply as a trope glosses over many historical facts that mark the lives and histories of immigrants in the U.S. and might indeed lead to “overgeneralizations” about minority American literatures. Starting from the conviction that the border is a reality and a material element that is important to all ethnic subjects in the U.S., one can obviously sustain the analysis of all minority texts from the standpoint of the border while remaining conscious of the different backgrounds implied in every single text.

4.1.2. At the Border between Post-colonial Studies and Minority American Studies

Reading Minority American Literatures from the standpoint of the border reveals the actual embeddedness of the migrant experience in colonial and “post-colonial” experience and the interconnectedness of Minority American Studies and Post-colonial Studies. Using the term “post-colonial” in the context of American Studies is problematic for more than one reason. Singh and Schmidt affirm: “[...] most critics concur that the term ‘postcolonial’ describes the combination of material, economic, social, and cultural practices an indigenous (and/or creolized) population engages with *after* the removal of the physical presence of a colonizing nation” (*Borders* 18). Starting from this definition, some critics argue for including

the U.S. in the field of post-colonial analyses. They back up their claim with reference to U.S. independence from Britain in 1776. In response to this argument, other critics refer to the U.S. military interventions since World War II. Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett Jr. and Robert E. Hogan refer to the “American participation since World War II in neocolonial ventures around the world” (8). In the same vein, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue that:

[...] the literatures of the African countries, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category. Perhaps because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played, its post-colonial *nature* has not been generally recognized. (2 emphasis mine)

Claiming a post-colonial *nature* for the U.S. seems a bit far-fetched as it occults some crucial aspects of U.S. history.

Long before the advent of British colonial rule, native American populations inhabited the Americas. In this respect, one can speak of the U.S. as a settler colony instead of a post-colonial nation. And, indeed for Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the U.S. falls under the rubric of “settler colonies” together with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Yet, a closer look at the particular histories of some American states suggests that the category of settler colony is not always a comfortable fit. The U.S. Southwest for example became American only after the American-Mexican war, in 1848 under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In this sense the Southwest is still, as many Mexican-American critics argue, under U.S. colonial rule. As Jaime Armin Mejía states: “[...] in the southwest, the colonizers have not left; they remain, and in

many parts continue their colonial domination, especially through exclusionary practices in educational institutions like English departments” (172)¹⁷.

With regards to contemporary debates, U.S. foreign policy is generally known in the language of cultural studies as “American imperialism”. U.S. imperialism takes the shape of global politico-economic and cultural domination. Addressing themselves to U.S. citizens, Singh and Schmidt admit: “we cannot but acknowledge that we are all a part of a most powerful imperialist, capitalist democracy whose global agenda most of us acquiesce in through silence, indifference, arrogance, and/or media influence” (Borders 29). Singh and Schmidt’s statement is particularly interesting because it accounts for the position of every American citizen with regards to U.S. influence abroad. The argument is that all Americans, “ethnic” or otherwise, share in belonging to a country engaged in colonial operations overseas. And, through indifference or acceptance of media discourses they consent to their government’s policies. Yet, minority subjects have a more complex position due to their historical interactions with colonialism and imperialism. Indeed, some U.S. minorities are post-colonial subjects who immigrated to the U.S. from post-colonial countries. Others live and may have been born in the U.S. but experience a cultural and politico-economic domination there that is similar to the colonial experience. For instance, “[...] postcolonial theory argues that the unchanging status of African Americans and Native Americans in American society might best be explained in terms of their treatment as internal colonial subjects” (Singh, Skerrett and Hogan 11). The category of “internal colonies” is indeed current in the language of Minority American Studies and is not exclusive to Native Americans and African Americans. Yet, one

¹⁷ Institutionalized forms of violence are not exclusive to the Southwest but it is mainly there, according to Mejia, that they combine with the on-going presence of the colonizers.

has to be careful not to discredit the claims of *actual* colonial subjects by overextending the categories of the colonial and the post-colonial. In fact, much military and territorial colonization is different from racism, ethnicism, and cultural domination. Yet, one can strategically employ the category of “internal colonies” as an analytical tool that helps reveal the intersections of the actual colonial experience with that of minority American subjects.

Post-colonial Studies and Minority American Studies share a common concern with the patterns of domination inherent in uneven power relations that govern the colonial encounter as much as the interaction between mainstream and minority cultures. Both discourses call for the necessity of developing a counter discourse to colonial and mainstream discursive practices and institutions. They both question the conflation of the concept of the nation with that of the nation-state in modern politics, and the totalizing dynamic that results from that. One of the most influential historical figures in the field of Post-colonial criticism who dealt with the concept of the nation in colonial and post-colonial contexts is Frantz Fanon. In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe draws upon Fanonian theory in reading the condition of Asian-American immigrants in the U.S. She asserts:

Fanon’s analysis implies that an essentialized bourgeois construction of ‘nation’ is a classification that excludes subaltern groups that could bring about substantive change in the social and economic relations, particularly those whose social marginalities are due to class: peasants, immigrant workers, transient populations” (73)

This critique of nationalism is indeed very common in Minority American writings. It questions the monolithic concept of national culture and the way it has been used in subjugating non-mainstream cultures and hindering their process of economic integration and political representation. In this sense, Minority American discourse shares post-colonialist concerns over the necessity of acknowledging the diversity of the national space, the

importance of de-essentializing the concept of identity, and developing an alternative discourse of difference.

In this context, U.S. minority narratives resonate with Edward Said's theory and analyses of the colonial encounter and the post-colonial condition. Said in particular, and colonial discourse analysis in general, show a genuine concern with the discursive construction of otherness and its instrumentalization in power discourses. Both colonial institutions and official discourses of pluralism and multiculturalism share a homogeneous, categorical representation of "the other" that serves to legitimize colonial oppression and cultural assimilation alike. As Singh and Schmidt assert: "In colonial discourse of the Other – as in official multiculturalism – each national (or racial/ethnic) group is viewed as pure and homogenous, representing an authentic and unified culture" (Border 23). Said's critique of the discursive mechanisms of the colonial machine has been widely adopted by Minority American critics and writers. Louise Rodríguez Connal, for example, asserts: "Edward Said's discussions of Orientalism, colonialism, and/or the 'Other' apply to the 'USAmerican'¹⁸ landscape. Many of the ideas found in his work apply to minority groups within the United States in ways similar to the colonized people about which he writes" (199). Indeed, Said's analyses of the discursive construction of otherness in colonial narratives and its political implications in colonial contexts transects at many levels with minority American narratives' account of the experience of the immigrant, that "other" within, and their representation in mainstream discourses.

¹⁸ Interestingly, Connal coins the term "USAmerican" as a way of disputing the equation of the U.S.A. with the American continent as in "American" nationality or "American" identity.

Non-mainstream narratives and post-colonial narratives also share an interest in the condition of hybridity¹⁹. This latter has been exhaustively analysed by many post-colonial theorists. Lowe's account of the condition of hybridity highlights its rootedness in an unequal power encounter. She asserts:

By hybridity, I refer to formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations; for example, the racial and linguistic mixings in the Philippines and among Filipinos in the United States are the material trace of the history of Spanish colonialism, U.S. colonization, as U.S. neo-colonialism. Hybridity, in this sense [...] marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination (67)

Lowe's analysis focuses on the origins of hybrid identities and the material conditions of hybridity. It explores their roots in colonial encounters while showing the on-going effects on the lives of minority individuals in the U.S. She stresses the importance of not regarding hybridity as a peaceful process of "'free' oscillation between or among chosen identities" (Lowe 82). She studies its violent implications in the case of Asian-Americans for example, stating that "it is the uneven process through which immigrant communities encounter the violences of the U.S. state, and the capital imperatives served by the United States and by the Asian states from which they come" (Lowe 82). Though many critics, post-colonial and non-mainstream, stress the importance of hybridity as a site of resistance, they all seem to agree that it is not always a choice. It is simply a material condition that is systematically created by the interaction between different power institutions, resulting more often than not in a clash of interests and unequal power positions. As such, hybridity is central to both post-colonial and Minority American discourses.

¹⁹ The use of the term "hybridity" has also interestingly been problematized by many critics for its rootedness in a racist colonial discourse.

The shared aspects of post-colonial and minority American conditions result in their narratives sharing a whole set of political imperatives and discursive functionalities. Both fields implicitly accept to revise colonial and mainstream discourses respectively. This mission has been identified by some critics with the Fanonian concept of “decolonization”: as a form of refusal of former systems, discursive or otherwise, and the effort to develop alternatives to them. Lowe examines this concept of “decolonization” for Asian-American narratives (107-8). She asserts: “Fanon argues that the challenge facing any movement that is dismantling colonialism (or a system in which one culture dominates another) is to provide for a new order that does not reproduce the social structure of the old system” (72). Lowe asserts that Asian-American narratives are instances of this desire and power to produce a new social order. By extension, Post-colonial Studies and Minority American Studies can both be seen as countercanonical paradigms that attempt to develop a counter discourse to cultural pluralism and colonialism. Both post-colonial and minority American literatures aim to “[...] displace the representational regimes of the institutionalized novel and official historical narrative by writing out of the limits and breakdowns of those regimes” (Lowe 101). Indeed, writing from the post-colonial site as well as the ethnic one is replete with alternative world views, styles, and writing strategies that critique earlier monolithic narratives that either left no room for difference or coopted it. Thus, Lowe’s description of the function of these narratives: “it is a literature, that, if subjected to a canonical function, dialectically returns a critique of that function” (44). By criticizing earlier hegemonic discourses, both non-mainstream and post-colonial narratives aim to provide the basis for a more just perception of difference and more liberating discursive practices. Anzaldúa, for instance, explicitly states: “Say my goal is a liberatory goal: it’s to create possibilities for people, to look at things in a different way so that

they can act in their daily lives in a different way” (Lunsford 40-1), in other words a politics of resistance enabled by “the forging of new aesthetic paradigms” (Singh and Schmidt, Introduction xvi).

The shared mission and concerns of Post-colonial theory and literatures on the one hand and Ethnic theory and literatures on the other assume different names and terms. Singh and Schmidt, for example, speak of a shared “post-colonial *awareness*”, that is “an alertness to issues of otherness and creolization in global and transnational contexts” (17 emphasis mine). Elsewhere Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan read this interaction in terms of a *fruitful application* of postcolonial studies to readings of the United States as a nation” (12 emphasis mine). At the same time, these critics remind us that “*each* diasporic community is shaped by its own specific histories of class, religion, language, race, and region, and that [we need] to remain alert to the dangers of totalizing tendencies inherent in some postcolonial discourses” (Singh, Skerrett and Hogan 12). On the other hand, Benita Parry accounts for the “The plenitude of signification” of the term “post-colonial” which “is that such that ‘postcolonial’ can indicate a historical transition, an achieved epoch, a cultural location, a *theoretical stance*” (66 emphasis mine). Fernando Coronil makes the same argument as he coins the term “*tactical postcolonialism*” (240 emphasis mine) to indicate the importance of using the post-colonial as a methodology to analyse texts that are not postcolonial but similarly concerned with social injustice. He argues: “while Spivak’s notion of ‘strategic essentialism’ serves to fix socially constructed identities in order to advance political ends, tactical postcolonialism serves to open up established academic knowledge towards open-ended liberatory possibilities” (240). In short, it is very important to research the areas of intersection between post-colonial studies

and ethnic studies and their rootedness in a similar kind of *awareness*, an awareness that Singh and Schmidt qualify as post-colonial. Yet, stretching the field of Post-colonial Studies in a *tactical* gesture to make it include U.S. Minority literatures, or resorting to the post-colonial as a *theoretical stance*, or *applying* post-colonial methods to the ethnic condition, all lead to theoretical impasses and ethical limitations.

Indeed, it is important to retain an acute awareness of contextual differences and to avoid falling into the trap of overgeneralization and homogenization. The method of *applying* theories coming from a specific context to another context might reflect some form of “epistemological violence”. In response, the borders school proposes a comprehensive approach to ethnic texts that allows for the fields of Ethnic Studies and Post-colonial Studies to come together in such a way as to productively highlight their intersections and historical influences without instrumentalizing one field in the reading of the other. Reading ethnic texts in terms of border texts, and approaching them from the perspective of the border, allows for an insightful and novel approach. This approach allows for a coming together of different perspectives on the immigrant experience as opposed to a single focus on the embeddedness of the immigrant in the post-colonial. In the logic of the borders school, the fields of Post-colonial Studies and Ethnic Studies come together in creative collaboration instead of totalizing unification. Singh and Schmidt succinctly put this particularity of the borders school:

In sum, border studies’ critique of the dominance of traditional immigration/assimilation narratives within U.S. ethnic studies would be impossible to contemplate without the influence of postcolonial theory, though its sources of inspiration are by no means solely coming from outside the U.S. (Borders 31)

Thus, approaching ethnic writing from the standpoint of the border allows for a contextualized and politically empowering stance to ethnic texts without overlooking the historical connections between the fields of Post-colonial Studies and Ethnic Studies.

4.1.3. At the Border Between Poststructuralism and Ethnic Writing:

Not only do border texts lie at the intersection of ethnic and post-colonial writings, they also bring together ethnic writing and poststructuralist and postmodernist schools. This intersection, contrary to the intersection with Ethnic and Post-colonial studies, has not been considered unproblematic by cultural critics. Critics have argued more often than not that this connection is paradoxical because of the birth of poststructuralism and postmodernism in the West. This fact has put the politics of both schools on trial among the communities of both non-mainstream and non-Western intellectuals and artists. I analyse some critical interrogations about the (im)possibilities of bringing together poststructuralism and ethnic writing, while clearing up some misconceptions about this interaction. Then, I move to analysing the contributions that poststructuralism can bring to border theory and literatures. Poststructuralism crystallized as an intellectual movement in the late 1960s (Gikandi 97). Its main source of inspiration and cornerstone theory is Derridean deconstruction. Deconstruction is most famous for problematizing the accessibility of meaning by questioning the nature of signs and sign structures within texts. Derrida's statement "There is no *hors texte*" has become the representative motto of deconstructive thinking, but was more often than not misunderstood and ill-used by critics and thinkers. As Geoffrey Hartman argues, this Derridean statement has been codified by many voices in the field of cultural studies as a form of "pantextualism", "wall-to-wall textuality" (5). Indeed, many critics came to blame Derrida for bringing cultural

analyses back to New Criticism in the sense of focusing on the text as a closed sign structure with no reference whatsoever to the outside world.

Some critics went even farther to suggest that deconstruction denies reality and reduces everything to textuality. Hartman accounts for this misunderstanding of Derridean theory as a form of ‘superficial’ judgement that ‘divorce[s] deconstruction from its context in the history of philosophy’ (19). He asserts: “Certain pronouncements like Derrida’s ‘There is no *hors texte*’ have become notorious: they are taken out of context as statements about reality itself rather than about the difficulty of turning texts inside out” (Hartman 5). Indeed, Deconstruction did focus on discourse while problematizing the transparency of representation but it did not deny the existence of reality as such. As Bill Readings asserts: “Deconstruction of the text/referent opposition does not replace the conventional primacy of the real over the text with a new primacy of the text over the real, or the signifier over the signified, but reveals their interdependence and mutual contamination” (230). Indeed, Derrida maintains that any form of presence/being operates through difference and deferral but he asserts that it is not constituted by it. “A being present to itself, as consciousness, eventually would come to defer or to differ: whether by delaying and turning away from the fulfillment of a "need" or a "desire," or by differing from itself. But in neither of these cases would such a present being be ‘constituted’ by this *différance*.” (Derrida *Margins* 36). Thus, there is a material and a phenomenological aspect of presence outside its linguistic and discursive manifestations.

In this sense, what deconstruction did shake up is the authority of representation and the authority of the image we construct of the real through the textual. It also wondered about the availability of access to the real in modes other than textual, representational, and mediated.

The Derridean project was geared towards questioning our accessibility to the real *as such* given that our interaction with it is always mediated by texts and textuality. And, it is actually this aspect of Deconstruction that made it plausible to post-colonial critics and most prominently to colonial discourse analysis school. As Gikandi argues, “it is when we view it as a *method of reading* – a deconstructive method – that poststructuralism reaches a point of conjuncture with postcolonial discourse” (113 emphasis mine). Spivak, Said, and Bhabha have all embraced deconstructive methodologies in their understanding of colonial discourse and their reading of colonial texts.

In this context, Barbara Foley reminds us that “Gayatri Spivak and Michael Ryan [...] argue that Derrida’s bourgeois followers have simply ignored the radical – indeed Marxist – implications of his project” (114). Going as far as claiming the textuality of the real bespeaks a bourgeois position that some complicated material histories and realities cannot afford. It is not Derrida and his deconstructive methodology per se who are responsible for this bourgeois thinking; instead it is the myopic perception of some of his followers. That said, I do not argue that the Derridean project was Marxist as such, at least in its early phases. Indeed, Deconstruction started as a critique of discourse and representation and a reading methodology that was preoccupied with the concept of justice in abstract terms. It is only later that it came to be used as a productive methodology in some Marxist projects and struggles. It is only in late Derrida that we find an overt concern with the material manifestations of justice in the political scene. As Barbara Johnson asserts: “people who repeat a gesture that for Derrida was new are making it into a methodology, and it has its usefulness in that sense” (qtd in Mackey 81). The usefulness of deconstruction as a methodology lies in its potential to subvert discursive

institutions and hence to bring to sight the shaky grounds on which they stand. For instance, one of the uses of deconstructive methodology according to Foley is to question the authority of capitalist systems. She asserts “Derrida proposes, in short, that the deconstructive project is not self-indulgent word-play, but an *epistemological practice* possessing the capacity to expose and disrupt the ideological stratagem by which advanced capitalist society legitimates itself” (Foley 121 emphasis mine). It is not necessarily Derrida’s focus to disclose capitalist institutions’ stratagems, but it is when reading their discursive manifestations in a deconstructive mode that one can come to dismantle the bases on which they stand. In this sense, as a ‘technique of trouble’ (Foley 120) and a reading strategy, deconstruction can serve as a *first step* in the process of questioning and subverting political systems and institutions. Indeed, “To deconstruct concepts is to intervene in institutional networks of knowledge and power” (Leitch 37). So, incorporating deconstruction in political struggles for justice is a fruitful technique that works at ground level. In a way, incorporating Deconstruction into the terms of the political represents the concretization of the abstract political potential implied in deconstructive thinking.

Indeed, the limitations of deconstruction that many critics are concerned with do not come inherently from it as a thought pattern and a reading methodology, but from the impasses created by those who attempt to *use* it. These limitations emanate from the failure to work *with*²⁰ deconstruction. Some of the followers of Said, Bhabha and Spivak fall into this category. As Parry states, “their work [Said’s, Bhabha’s and Spivak’s] was appropriated by

²⁰ Given the philosophical context in which deconstruction first appeared and Derrida’s own practice of it, I use the expression “to work *with* it”, not in the sense of using it as a critical tool, but in the sense of collaborating with it as an independent school of thought that can inspire political praxis.

participants to license the privileging of ‘discourse’ as the model of social practice, and consequently to promote an incuriosity about enabling socio-economic and political institutions” (68-9). Undoubtedly, this was not the intention of colonial discourse critics. Instead, it was prompted by those who wanted to concretize the political potential of deconstruction into political activism and failed to do so. When working *with* deconstruction, one has to be careful as to one’s approach. If it is to be taken as an end in itself, deconstruction can indeed result in a permanent state of indecision. As Foley argues: “The fatal flaw of deconstruction [...] is that it is not so much ahistorical. It desires to freeze in time (or better, to hold on suspended animation) its act of epistemological transgression and actively to block the possibility of resolution or synthesis” (129). I would not necessarily identify that as a “flaw”, but simply a consequence of the fact that Deconstruction was not originally designed for political activism as such.

Another aspect that one has to be conscious of when working *with* deconstruction is that there is much binarism in the language of deconstruction, even though it concerns itself with dismantling dualities and hierarchies. As Readings affirms, “the recent history of deconstruction has not escaped a binary mode of representation” (235). This binarism is actually more often than not a mere linguistic trap that one paradoxically falls into while attempting to question its terms. This flaw is one of the basic impasses of borderlands poetics, as discussed in the first chapter, and most prominently in Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*. For instance, Anzaldúa had to speak about the Indian from one side and the Anglo from the other side to be able to articulate the terms of her *mestiza* consciousness. The latter is actually intended to be a totally new element, not a mere sum of the Indian and the Anglo, but much

more. As analysed in the introductory chapter, despite its deconstructive potential Anzaldúa's *mestiza* term remains binary at heart. Instead, it is the latest wave of border theory and fiction, as I will analyse in the coming sections of this chapter, which manages to work *with* deconstruction without falling into the binarising traps of earlier discourses. Indeed, instead of using deconstruction as a method and getting frozen in the deconstructive moment, these newer border narratives use stereotypes and binarisms while deconstructing them from within. They do so by showing that binarisms and dualities are not continuous in time; instead they are momentary effects contingent upon a whole set of other elements. It is in this sense that border texts *show* deconstructive awareness instead of *using* deconstruction to subvert concepts and ideas. It is in this sense that deconstruction functions for political ends in border texts while eschewing the aforementioned traps of paradoxical binarism and ahistoricism.

4.1.4. At the Border Between Postmodernism and “Decolonizing” Narratives:

Another problematic intersection in the field of cultural studies at which border writing operates is that between Ethnic and post-colonial narratives on one side and postmodernism on the other. Like the debate on deconstruction and poststructuralism, the debate over postmodernism is basically motivated by its Western origins and its stance vis-à-vis the political. In this respect we find two major schools of thought. Some critics argue for the embeddedness of postcolonialism and multiculturalism in postmodernism. As Parry asserts: “postcolonial criticism has come to be identified as postmodernist in its orientation – an alignment promoted more or less actively by prominent critics in the field” (66). Critics who argue for this opinion back up their stance with the claim that postmodernism is the movement that first rebelled against the Humanist totalitarianism inherent in Enlightenment philosophies.

All the other movements that came to struggle against Humanist assumptions and to call for the right to difference, be it racial or ethnic or other, spring from there. The other side in the debate shows more scepticism about the politics of such a claim, and argues for the difference of origins, contexts and missions of postmodernism on the one hand and post-colonialism and multiculturalism on the other. Critics and artists of this opinion argue for the separateness of these fields, yet they allow for technical and methodological exchanges to take place when the politics in question cover similar grounds. Steven Earnshaw's argument about American ethnic writers such as Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston runs: "Their works often use the techniques and attitudes associated with postmodernism yet they still present themselves as 'antimodels' to postmodernism, thereby making the term 'postmodernism' an extremely uncomfortable one with respect to the justice it can offer" (xxi-ii). I argue for this second opinion as it gives more justice to contextual differences and material realities. Yet, it is also important to shed light on the areas of intersection between postmodernism and non-mainstream writing in such a way as to clarify the relevance of postmodernist techniques and postmodernist thought to ethnic writing.

Postmodernism emerged as a separate movement in cultural studies in the form of a critique of modernism's lack of concern with difference²¹. It is in this sense that it came to be associated with Western thought. Lowe, for example, sets postmodernism in opposition to 'decolonizing' narratives, arguing:

Euro-American postmodernism dissolves the notion of homogenous 'West' as it has been constructed within Enlightenment literary and philosophical categories; like

²¹ It is important to note that postmodernism has some continuities with modernism, as many critics argue. Clear-cut distinctions between both fields were created for methodological and analytical purposes.

poststructuralism, it contests the 'modern' within European terms and reveals the difference internal to the making of the West. In contradistinction, 'decolonizing' writing, which may include features associated with postmodernism (such as nonlinear, antirepresentational aesthetics), emerges not from a terrain of philosophical or poetic otherness within the West but out of the contradictions of What Bipan Chandra has called the 'colonial mode of production'" (107-8)

Thus, "decolonizing" narratives might well be born in the West, being written by post-colonial elites or ethnic writers. Yet, the difference between those writings and postmodernist narratives is that the former are rooted in an unbalanced power dynamic and a history of exploitation, that is a 'colonial mode of production'. Postmodernism on the other hand is born in the West out of internal power struggles and historical challenges to established institutions and discourses. For this reason, Shu-Mei Shih argues that movements such as poststructuralism and postmodernism functioned as "internal critique" that took the "form of narcissism" (18). She explains her argument with reference to the restriction of postmodernist thought to the Western hemisphere, and its reluctance to engage with the terms of non-Western structures and institutions. She asserts "[...] if the West is postmodernist in the sense that it is fragmentary, complex and indeterminable, then the non-West is modernist in the sense that it still retains a belated sense of purpose" (18). In this sense, postmodernist narratives and theories are anchored in a mainstream "first world" culture whose primary battle field is definitely not the ethnic. Hence, claiming that it encompasses the post-colonial and the multicultural might lead to depoliticizing the claims of these latter. Yet, it is important to highlight the areas of intersection and the divergences between postmodernist and 'decolonizing' narratives in order to understand the commonality of some techniques used by writers from both schools.

Interestingly, John McLeod distinguishes between two phases in the history of exchange between postmodernism and post-colonialism. In the first phase they both appeared

“entirely compatible” as “both attacked the tyranny of certainty, the relationship between language and power, and those metanarratives of legitimation that had acted as the philosophical props for such things as one’s identity, the pursuit of reason, and colonial rule” (McLeod 107). In the second phase, however, they started drifting apart as “increasingly, postcolonial critics accuse postmodernists of dispensing with certain vital concepts – especially historical reference – in their proposal that all is now ‘hyperreal’, or ‘simulacra’” (McLeod 107-08). Actually, the rupture came as a consequence of their growth and the coming to terms of each one with its most urgent concerns. As McLeod and many other critics make clear, both fields share at a ground level their refusal of former narratives and their desire to re-write them and write back to them. That is why they both start with a “post”, as Kwame Anthony Appiah asserts: “its *post-* [postcoloniality’s], like that of postmodernism, is also a *post-* that challenges earlier legitimating narratives” (353). American ethnic narratives lie at the intersection of all *posts* as they seek to delegitimize both the colonial narratives to which they historically relate, and humanist mainstream narratives that do not account for the heterogeneity of “the West” and “the East”. This refusal of former biased narratives and the concern of post-colonial theory and postmodernism alike with the concept of representation result in a set of shared concerns. Elleke Boehmer summarizes the latter: “their concern with marginality, ambiguity, disintegrating binaries, and all things parodied, piebald, dual, mimicked, borrowed, and second hand” (244). With the refusal of hegemonic totalitarian narratives comes the refusal of the sovereignty of narrators in particular and subjects in general. As Jean-François Lyotard asserts: “postmodernity is also the end of the people as sovereign of the stories” (20). It is at this level that postmodernist narratives and “decolonizing” narratives²² part company.

²² I use the term “decolonizing” narratives taking after critic Lowe. It is meant to strategically

Postmodernism is particularly concerned with the *manifestations* of the unreliability of representation and the precariousness of the speaking-acting subject. Jean Baudrillard's concept of 'simulacra' is most representative of that, as in McLeod's aforementioned quotation. Everything is a copy of a copy and in the bubble of copies postmodernism seems to have lost interest, if not belief, in the original. Virtuality is so overwhelming and so dazzling in postmodernist narratives that it overshadows any interest in the real. "Representation, history, evaluation" all seem to "have been lost in the fun-house of postmodernism" (McLeod 108). "Decolonizing" narratives show a parallel concern with the inauthenticity of representation and the precariousness of subjectivity, yet they remain in pursuit of reality and historicity. They are concerned with the manifestations of "simulacra", yet also with its politics. "Decolonizing" narratives use postmodernist techniques of sceptical narrativity and unrepresentability, yet they are still concerned with the subject of history and the *impact* of "simulacra" on the factuality of facts. In this sense "decolonizing" narratives become more politically engaged and more materially involved than postmodernist narratives though they both resort to a shared set of techniques. I argue that border aesthetics bring together post-colonial, postmodernist and ethnic perspectives and lie at the intersection of them all. Thus, in my reading I am attentive to the critical insights coming from these three schools while remaining alert as to the impasses of compatibility between them.

4.2.Border Narratives: Techniques and Concerns:

4.2.1.Unreliable Narrators: A Matter of Perspective:

I argue that *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family* are border texts. Border texts are well positioned to question the concept of representation because they lie at

refer to both post-colonial narratives and minority American narratives.

the intersection of different representational modes. They explore a multiplicity of perspectives, histories and languages. They employ different techniques to reveal those intersections and to problematize them by suggesting alternatives to mainstream narratives. Plante, Cisneros and Garcia use different narrative techniques to question the authority of narrators and point to their unreliability. In *Caramelo*, the main narrator is Celaya. She narrates some sections of the novel and her grandmother narrates others. Celaya's narrative voice is unreliable and she acknowledges telling lies. Interestingly, the novel starts with a disclaimer, with Celaya saying: "The truth, these stories are nothing but story, bits of string, odds and ends found here and there, embroidered together to make something new. I have invented what I do not know and exaggerated what I do to continue the family tradition of telling healthy lies" (Cisneros 1). Celaya tells her own story, the stories of her grandmother and all the family, but she acknowledges the creative nature of her narrative as she says: "When I was dirt is when these stories begin. Before my time. Here is how I heard or didn't hear them. Here is how I imagine the stories happened, then" (Cisneros 89). Actually, we may read it this way in light of Derrida's notion of undecidability. Derrida asserts:

This undecidedness is never resolved. The double *récit* is constructed so as to preserve the undecidedness and to hold in suspension the demand for narrative that [...] demands unity from a narrator capable of remembering and of gathering (himself) together, telling 'exactly' what has happened. (143)

Caramelo's narrator is indeed uncertain and her narrative is fragmented and forgetful. Yet, as a border text, *Caramelo* goes beyond this sense of doubleness described by Derrida towards a multiple manifestation of uncertainty. Indeed, not only is Celaya that destabilized narrator, but she is also not the sole narrator. She shares her narrative status with her grandmother who tells parts of the stories and intervenes at many points to comment on Celaya's narrative.

While narrating her grandmother's story, Celaya is constantly interrupted by the grandmother herself. The grandmother's comments appear in bold inside Celaya's narrative. Celaya replies to these comments, then carries on with the narration. The grandmother criticizes Celaya's narrative at many points in the novel as in her statement "**¡Que exagerada eres! It wasn't that long ago!**" (Cisneros 96). Elsewhere the grandmother even rectifies Celaya's narrative. For instance when Celaya describes a photograph saying: "In rosy pastels it seemed to rise like a dream of a more charming time...", the grandmother says: "**It was not rosy, and it certainly was not charming. It was smelly, dark, noisy, hot, and filled with vermin**" (Cisneros 97). Her criticism becomes even harsher as she says: "**Nonsense! It wasn't like that at all [...]**" (Cisneros 97) and "**How you exaggerate! Where you get these ridiculous ideas from is beyond me**" (Cisneros 98). Celaya is so uncertain that she asks her grandmother for details as when she wonders if "that gave the building a bit of a Moorish feeling?" and the grandmother replies: "**That gave the building a bit of a dreary feeling**" (Cisneros 97). Celaya even asks for the grandmother's opinion about her narrative, as when she wonders: "How do you like it so far?" and the grandmother replies "**Some parts not so good. But not so terrible either. Go on, go on**" (Cisneros 155). When the grandmother takes the lead and becomes the narrator of her own story, Celaya in her turn seems unconvinced of the narrative and warns her grandmother: "You are getting ahead of the story, Grandmother" (Cisneros 120). The multiplicity and uncertainty of narration associates the novel with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, as explained by Sue Vice:

In a polyphonic novel, characters are represented not as objects, who are manipulated and commented upon by an omniscient narrator, but as subjects, on an equal footing with the narrator (their voices are constructed in exactly the same way as their figure's

voice), whose own word about themselves and each other is all that we know about them. (114)

Indeed, this multiplicity of narratives and narrators and their different if not contradictory inputs makes it clear that there is no way the reader can have direct access to the facts related in the novel. It also draws the reader's attention to the mediated aspect of the information he is presented with and the multiplicity of perspectives from which it can be narrated.

Garcia, on the other hand, chooses to alternate the narrative between third-person restricted narration and first person narration. The novel is divided into different sections, each one is entitled with the name of the narrator or the central character of the narrative and the setting. The main narrative mode is third-person narrator, but there are whole sections narrated by Ignacio Garcia in the first-person. These sections appear in italics. Other sections are narrated by Dulce in the first-person narrative mode as well. The third-person narrative mode is limited and not omniscient since the narrative voice does not seem to know a lot about the characters. It knows the characters from what they say about themselves and it abstains from commenting on that. For example, the narrative voice states: "She [Reina] is fond of saying she has few specialities but prides herself on doing them exceedingly well" (Garcia 15). At some points the third-person narrator allows for the characters' voices to intercede in the narrative without quotation marks. So we find in one paragraph three narrative voices: the third-person narrator, Ignacio Garcia, and Constantia. It is interesting to quote the following paragraph at length to better observe the way those voices subtly intercede one upon another:

That night, as they camped out under a sky collapsing with stars, her father expounded on the relative merits of the Greek philosopher. Abruptly though, he changed the subject. *Analysing people is definitely more taxing than distinguishing among even the subtlest variations of subspecies.* It was true that with a quick glance, Papi could identify a creature's essential habits – its food preferences and mating rituals, its

nurturing or aberrant behavior. . Human beings are distressingly unpredictable [...] Her father paused, looked up at the quickening wounds of a million stars. *There is comfort, mi hija, in knowing what to expect.* (Garcia 134)

The absence of quotation marks and the absence of comments on the part of the third-person narrator on the statements of the characters matters greatly in terms of the status of the narration. Garcia's technique erases the border between the narrator and the characters in such a way as to place them on equal footing and to make their statements complement each other. The narrator has no authority over the characters and has no separate status from them. The readers are meant to construct the narrative from the different fragments they are presented with. This narrative technique stresses the importance of perspective in narration, the precariousness of the act of reading, and hence the unreliability of representation. In postmodernism this narrative strategy is associated with decentered subjectivities and the end of their sovereignty in narrative. In minority American literatures, as in post-colonial narratives, this narrative technique hints also at the precariousness of the speaking subject and the unreliability of discourses and representations.

The narrative mode in *The Family* and *The Native* is rather that of the third-person omniscient narrator, yet it takes shape in ways other than those associated with the traditional novel. Indeed, Plante's texts align themselves with the Nouveau Roman, where the narrator is able to describe the characters' thoughts and feelings but abstains from commenting on them. As Alain Robbe-Grillet asserts in *For a New Novel*: "It is the commentaries that will be left elsewhere; in the face of his [the character's] irrefutable presence, they will seem useless, superfluous, even improper" (22). Indeed, Plante's novels describe the characters' lives as if from behind a camera and quotes them speaking in full dialogues, yet the narrator never comments upon or discusses the scene. This narrative mode pushes the reader to question the

authority of the narrator and his/her reliability because of the absence of commentary and the selective angle of vision of the narration. In this respect, Plante joins Garcia and Cisneros in displaying the uncertainty of narratives and the insubstantiality of the narrative position. This uncertainty is the predicament of the narrator as much as of the characters in the scene. The focus on the details of the scene and the camera-like perspective displaces the narrator and the characters alike and questions the importance of human presence in the scene. As Robbe-Grillet asserts in reference to narrative modes in the New Novel: “Our world, today, is less sure of itself, more modest perhaps, since it has renounced the omnipotence of the person, but more ambitious too, since it looks beyond. The exclusive cult of the ‘human’ has given way to a larger consciousness, one that is less anthropocentric” (29). This aspect of the New Novel shows disillusionment with the authority of the human, and the capacity of human discourses to represent and even talk about the world. All narratives are thus incomplete and unfaithful to the nature of external phenomena and facts. This common thread among Cisneros’s, Garcia’s, and Plante’s novels plays an important role in politicizing border narratives by stressing the unreliability of discourses and by extension the distance between material facts and their discursive reproduction.

4.2.2. Reflexivity and Self-reflexivity: Beyond Representation:

Another border technique that is at work in *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Family* and *The Native* is reflexivity. The four novels use different strategies to point out the self-reflexivity of narratives and the reflexivity of the (un)real in such a way as to question the established order of things. *Caramelo* is a self-reflexive novel par excellence. Defining the self-reflexive novel, Michael Boyd asserts: “when a novel pauses to look at itself, to consider itself as a novel, it strikes what Albert Cook calls a reflexive attitude” (15) and “The reflexive

novel focuses on the fiction-making process itself” (24). *Caramelo* is full of such meta-fictional moments. As in the above mentioned disclaimer at the beginning of the novel and the passage where Celaya asks her grandmother “How do you like it so far?” (Cisneros 155) and the grandmother replies: “**Some parts not so good. But not so terrible either. Go on, go on.**” (Cisneros 155). Elsewhere, the grandmother comments on her own narrative saying: “**So this part of the story if it were a *fotonovela* or *telenovela* could be called *Solamente Soledad* or *Sola en el mundo*, or *I’m Not to Blame*, or *What an Historia I’ve Lived*” (Cisneros 95). She also comments: “**If this were a movie, a few notes of a song would follow here, something romantic and tender and innocent on the piano, perhaps ‘The Waltz Without a Name’?**” (Cisneros 104). Also, at some point Celaya asks her grandmother: “Who is telling this story, you or me? (Cisneros 97). Elsewhere she says: “Just for poetic purposes, we’ll allow the wind to arrive in this scene. It suits the story better” (Cisneros 171). The grandmother is not convinced and claims: “**How many months do you expect a woman to be with child? Your father was born in the summer, remember? And here you have the story shift to winter. You take such liberties!**”. Then, Celaya replies: “Indulge me. I need the wind for this part of the story” (Cisneros 175). Further in the narrative, Celaya gets angry with her grandmother and orders her: “Please. Quit the theatrics.” (Cisneros 205). Self-reflexive gestures are also present in the footnotes as in the reference to the movie version of the Mexican revolution presented in Celaya’s narrative. The footnote runs: “*For a Hollywood version of the Mexican revolution, see Elia Kazan’s Viva Zapata*” (Cisneros 152).**

The effect of such self-reflexive comments is to denaturalize narration and focus on the constructedness of narrative instead of the content of the narrative itself. As Boyd asserts: “The

characters in a [reflexive] novel will seem ‘unreal’” and “The readers of such fiction [...] will be encouraged to become critically detached from the action” (28-9). This narrative attitude is identified by Boyd himself and many other critics as “anti-realist” (19). I would argue instead that it is anti some realist narrative attitudes and not anti-realist itself. In this sense, self-reflexive techniques and comments are not meant to question the real as such but they are meant to criticize the narratives that pretend to capture and relate the real. They lay bare the constructedness of the narrative itself which in other discourses would remain behind the screen. This technique not only destabilizes the reliability of representation, it also questions the reliability of perception itself. As Boyd affirms: “What will be made strange in this manner will be not only the conventions of the traditional novel but also the conventions of perception in general” (29). Indeed, to question representation is also to show the limits of the tools of representation, most importantly perception. Border narratives stress the groundedness of all narratives in perspective and hence their limited and biased aspect.

Drawing the reader’s attention to the importance of perception in narrative through reflexivity is also at play in Garcia’s novel. Reflexivity in *The Agüero Sisters* calls forth a multiplicity of versions. It starts from the material level by portraying some characters as parallels of others, and by paralleling some characters with other versions of themselves. We are reminded throughout the novel that Constancia looks like her mother, even though Constancia refutes this parallel. The parallel is sometimes expressed in terms of a simile, and at others in terms of fact as in the narrator’s statement: “At the Miami airport, Reina was stunned to see a vision of her mother rushing toward her at the gate” (Garcia 157). Elsewhere in the novel Constantia appears as a reflection of her younger self when her daughter Isabel carefully

inspects her and says: “You look good, Mom [...] like some earlier version of yourself” (Garcia 212). The lexicon of versions and images proliferates throughout the novel. Constantia states: “Haven’t you often noticed how often women destroy pictures of themselves, Reina? That’s because nothing conforms with our private image of ourselves. My products bring back that feeling. The beauty of scent and sensation, the mingling of memory and imagination” (Garcia 162). This passage and the centrality of Constantia’s beauty industry in the novel are particularly interesting in discussing this point. These beauty products provide women with the version they most like of themselves and blur the limit between their real appearance and what they actually want to see. Photographs are another reminder of this proliferation of images and copies. For instance, “Reina nails up the photograph of their mother that looks exactly like Constantia *today*. In fact, it’s identical to the *antiqued* photograph.” (Garcia 163 emphasizes mine). The photograph is the medium that allows the reflection of the past in the present and the face of Constantia in the face of her mother and vice-versa. Reflexivity does not only concern the characters in the novel and does not only occur by similarity. The land and the sea are reflexive through contradiction as in the narrator’s statement “it seems to Reina that everything comes to an end on land, rooted in accumulation. The sea is much more forgiving” (199-200). Reality merges in dreams as “Reina closes her eyes and *loses herself in a reverie*” (Garcia 294 emphasis mine). These examples show the way the novel constantly keeps referring its reader to something else either through similarities or through differences. It creates a referential dynamic that works by accumulation of images and versions and results in questioning the certainty and independence of the one-version-patterns of thought and perception.

The novel's preoccupation with images and versions is in line with Baudrillard's concept of "simulacrum". "The very definition of the real", asserts Baudrillard, "has become that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction... The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced" (146). At the core of *The Agüero Sisters'* narrative is the quest for the real and the difficulty of having access to it because of mediation and the multiplicity of versions. Indeed, Constantia and Reina get together in an attempt to understand their mother's murder since both of them are never sure of what has exactly happened. They have different versions of the past and are so unsure about it: "Mami could not have drowned, like their father said. No, she couldn't have drowned, which means their father must have lied. And if Papa lied, what the hell was the truth?" (Garcia 167). Elsewhere Constantia says to Reina "I think we remember a lot of things differently" (Garcia 173). The quest for truth is portrayed as a very complicated process that turns into a source of discomfort. Ignacio Agüero is an extreme example of this discomfort and anxiety around truth and being. He shoots himself in the heart after having told his daughters that "The quest for truth is far more glorious than the quest for power" (Garcia 13). Reina, on the other hand, wonders "whether certainty isn't truly disaster in disguise" (Garcia 157). Constantia also believes that "Knowledge is a kind of mirage" (Garcia 277). In short, reality is portrayed as either inaccessible or disastrous. The multiplicity of versions and the inaccessibility of truth are particularly important to border writing since, as discussed in the first chapter, border texts capitalize on material reality and the importance of lived experience as opposed to narrated and mediated experience.

Likewise, *The Family* and *The Native* are full of reflexive strategies. They reveal their concern with images, versions and copies through different writing methods. Characters become images of themselves and of other characters. In *The Family*, all the Francoeur sons reflect one another despite their differences. Their mother wonders:[...] how could her sons, so different from one another feel that they belonged to the same house?”. Then she affirms: “They did. They all, she knew, got on together. She had made law that they would, that they must; but it was they who made the law hold, and they who would have been shocked by any one of them not abiding by the law” (Plante, *Family* 106). Each one of the Francoeurs sends back an image of the others, so the narrative rarely mentions one of them without referring at least to another one. Their subject formation is relational, and the pronoun “we” is more current than “I” in their reports of what they do and what they think. A good example of this is Albert’s statement: “We have always done everything together, every decision has been made together, and that’s why when I come home, I feel what I never ever feel when I’m away from home: a wonderful harmony” (Plante, *Family* 242). The characters in *The Native* are also reflexive and are always mentioned in reference to one another. Antoinette for example is always either compared to her mother or her grandmother (Plante, *Native* 33). She tells her mother: “I want to be like you, but you never believe I can be like you” (Plante, *Native* 71). Antoinette’s father always sees her as a reflection of his mother. And, Antoinette wonders all the time about the differences between her mother and her grandmother. Each of them mirrors the other through contradiction instead of similarity. As the narrator relates: “Antoinette thought about her mother all the while she listened to her mémère” (Plante, *Native* 48). Antoinette herself is always in constant process of self-identification with her mother or with her grandmother. In *The Native*, Boston and Providence are always mentioned in a parallel

mode that makes each one send back an image of the other, so the reader is constantly reminded of the differences between the two settings. The reflexive dynamic and writing strategies always keep referring the reader to something else in such a way that the idea of the self-integrity of meaning and conception is deconstructed.

The reflexive aspect is also present in Plante's narrative through the recurrence of images and photographs. Photos and mirrors send back images that are supposed to be the same as real images, yet they are never exactly the same. They are all simulacra, copies of copies, that lead the viewer to question the reliability of representation and the authenticity of what is supposed to be the original. In one scene in *The Family*, Andre helps Daniel wear make up, "his face each time was different: white with small red lips, yellow brown with the corners of his eyes extending sharply to his temples, pale yellow with large blue circles around his eyes" (Plante, *Family* 111). Daniel comes in different versions of himself that make him unrecognizable to people and even make people unrecognizable to him. He "knew that when he looked at the mirror he wouldn't recognize himself; when he rose from the chair and went out into the kitchen, not only would no one know him, he would know no one (Plante, *Family* 110). The estranging effect of copies and versions is also present elsewhere in the novel when Jim runs for office and his wife, Reena, sees his photograph all over the place:

As she walked home from the grocery-shopping in the rain, she saw *multiple images* of her husband all about her on handouts and small posters, saw the eyes of her husband stare at her from a curb, from a puddle, from the base of a tree trunk, from among a pile of sodden leaves, from the street under the bumper of a parked car, from a telephone pole, and the eyes *disoriented her*" (Plante, *Family* 184 emphasizes mine)

The similarity with difference between the images and what the viewer recognizes as the original becomes troubling and destabilizing to both perception and conception. Representation

replaces the “original” when one loses immediate touch with the real, as the narrator relates: “Albert had been away so long, Daniel could imagine him only as in a photograph” (Plante, *Family* 62).

The recurrence of images and photographs can be read in terms of a self-reflexive gesture that sends the reader back to the novel as a form of representation itself. *The Family* is explicit about this link: “Daniel sat under an oak at one end of the long green bench, reading [...] what he saw and heard in his book and what he saw and heard around him confused” (Plante, *Family* 175). As a form of representation, the book blurs the border between the real and the rhetorical. The order of the real and the order of the representational are similarly confused for the reader who is trying to make sense of the narrative through a constant movement between them. This critique of representation and its effects is best expressed in Derrida’s theory of deconstruction and the poststructuralist definition of the text in general. Derrida asserts:

A text is [...] no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content closed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus, the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (84).

This referential aspect of representation has also been adopted by Said in his concept of “worldliness”. He asserts: “texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society – in short, they are in the world and hence worldly” (35). Actually, in their constant reference to the real world, texts do not simply “reflect” or “represent” reality, instead they condition our understanding of reality and our experience of the real. It is this inseparability of reality and representation that border texts aim

to bring to the forefront through their reflexive and self-reflexive gestures. Contrary to some postmodernist writings, the purpose of border texts is not to deny the existence of the real and its separateness from the fictional, but to portray the challenges that the proliferation of copies creates vis-à-vis the accessibility of the real in its full materiality.

4.2.3. “Ethnic Autobiographies”: Writing Stories, Questioning Histories

As it crosses the border between the reader and the writer, the real and the representational, border writing also crosses generic boundaries and most importantly the border between story and history, fiction and non-fiction. For a better understanding of border genres, I start with an analysis of the importance of memory in the novels and the interconnectedness of personal and communal memories. Then, I move to analysing the border genre and its politics.

Caramelo is woven around the importance of memory, indeed the whole narrative is built around the memories of Celaya and her grandmother. It tells the stories of the Reyes family and the history of Mexican-Americans. The narrative makes explicit references to memory on many occasions. As she takes on the narrative voice, Celaya finds it hard to set the limit between what she remembers and what she forgets, what she lived and what some family elders told her. On the way to Mexico, Celaya’s mother asks “Remember when we had to drive through the Sierra Madre?” and Celaya replies “I remember”. When her brother Rafa mocks her saying: “How could you remember? You weren’t even born yet!”, she insists “I do so remember. Honest!”. Then their mother comments: “You mean you remember the stories somebody told you” (Cisneros 19). This exchange can be considered as a self-reflexive gesture that questions the authenticity of the narration. Yet, it is also meant to highlight the dynamics

of passing on stories from one generation to the other. Being rooted in orality, this cultural practice foregrounds the importance of memory as in Celaya's statement: "Because we are kids, things happen and someone forgets to tell us, or they tell us and we forget. I don't know which" (Cisneros 22). This practice does not only merge the real with the imagined but also the personal with the collective. In many instances in the novel, personal stories come framed with public events, and likewise public events refer to personal experiences. For instance, Celaya reminds her grandmother of the importance of mentioning details when narrating a story: "The year of your arrival to the Reyes household was the centennial of Mexican independence" (Cisneros 124). Elsewhere, the narration draws analogies: "Eleuterio Reyes was trying his best to rise from the ashes of his near death, and the Mexican nation was doing the same." (Cisneros 149). The symbiosis between personal stories and public events makes it clear that the historical context is not simply a setting and a frame, but an element that affects and is affected by the personal in different ways.

The Agüero Sisters too establishes links between the personal and the public as in the narrator's comment: "Reina Agüero's insomnia began last summer on the thirty seventh anniversary of El Comandante's attack on the Moncada Barracks" (Garcia 9). Ignacio's narrative uses the same technique. Ignacio tells us: "The Great War had been over for two years when I left Pinar del Rio for the University of Havana" (Garcia 113). *The Agüero Sisters* theorizes this link between personal history and public history in explicit terms, as Dulce asserts:

Some days I feel the hot mist of the past on my back, all the generations preceding me, whispering *this way and this way and not that way*. There should be rituals like in primitive societies, where the elders confer their knowledge on their descendants bit by

bit. Then we could dismiss all the false histories pressed upon us, accumulated our true history like a river in a rainy season. (Garcia 144)

I read this statement as self-reflexive since what the novel does, when it combines personal stories with historical events, is to actually record history through personal memory. It reveals different facets of History that are otherwise dismissed by narratives of historiography and overshadowed by its normative approaches. In *The Family* and *The Native*, memory is similarly important. It is put to the fore through the importance of the French language and the Catholic religion for Quebecois-Americans more than through historical events as such. Both novels focus on contemporary history by relating the past of the Francoeur family to their present. They also reach for ancient history by referring to the Indian ancestry of the Francoeur family. *The Native* and *The Family* rarely comment on the links between public and private histories, instead they work to filter those links through the narrative. For instance, we are told that Antoinette has Indian facial traits (Plante, *Native* 27), and at the same time we are shown that she has just as hard time identifying with her Southern American mother as she does with her parental grandmother. She is lost in-between. When it comes to recording the history of the family, the novel diagnoses a mode of silence. *The Native* ends on a note of silence as Antoinette asks her father: “Mémère and Pépère didn’t know when their ancestors came to America, did they?”. “No,” her father said, and shook his head a little”. And continues: “She didn’t know if this was because he couldn’t talk more, or didn’t want to.” (Plante, *Native* 122). History is plagued with silence. And, silence is left unexplained and memory is a void. Antoinette’s confusion, anxiety, and disorientation throughout the novel are all in a way related to this sense of absence and loss that the final scene of the novel foregrounds.

Be it through revision, lies, or even silence, collective memory is linked to individual and personal memory in the four novels. There is no way to narrate personal and family stories without referring to national and collective histories. Interestingly, Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez reads memory in terms of the link between ethnicity and autobiography. She states:

Ethnicity and autobiography are inherently linked in their emphasis on memory [...] This emphasis on ancestry, memory, and history is shared by the literary genre of autobiography – the difference being that autobiography traditionally focuses on the *autos*, on documenting the development of the *individual* identity and life, whereas ethnic groups use memory to trace their *collective* development as a people. (41)

It is true that writing from an ethnic perspective foregrounds this concern with collective memory and communal history. Yet, what is particularly interesting about ethnic writing is that it focuses on the link between the personal, the *autos*, and the collective. As Singh, Skerrett and Hogan assert: “Not only do we create and maintain the memories we need to survive and prevail, but those collective memories in turn both shape and constrain us” (8). Indeed, cultural memory is also personal and this is what *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family* strive to show by narrating the lives of their characters and the ways they navigate cultural and personal spaces. The other side of the coin is that by narrating collective memories from *autos* and personal perspectives the novels re-write History. Re-writing History takes different shapes: it corrects, rectifies, complements, and brings back from silence.

Interestingly, in *Deaming in Cuban* (1992), Garcia addresses the issue of the selective approach to writing history and teaching it. In the novel, Pilar has a discussion about history with her father. The father says: “the Spaniards wiped out more Indians with smallpox than with muskets” (Garcia 28). Pilar wonders: “Why don’t we read about this in history books?”.

She asserts: “It’s always one damn battle after another. We only know about Charlemagne and Napoleon because they fought their way into posterity” (Garcia 28). Pilar then proposes an alternative approach to recording history as she says: “If it were up to me, I would record other things like the time there was a freak hailstorm in the Congo and women took it as a sign that they should rule. Or the life stories of prostitutes in Bombay” (Garcia 28). This latter statement highlights interpretation as an important element in recording history. It also foregrounds the connection between the personal and the political in alternative “herstory” records. It suggests benefiting from the narrativity of history to give voice to socially and politically silenced groups.

Along these lines, *Caramelo*, *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Native* and *The Family* attempt to write history differently. They thus align themselves with a distinct genre of writing that some critics call “ethnic autobiography” (Browdy de Hernandez 56), and some others call “historiographic metafiction” (Hutcheon 108). In her definition of “historiographic metafiction”, Hutcheon asserts that it “attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical” (108). Yet, it also destabilizes the institutional discourses of historiography by showing that they are incomplete and limited in perspective. “It does not deny the existence of the past”, clarifies Hutcheon, “it does question whether we can even know that past other than through its textualized remains” (20). These “textualized remains” are themselves put under scrutiny because of their discursive nature first, and then because they are narrated from the perspective of those who have the power to write the narrative and to control its circulation through both formal and informal cultural institutions. By re-writing history in and through fiction, these texts not only show the multiple perspectives from which

History can be written, but also attempt to re-write and re-right History. At the same time, they remain conscious of the fictive nature of all narratives and attempt to reveal it through different textual techniques. Historiographic metafictional works offer an alternative approach and an alternative theory of literature that blend together history and literature, theory and fiction, high culture and popular culture, prose and poetry. In this sense historiographic metafictional texts are also border texts that stand at the intersection between different genres and modes of expression while revealing the constructedness of every discursive production. They engage the terms of the discursive practice from the institutional standpoint of literature to show the impasses of all forms of representation and the importance of a material entry to reality.

4.2.4. “Heteroglossia”: (Mis)readings Across the Border:

The importance of language and the power of words are of paramount importance to Cisneros's, Garcia's, and Plante's works. The four novels keep drawing the reader's attention to their peculiar use of language. Not only do they use different languages with and without translation, they also use different linguistic modes and cultural registers. The novels display their concern with the power of words through their own use of language, but they also state it explicitly in many occasions. To Celaya for instance “talking” is her life. She says: “I realize with all the noise called ‘talking’ in my house, that talking that is nothing but talking, that is so much a part of my house and my past and myself you can't hear it as several conversations, but as one roar like the roar inside a shell, I realize then that this is my life [...]” (Cisneros 424). She draws a parallel between talking and being. Talking is not a separate act that humans perform, instead it relates intrinsically to who they are and what they become. *The Agüero Sisters* highlights the changing aspect of language and its effect on human communication and

human relations. Going to Miami Reina wonders if English will be more useful for her than the Spanish she speaks in Miami. “Reina speaks another language entirely [...] and her sister sounds like the past. A flash-frozen language replete with outmoded words and fifties expressions. For Constanca, time has stood linguistically still. It’s a wonder people can speak to each other!” (Garcia 236). Language is not a dead phenomenon, it keeps moving and changing and it is inseparable from people’s life trajectories. *The Family*, on the other hand, focuses on the interconnectedness of language and consciousness. Language is not just a tool of expression, it is inseparable from consciousness and determines humans’ modes of thinking. To Daniel, “religion was French, Jésus Christ was a French name [...] Jesus Christ in English always sounded to him, no matter how pious the intention, like blasphemy” (Plante, *Family* 192). Language determines humans’ mechanisms of internalization of the world and their most intimate interactions with it. For all the importance that language has in life and social interaction, Cisneros’s, Garcia’s, and Plante’s works suggest alternative ways of relating to it. I focus on the plurality of languages at play in the four novels. Then I move to analysing the importance of both transculturation and unreadability in border texts.

Many critics argue that language in general, literary and non-literary, is *always already* multiple. Derrida, for instance, asserts: “there is ‘language of the other’ whenever there is a speech-event”, and he adds: “this is what I mean by ‘trace’” (149). Trace, which is the presence of the other’s language or style in one’s speech, is inevitable since language is not the property of anyone and speech works by contamination. All users try to appropriate it but “a language [*langue*] can never be appropriated; it is mine only as the language of the other, and vice versa” (Derrida 154-5). In the same vein, Roland Barthes discusses the multiplicity of literary use of

language, but asserts that multiplicity is not proper to literary language as it is a marker of the everyday use of language as well. He asserts:

The symbolic language to which literary works belong is *by its very structure* a plural language whose code is constructed in such a way that every utterance (every work) engendered by it has multiple meanings. This tendency already exists in language proper which contains many more uncertainties than people are prepared to admit [...]. (70-1)

Barthes's take on the topic is slightly different from Derrida's. He speaks about "uncertainties" and "ambiguities" of language instead of "trace" and "différance"²³. These differences relate to the distinct affiliations of each critic and the time lag between their theories, with Barthes striking a middle ground between structuralism and poststructuralism. Yet, Derrida and Barthes alike make the point that any single use of language always comes multiple in modes, tones, and styles.

Cisneros, Garcia, and Plante encode this multiple aspect of language on their texts by combining different languages, most of the time without translation. They also use different linguistic modes, ranging from kid language, to proverbs, to chants and cultural myths. *Caramelo* is replete with cultural references to myths, folktales and telenovelas. The Aztec female deities, like La Virgen de Gaudalupe and La Malinche reappear at many points in the narrative. The novel also evokes many Mexican proverbs, as in the scene where Celaya says: "Uncle is always complaining he is *pobre, pobre*. – it is no disgrace to be poor, Uncle says, citing the Mexican saying – but it's very inconvenient" (Cisneros 10). The storytelling

²³ "It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called "present" element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not" (Derrida *Margins* 13)

narrative style allows for cultural opinions and even stereotypes to find their way into the narrative as in Celaya's statement: "It was the cultural opinion of the times that men ought to be *feos, fuertes, y formales*. Narciso Reyes was strong and proper, but, no, he wasn't ugly" (Cisneros 103). This folkloric imaginary has actually always been present in Mexican-American literatures since its early phases. As Raymond A. Paredes asserts, "a number of Chicano writers have employed folkloric materials as the building blocks of fiction, believing that the most distinctive and enduring cultural values are not found in genteel society but in the traditions of the common people" (73). Paredes also mentions the importance of legends and *corridos* to Mexican-American narratives asserting that they "have been especially fruitful sources of fictional themes" (73). *Corridos*, originally popular ballads from Mexico, indeed represent a source of inspiration to diverse Chicano/a authors despite the different ways they have been adopted over time. Cisneros celebrates the *corridos* tradition in her novel *Caramelo* by including poems in Celaya's narrative as in chapters 39 and 82. Both chapters start with poems, but only the former has a Spanish translation of the poem. Cisneros also includes the practice of footnotes in her novel, thus introducing a totally different narrative mode from storytelling style, legends, and poems. Most of the time, these footnotes include background historical information to the stories being told.

The Agüero Sisters' features multiple uses of Spanish in addition to English. It introduces more multiplicity at the level of style, tone and narrative mode. Mentioning the date and place and sometimes the narrator at the beginning of every chapter evokes the tradition of storytelling as much as the convention of historical annals. Political and media discourses are also present in many sections of the novel, especially in Reina and Constantia's discussion of

the political situation in Cuba and its relation to the U.S. Constantia's boasting about her beauty products is very evocative of the language of marketing and advertising. Also, in some of Ignacio's narratives we hear the voice and language of the naturalist. The latter is also present in some of the titles of the novel's sections, as in "Tropical Disturbances" (Garcia 6) and "Spring Migrations" (Garcia 65).

In addition to linguistic *métissage*²⁴, *The Family* and *The Native* are also marked by a variety of discursive forms. Political discourse is present mainly in the section where Jim runs for office in *The Family*, as well as in the section where he discusses trade unionism. The narrative comments explicitly on Jim's use of language: "he used words the at-home family never heard – nebulous, ubiquitous – and it was obvious that, away from home, he not only spoke with great sophistication, he swore" (Plante, *Family* 193). These variations in style and context are but another instance of the multiplicity of voices in border narratives. This variation is not only language related, it is also discursive: it varies in terms of context of a given enunciation and its content. Another discursive variation, for example, is the use of religious references and religious discourse not only in the sections narrated in the church in *The Family* and *The Native* but also in the language of the characters and the narrator.

This variety of discursive patterns in the four novels is evocative of Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia" in literary works:

Bakhtin uses the term 'heteroglossia' to mean not simply the variety of different languages which occur in everyday life, but also their entry into literary texts. These languages bring with them their everyday associations, which can of course include literary ones, as well as making their own in the textual setting (Vice 18).

²⁴ i.e. the use of English and French in the same narrative.

As such, “heteroglossia” is a border writing style as it not only stresses the variety of languages and patterns in human discourse, but also proposes that they do not function in a binary mode. Instead, they enter into a process of mutual exchange. Bakhtin uses the term “dialogism” to describe the way this “heteroglossia” of languages works (Vice 20). Dialogism conveys the idea of exchange and dialogue inherent to the literary use of language. Even though, the word “*Dialogism*” itself sends us back to dualistic thought patterns. Vice does not comment on Bakhtin’s word choice, yet she makes the point implicitly in her summary of Bakhtin’s theory when she says: “Because all languages are related hierarchically, dialogic interaction will occur within textualized heteroglossia, with potentially position-altering effects” (18).

Indeed when it comes to writers and critics with complex histories, multiplicity and “heteroglossia” assume different shapes and goals. To start with, “the language of the other” , as Derrida tells us in a self-deconstructive manner, is no longer the appropriate term since the ‘other’ is no longer *materially* other. The troubled histories of colonization and cultural domination make multiplicity of languages a complex issue. The four novels under study use English as their main language and Spanish or French as minoritarian languages. It is revealing to consider this in relation to the English-only linguistic policy in some U.S. states. As critic Guadalupe San Miguel asserts: “In general state school officials supported an English-only instructional program to rapidly assimilate language minority children into the established cultural norm. This was reflected in the extension of the existing English-only policy into the nonpublic schools and into the classroom” (58). Many critics see the English-only system as a cornerstone of the process of acculturation of immigrants in the U.S. Some other critics describe it as a part of the U.S. colonial enterprise in the Southwest. Anzaldúa asserts: “we

were a colonized people who were not allowed to speak our language, whose ways of life were not valued in this country. Public education tried to erase all of that” (Lunsford 38). Along similar lines, Mejía asserts: “The English-only instructional program imposed on Texas Mexican students throughout the 20th century has clearly been intended to have the same effect – the ideological pacification and re-formation of Texas Mexicans” (179). In different states and contexts, the English-only policy is discussed in different ways, yet in all cases it is seen as a form of linguistic and cultural violence. Writing in different languages and from different cultural locations and discursive variations is thus not simply a bourgeois postmodernist technique of claiming a plural subjectivity. Instead, it is a politically charged artistic gesture. From an ethnic perspective, what is at stake is not only the multiple facets of the “hybrid” position but also the power imbalances implied in that subject formation process. Cultural references and untranslated Spanish and French words are not simply an exhibition of ethnic bilingualism in opposition to U.S. official monolingualism; instead they are a call for recognition through transculturation.

“Transcultural rhetorics”, asserts Connal, “provide a way of engaging with multiple cultures. They also provide a means of subversion that Anzaldúa and Said call for through the power to narrate one’s own story” (200). Indeed, by refusing to translate their use of non-English words and to explain their non-mainstream cultural references, border texts ask for the reader’s active contribution to the process of making sense of the text. Readers who refuse to engage with the requirements of this multicultural encounter are meant to feel “other” in relation to the world of the text. That is why some critics see this technique as aggressive though necessary. As Oh argues: “Quite possibly, then, one of the keys to successful

multicultural writing is the aggressive, if strategic, use of textual inaccessibility, so that readers can either ‘overhear’ or ‘work hard to understand’ its meaning” (14). Indeed, by using this technique multicultural texts aim to write back to totalitarian perceptions of culture and to criticize canonical approaches to literature. Yet, it is also important to see this technique as a quest for establishing a connection and some sort of communication, that functions through partial understanding and/or misunderstanding. Interestingly, Derrida argues: “unreadability does not arrest reading [...] rather, it starts reading and writing and translation moving again. The unreadable is not the opposite of the readable but rather the ridge [*arrêt*] that also gives it momentum, movement, sets it in motion” (116). It is this openness that border writing seeks, a connection that is a mature form of communication, aware of its own limits and contingencies yet still concerned with keeping the energy of exchange going. To use Derrida’s terms above, border texts are a borderless space where all narratives, genres, languages and styles come together in motion, yet it is a space where borders are resurrected by the same gesture, through that ridge or *arrêt*. Border writing is an image of the border itself, a sum of connections and disconnections. The way you live it like the way you read it depend on which spot on the border you are at and how much effort you are willing to make.

Conclusion

“One of the roles of theory is to enable us to recognize in what ways our future wars may be different.” – Craig Calhoun²⁵

My readings of Cisneros’s *Caramelo*, Garcia’s *The Agüero Sisters*, and Plante’s *The Family* and *The Native* have resulted in a number of findings and critical reflections that not only help redefine the concept of the border in the U.S. context, but also can help renew other narratives in relation to border theory and border fiction. They bear the promise of redefining a host of other concepts in cultural studies and critical theory starting from this redefinition of the border. My study sets the grounds for a new perception of the border that might pave the way forward for a different take on minority American literatures and immigration narratives as well as globalization critiques and postcolonial theories. This new definition of the border accounts for different aspects and characteristics of the border and defines it as a movement between movement and stasis. It shies away from simplistic accounts of a boundaryless global “village” and also from the simplistic logic of the nation-state that equates the nation with the state and forces citizens into monolithic nationalisms. This dissertation is also an attempt to bring to light some of the political stakes underlying issues of human spatiality in the contemporary historical phase. It questions some of the limits of human thought patterns and attempts to push forward a new perception of diversity and multiculturalism. I believe this perception to be more authentic and closer to the reality of humans’ daily interactions, but also closer to justice and to the democratic ideal that modern societies have more often than not failed to reach. The logic of the border is the logic of the real that narrates the diversity and the

²⁵ *Critical Social Theory*, 10

changeability of the concrete and the material. It does not tolerate omissions for the sake of conceptual coherence, and does not invent social cohesion to serve an already privileged portion of society.

Part of the definition of the border as analysed in the four novels is its permeability and crossability. Humanity bears the weight of a long history of violent conquests that continuously set and reset borders through colonization and military interventions. These spatial movements are also border movements that have not only redefined the borders of given territories, but also the concept of the border itself. Borders have come to be seen as transient and crossable in exactly the way as they were once invented as fixed and determinant. Colonization proceeded through an implicit international consent that territoriality is allowed to move and expand through violence and silence. A further step towards confirming the expandability of territories and the elasticity of borders is economic globalization and the cultural transformations it has wrought. As I demonstrated in chapter two, economic globalization transformed the institution of the nation-state both from within and without, through denational and transnational operations respectively. It proved that borders are meant to be crossed, trespassed, and even erased when politico-economic interests are at stake. Immigration is another important aspect that redefined the borders of the United States through different waves and initiatives, both organized²⁶ and voluntary²⁷. Across the different contexts and motives for immigration analysed in the novels, immigrants came to redefine the border in transnational and postnational terms. Ethnic and cultural identities as well as civic belonging and nationalism came to be perceived in migratory terms. They were identified in terms of movement and held

²⁶ I am referring to immigration quotas.

²⁷ “non-quota immigrants”.

to be expandable. Postnational citizenship and self-identification came to the fore as a predominant modern national identity pattern. This decoupling of territoriality and national authority further confirmed the crossability of borders not only in national histories but also at the level of individual daily experiences and life choices. Accounting for these movements on the U.S. border both at the macro level of governments and at the micro level of citizens' daily lives confirms that movement is a very important element in the definition of the border. Yet, it is just one side of the story.

The analysis of Cisneros's, Garcia's, and Plante's novels traces another important spatial movement of the border. This movement marks the border by stasis. It constitutes the other oft-silenced part of the definition of borders on the contemporary geopolitical scene as well as in canonical border fiction and theories. As has been analysed in chapter three, immigrant lives in the barrios, the ghettos, and the enclaves map out another set of borders that are not really mobile or porous. Indeed, in the logic of transnational life patterns and in transnational contexts, place becomes precarious. Place precariousness does not eliminate the borders of place or the individual and communal experience of it. Instead, it tightens up the borders set around place by triggering territorial insecurity and myriad other forms of insecurity attached to it. Citizens produce their sense of place differently across districts and neighborhoods through a different set of daily routines and life styles. The individual and communal sense of place is a daily production and reproduction, yet immigration narratives tell a deeper facet of this immediate and concrete sense of place. The actual sense of place and borders is set between constructionism and determinism. Place opens up spaces of control and agency to the immigrant subject to carve out the real, yet these spaces are neither absolutely

free nor spontaneous. Commodification of ethnicity and place play an important role in mapping out the borders of the ethnically integrated neighborhood. This commodification is a capital necessity that at the same time reflects capital insecurity, its potential dysfunction, and ethical bankruptcy. It also creates a democratic impasse and raises questions about the possibilities and promises of social justice. Pursuing the so called American dream, be it of political stability or social and economic well being, residents of the ethnic neighborhood find themselves caught in a socio-economic pattern that puts limits on their socio-economic mobility and integration. The borders of the neighborhood function in such a way as to create and maintain economic imbalances between different ethno-cultural groups and to cut short the potential of immigrants. The borders of the barrio, the ghetto, and the enclave become increasingly inflexible despite the communal inconsistencies of the ethnic neighborhood. They pave the way for a static perception of identity and culture, and facilitate the circulation of stereotypes. In such a context, multiculturalism becomes nothing but another version of social seclusion and xenophobia.

Representation is another important level on which borders (dys)function. As border narratives, the novels contribute to the revision of both mainstream narratives and an older generation of border narratives as well. They use different techniques to question the concept of representation and all forms of discursive production. By introducing a multiplicity of narrative postures, they question the authority of narrative voices and the impartiality of representation. They also use reflexive and self-reflexive techniques to foreground the constructedness of the narrative and the inseparability of the real and the representational. They stress the connectedness of personal and communal memories in such a way as to open up new

perspectives from which History can be re-written. These border texts are also multilinguistic territories that are only accessible through transculturation and manifold imaginings. Through these different movements between narrators, images, memories, languages, in addition to locales and characters, border narratives draw the reader's attention to the importance of movement in border narratives. Movement is only possible in reference to stasis, however it is this movement between movement and stasis which is the actual reality of the border. By writing *in* all these movements, settled and unsettled, Cisneros's, Garcia's, and Plante's texts contribute to what I called "writing the border from the perspective of the border". Writing the border from the perspective of the border is about movement and stasis, about speech and silence, about connections and disconnections, and about all the spectra in-between. It is not an official media narrative that claims to own the truth; it is a minor narrative that acknowledges the multiplicity of perception and the inaccessibility of the real in representational modes. It does not annul the real, yet it foregrounds its fleetingness in narrative modes. It is this wavering between movement and non-movement that draws the reader's and the critic's attention to the fact that there is more to the border than what is being said about it. Writing and reading the border from the perspective of the border requires a conscious act of self-positioning that enables an awareness that the border is about what is being lived and not just about what is being said. The real and the lived, in the logic of the border, depend on where you stand *on* the border at a specific moment in time. Be it an official checkpoint or a smuggling tunnel, where you stand on the border is the sum of the perspectives from which you look, the perspectives from which you are looked at, and the interplay of movement and stasis among all these perspectives.

The redefinition of the borders of the U.S. and the findings resulting from it bear the promise of expanding research in a number of different directions. The new concept of the border might be applicable to other contexts and other border contests. I am particularly concerned with studying the maritime border between North Africa and South Europe, its colonial histories, and cultural implications. More particularly, a comparative study of North African and Mexican-American border narratives suggests different areas of intersection despite the different contexts and power interplays. With the rise of border walls and fences in many parts of the world, and the increasing logic of blockades and barricades on the contemporary geopolitical scene, my project of redefining the border can fuel a number of other critical narratives dealing with border realities and border imaginaries. My call for re-rooting borders in their physical and material realities and dealing with them in a down-to-earth fashion dissociates border struggles “on the ground” from other metaphorical uses and even some abuses of border rhetorics. This territorial or geographical turn, we might say, is prone to re-route border research and to provide border criticism with a new point of departure whereby the field becomes more clearly focused, more politically engaged, and more independent. In a way, it can lead to a firmer institutionalization of border theory as a separate research field that is interdisciplinary by nature without it being neither amorphous nor vague in shape and content. As explained at length in chapter one and chapter four, I did not intend to set out a dichotomy between the real and the representational nor between the concrete and the conceptual. Instead, I call for a more accurate concern with the real in such a way as to reveal the different layers at which it imbues and is imbued with the representational. A strategic grounding of border research in the reality of the border holds the promise of a more frontal and less “bourgeois” approach to border injustices. Indeed, due to the interconnectedness of the

real and the representational, this change in discursive border practices is meant to bring about change to the realities of borders, border crossers, and border prisoners. This change in border narratives has indeed been launched by border literatures. A parallel change in border theory and criticism has yet to come. The more institutional aspect of critical theory will make this change slower to happen than it did in literature. Yet, fiction has always been the embryo of transformative logics in conceptual terms. The discursive nature of both fiction and criticism, despite the difference of attributes and format, announces the advent of new border theory developments that will walk hand in hand with the booming border literatures all over the globe.

The interdisciplinary nature of border theory makes redefining the border an attempt to redefine other concepts connected to the border and to revolutionize research fields other than border theory and criticism. Writing the border from the perspective of the border questions the institution of culture and cultural production processes. It also questions language and humans' relation to language and linguistic production. It proposes new definitions of nationalism, identity, and community, and a range of other concepts. First and foremost, movement is redefined as movement between movement and stasis. Questions without answers are dead ends. Stopping at the question is counterproductive and disengaged, yet full answers do not exist. In a multicultural context, one has to strategically accept partial answers to keep moving and to keep life and human energy going. In present day human encounters, the so called "other" is always already within. Transculturation and self-awareness have limits; hence disconnections have to be accepted as parts of human connections. Foundational theories of culture not only produce stereotypes and make the human mind lag ages behind human reality,

but also legitimize and sometimes legalize violence and injustice. A definition of culture authentic to the reality of human interactions in this day and age would be far from that of a congealed set of patterns produced and reproduced by a supposedly ethnically uniform group of individuals. Instead, culture is a sum of different life trajectories of different individuals coming together in a shared activity or a daily routine. It is a relational moment and always changing. It welcomes immigrant subjects and encompasses the complexity of their life trajectories as a coming together of both a lived and a remembered version of their culture of origin, and both a lived and an imagined version of their adoptive culture. Culture is the sum of daily interactions between individuals as they strive to make sense of their complex histories and present realities. Humans produce culture and space differently, depending on their immediate realities and life trajectories.

Redefining the border also suggests revisiting history and redefining it. History is no longer a set of facts related exactly as they happened by those who had the authority to write history as the events took place. History has to be redefined as a field of human agency that is personal as much as it is political. The subject of history can be replaced with “history and its amendments”. These amendments to mainstream history are to be found through a number of marginalized voices and untold stories. Myriad perspectives and myriad narratives are possible, but this does not erase the factuality of facts. Instead, it bespeaks the selectivity of recording, the partiality of narration, and the violence of imposed silence. This movement between the stasis of the factuality of facts and the movement of individuals’ micro narratives is what defines border histories in particular and broader history in general. This redefinition of history has indeed crystallized in more articulate terms in post-colonial theories than it did in minority

American theories and immigration narratives. It remains one of the important areas that border theories need to tackle and narrate from the perspective of the border. Similarly, language and its relation to identity debates has to be addressed more boldly by border theorists as a continuous pursuit of meaning, a wavering movement between understandings, misunderstandings, and understandings through misunderstandings. This continuous movement between fixity and movement of meaning and comprehension is the only possible form of human communication. It is a coming together of communication and miscommunication. It strategically qualifies as communication in the logic of the border and it is the only form of communication possible from the perspective of the border. Inherent to language and linguistic battles from the perspective of the border is also the inevitability of dichotomous terms. Border narratives accept dichotomous terms, and strategically use them, to subvert them eventually. They thereby adopt a mature approach to language that embraces its limits and is content with the simple attempt to resolve them from within.

This dislodging dynamic that the border perspective introduces and represents *par excellence* is not a frivolous celebration of movement over stasis. Instead, it is a mature consciousness of the limits of both movement and stasis and a realization that movement can only keep moving through stasis. It strategically settles for anchoring concepts in their immediate realities in such a way as to foreground their anti-foundational aspect. By subverting societal master narratives and mainstream discourses and favoring the relational perspective of defining concepts and telling stories in the moment, border narratives do not attempt to annihilate the presence of preconceived ideas and patterns inside and around always shifting concepts and definitions. Instead, what I have come to call a “border perspective”

strategically points to definitions as mutational because this is the perspective from which change can be expected to come. Seeking change and attempting to rebalance human exchange is the driving force of this border perspective. Re-writing and re-righting history and present stories is the task of border narratives. I see this dissertation and potential future research projects as devoted to the task of providing border criticism with its full potential by recreating itself and recreating other disciplines, but most importantly by recreating reality through opening up the human mind to the complexity of the real. The complexity of border reality has to be lived outside the text. A perspective to live it from is found in narratives about the complexity of the real. Redefining the border is the cornerstone of the foundation from which representation can be re-represented in such a way as to transform not only the reality of representation but also the representation of the real. The real on the other hand is *always yet to be*²⁸ transformed.

Change and renewed perspectives are of course only partially new since the history of ideas and concepts is not a clear-cut set of segments. Instead, this history progresses through an intellectual energy that is referential by nature. As Craig Calhoun points out:

New perspectives, new theories, and new empirical information all can enable us to see how things can be different from the ways they first present themselves to us, and how things even could be different from the ways they are. Seizing such possibilities, however, means rejecting the notion that either we must accept nearly everything as it is or we must enter into a radical disorganization of reality in which we can claim no bearings to guide us. (2)

We inevitably read things in relation to other things. Redefinitions are always already partial because they are developed against the background of more settled ideas and other, newer intellectual tendencies. Reinventing ideas and concepts against a completely clear background

²⁸ To ponder in relation to and/or against Derrida's "always already"

is an intellectual impossibility. Being aware of the limits of the human mind and its processing dynamics is a necessary self-positioning exercise for the critic and the observer. Setting oneself against the background of past and future thinking processes and trends reveals that just like fictional narratives, critical narratives are constructed through bits of other narratives both inside and outside the text. All these narratives keep moving against the background of a social world that is even faster moving. As Calhoun asserts, “we need to recognize that our theoretical innovations respond to problems in our efforts to achieve understanding or to offer normative guidance, but that in fixing one set of problems they may create new ones, or new ones may emerge as the social world changes” (7). Final resolutions do not exist. History and the real are moving energies. What mental gymnastics can offer is simply perspective.

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