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**BORDERS
IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD**

Negotiations, Subversions, Reconfigurations

« ÉTUDES ANGLOPHONES »

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Introduction

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The idea of the border as a founding event, a spatial demarcation that separates and shapes human communities, often conflicts or coexists with the view that it is the concrete enactment of preexisting social, cultural, political exclusion. In a now famous postulate, Simmel gives priority to the sociological component over the spatial component: “the boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially” (Simmel 1997, 142). By suggesting that the physical boundaries that communities give to themselves are the product of extant social separations, Simmel highlights the close entanglement of actual geographical separations and symbolic or metaphorical ones which has underpinned the development of the field of border studies from the beginning.

In the most common use of the term, borders are conceived as physical territorial demarcations, dividing nations, but also providing protection to them, as well as a potential structure for political and social identity. As Étienne Balibar argues, for a significant part of the population of nation-states in the Northern hemisphere, “the representation of being in the world is built around the conjunction of the border, the state, territory and security” (Navone and Rahola 2021, 122; our translation). Borders are often perceived as clearly delineated boundaries and sometimes actualized

as walls, fences or other enclosures meant to neatly cut between states or other socio-political communities, and consolidate their identities and sovereignties. These borders are an integral part of power relations, as they affirm the conquest of and enact control over a territory, not only through physical, possibly weaponized boundaries, but through discourse and representations, epitomized by official map-making and place-naming (King 1996).

As this literal notion of the political demarcation commonly prevails over more symbolic or metaphorical ones, borders tend to be perceived as static, often insurmountable barriers. Yet, even political borders are both a historically contingent development and sites of contestation, which are “made and remade according to a host of shifting variables” (Nail 2016, 6, 14). Far from being immutable, they are “typically rooted in historically constructed structures of meanings”, *i.e.* “discursive landscapes of social power” (Paasi 2009) and are subject to the pressures of the two sides whose (often) conflicting interests they articulate. They are also permeable, in the sense of being sites where individuals cross from one space into another: “They at once separate and bring individuals together; they divide territories where different legal, political, ideological, religious, sartorial and dietary norms apply; and they also are the place where these various norms intersect and combine” (Graziano 2018, 1).

It is in fact this very tension between rigidity and fluidity, division and contact, that makes them such useful tools of analysis for the complexity of social and cultural interactions, and that has allowed border studies to develop, since the 1980s, as a rich interdisciplinary field. As Doris Wastl-Walter recapitulates, “a new, multidisciplinary generation of border scholars emerged, composed of, for instance, political geographers, historians, anthropologists, political scientists, economists, sociologists, and lawyers, giving the field an increasingly interdisciplinary character” (Wastl-Walter 2011, 2). The interest in such an intellectual entry point has been so widespread across the humanities that some have called for theoretical limits to border theory (Johnson and Michaelsen 1997), while others, like Brunet-Jailly (2005), have been calling for a multidisciplinary theory of borders, albeit usually restricted to national borders.

One of the premises of this volume is that borders are a meeting place for disciplines which explore socio-cultural identities and their dynamic interactions, because of their capacity to articulate geographical, cultural and psychic spaces. Foundational to this ability is the fact that, in their literal and metaphorical senses, they can be thought of as sites of contiguity as much as of separation (Manzanas 2007, 12), as thresholds as much as barriers between an inside and an outside, a here and a there.

Most of all, they can be understood as processes: processes of division, but also processes of cultural redefinition and relocation. On the one hand, their production partakes of the endless creation of “categories of difference or separation” (Newman 2007, 35) that social and cultural encounters entail. As Rosello and Wolfe remind us: “[b]ordering is ordering, othering and negotiating difference” (2017, 12). On the other hand, border practices, the actual experience and negotiation of the border, may be understood as articulating questions of identity and cultural belonging, especially by those who are placeless or challenge the authority of existing demarcations. Homi Bhabha notably understood borders as “interstices,” “in-between” or liminal spaces that enable the hybrid interaction of cultures, allow identities to be recast and create alternative sites of meaning (Bhabha 1990, 1994). As he argued, borders have to be understood as performative spaces, rather than polarizing separations, where social and cultural difference is articulated in a “complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (Bhabha 1994, 2):

The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always be a process of hybridity, incorporating new “people” in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning [...] What emerges as an effect of such “incomplete signification” is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated. (Bhabha 1990, 4)

Since Bhabha, much emphasis has been placed on the border as a site of encounter between cultures, but also as a site of cultural resistance, a performative space where the *locus* of culture and knowledge is redefined and may be shown not to be immutable or self-contained (Benito and

Manzanas 2002). “Border thinking,” thinking from the outside, has been understood as a crucial way to retrieve subjugated forms of knowledge that were invisibilized, for example by the modern/colonial world system (Mignolo 2000; Schimanski and Wolfe 2017). “Borderscapes,” rather than borderlines, have been investigated as a means to take into account the processual nature of the border as well as the “varied and differentiated encounters” that are negotiated around it (Brambilla 2015; Brambilla and Pötzsch 2017; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007).

This ongoing dialogue is a recurrent concern in this volume, which is not so much about the static (and yet repeatedly challenged) political borders that divide our contemporary world, as about borders as social, cultural, and territorial processes and practices that contribute to the shaping of identities. It is about the thick contact zones (Pratt 1992), borderscapes and cultural thresholds where cultures, communities and territories overlap, commingle, conflict and hybridize. It is especially about cultural resistance at the margin, subversive representations and reappropriations, small-scale strategies that are conceived to transgress impractical or oppressing borders, and a variety of border-crossing practices which are understood as so many “performative renegotiations” of identities (Rosello and Wolfe 2017, 2).

Most of all, it conceives the border as an interdisciplinary concept, whose articulation of the literal and the metaphorical, of the concrete territory and the imagined community, highlights the imbrication of political, social, environmental, discursive and aesthetic considerations. In other words, the exploration of the ways in which borders are negotiated at cultural and territorial levels is also envisioned as a way to cross, blur or redefine boundaries between disciplines—notably between literature, cultural studies, geography and history. Having to embrace a “specific focus on the paradoxical, on the contradictory, and on the conflicts of cultural practices and identity” (Alvarez Jr. 1995, 462) when looking at borders and borderlands may even lead to rethinking conceptual categories and epistemological postures.

The borders that are explored in this volume are for a large part the product of the expansion of the English-speaking world, of its territorial conquests and imperial project (from within the British Isles to the Americas, the Indian subcontinent and Africa), of the diasporas that it entailed, but

also of the intellectual attitudes and social order that sustained it. They reflect the tensions between the boundaries imposed by European colonization and pre-colonial “territorial orders [that] were very different to European notions of territorial fixation” (Newman 2011, 40), both within the context of the British empire and in post-imperial times. Even today, territorial divisions remain as a legacy of former colonial rivalries in Africa or Asia, and imposed borders from colonial times shape national destinies, leading in some cases to the displacement of populations or warfare, but also fostering social and cultural dynamics that challenge such coercive geographies. While the contributions highlight processes of border building, definition and imposition within the English-speaking world, they also analyze a variety of strategies of resistance to its normative spaces, from the intractability of organic and natural boundaries to a diversity of forms of decolonial noncompliance.

The various contributions to this volume consider borders as pliable and multifaceted and examine the notions of subjective borders and normative borders as dynamic and malleable objects seen both through daily experiences and through literary, artistic or historical representations. Ranging from Victorian to contemporary times, and from Europe to the Americas and Africa, they offer a temporally and spatially multiscale approach to the challenges presented by, and to, physical, natural, discursive, social or imaginary borders. They focus both on the making and transgressing of borders, and on their official or subversive representations as performative in that they can validate or invalidate imposed boundaries and categories.

The volume is divided into four parts, highlighting the complexity of border issues and the tools that the multidisciplinary and multinational approach inherent to anglophone studies can provide. For instance, the literary or musical perspective, added to the more traditional socio-spatial approach to border studies, reveals specific modes of resistance through fiction and song writing, or artistic performance. Each part focuses on one type of border or border crossing (territorial, natural, social, symbolic), and yet, in each of them the various contributions tackle issues that cut across strictly delimited thematic concerns. Each of the thirteen case studies conceptualizes

the notion of borders, the result being a multidisciplinary dialogue between critical theory and a variety of literary/visual/cultural corpuses.

Part I, “Imposed Borders and Contested Geographies,” focuses on the more concrete, and seemingly more straightforward, aspects of border studies, *i.e.* territorial borders. Yet, the authors clearly demonstrate, through case studies covering three countries and continents (Ireland, the United States, Nigeria), how ambiguous these often reified borders can be (be it by physical obstacles, official maps or discourse), and how the study of these ambiguities and their historicity can help us uncover relations of power and domination, as well as symbolic—and not so symbolic—violence in the contemporary world. But this approach, in particular through the concept of imagined geographies, also uncovers the potential for political resistance in subverting such borders through graffiti, literature, an alternative perspective on territorial history. Because they are imposed by those who hold power over those who do not, contesting, crossing or ignoring these borders, knowingly or not, represents a *de facto* refusal of a given order and assigned categories often associated with inequality and discrimination.

In the first chapter, “Contested Borders: Northern Irish Murals and the Visualization of Territory,” Caroline Lehni examines the use of murals by both Republicans and Loyalists in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland, focusing on iconographic elements but also on their location in space, in the area on and around borders between the two communities. The author demonstrates that through their imagery, those murals are used to express political views on reconciliation or residential segregation, the impact of which is compounded by their location along “peacelines” or “peace walls” within Northern Ireland. While site is always important in the study of murals, the effect is here amplified, since the message itself is territorial. As a result, even though a minority of murals do aim at crossing those sectarian borders, the majority of these performative images are not only representing physical and symbolic division, but also perpetuating, even sometimes creating it.

In “A History of Shifting Settler-colonial Borders: Reading the Native/Non-Native Territorial Palimpsest in and around Rapid City, SD,” Sandrine Baudry and Céline Planchou also explore the relationship between the

concept of imagined geographies and border studies. They are taking a border town and its surrounding territory as a case study to reflect on overlapping native and non-native geographies, re-placing the drawing of arbitrary borders within the broader context of settler colonial violence. They explore how the dominant discourse on local geography is intertwined with the historical national narrative of territorial expansion and the move West, and the political project of erasure of Indigenous peoples, cultures, geographies and resistance. They also look at how current mundane practices, artistic expressions and decolonized research can offer counter narratives at the political and infrapolitical levels, and thus enable the resurgence of native geographies and spatially-based resistance. The chapter concludes with an epistemological reflection on the need for researchers to question their own ingrained tendency to validate dominant geographies as a given.

In the next chapter, Anna-Grace Scullion addresses similar issues of colonial geographies on a nearby territory, albeit from a literary perspective, focusing on an Ojibwe writer's work. "The Decolonial Frontier: Landscape, Maps and Borders in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" draws on the importance of land and place in Indigenous culture as well as in Erdrich's writings and takes a look at how literature can be used as a means to redefine borders in a general context of decolonial resistance. The author focuses on the cultural and historical nature of landscapes and maps, and thus of borders, showing how Erdrich's references to vernacular landscapes is in itself a form of resistance to the relationship to space imposed by settler colonialism, even though the land her stories are set on is fictional. She also broadens her analysis beyond the novel *Tracks* and the case of the Ojibwe to look at how maps, borders and the settler's relationship to land are a general imposition on colonized people. This contribution brings a perspective both on the importance of maps and borders in the colonial project, and on the power of literature as a means to reject those imposed geographies.

Finally, Joseph Egwurube provides a different perspective on the notions of Indigeneity and identity and their relationship to imposed borders. In "Indigeneity, 'Statism' and 'Federal Character': The manufacture of Inter-communal borders in the Federal republic of Nigeria," he focuses on current intra-national borders, the political, historical and ethno-cultural

dynamics behind their increasing number, and the impact they have on the rights of citizens. The author examines the relationship between the rapid redrawing of borders and the issue of national cohesion and sense of belonging, since these borders clearly define two categories of citizens, indigenes and settlers, the latter suffering from discrimination and reduced rights. Since the status of a given individual depends on whether they are living in their state of origin, the redefinition of state borders automatically redefines the new minority “aliens.” Those imposed borders thus clearly reflect the power dynamics between ethnic and linguistic groups, at the same time as they foster inequality and disunity within the federal nation, and as such are the object of contestation.

Part II, “Natural and Symbolic Boundaries,” examines the correlation between natural forms and their occasional function as borders. It also uncovers the powerful symbolic significance that arises from such natural borders, which are inextricably linked with cultural practices such as surveying, travelling, visiting, exploring. Encompassing the representations of the Black Forest visited by British travelers in the Victorian era, the marshes of New England in Thoreau’s writings and Ron Rash’s borders made of barbed wire in the Appalachian Mountains, this part foregrounds borders as highly symbolic interfaces and stimulators of the imagination. The chapters included in this section emphasize the importance of language, writing and metaphor in the representation of borders. Borders grow out of the texts that discuss them and their symbolic significances are richly layered. Instead of signifying simply as rigid forms of limitation and demarcation, the boundaries discussed in this section are imaginative, cultural and poetic tropes that ramify in many directions.

Julien Nègre’s “Writing Without Borders? Thoreau’s Remapping of Borders Through Language” examines the interaction between Henry David Thoreau’s direct experience of borders and his work as a writer. Using both Thoreau’s texts and cartographic material, Nègre makes a compelling case for Thoreau’s interest in borders without putting forth the conventionally expected argument of Thoreau writing “without borders” and challenging the fixity of human borders. As a professional surveyor, Thoreau was familiar with the scientific and technical aspects of border-tracing. He was writing

in the 1840s and 1850s, a period of crystallization and stabilization of the national borders of the United States. Nègre contends that although it might seem that Thoreau simply discards the artificiality of borders, he is actually very much interested in borders as phenomena of the natural world, especially in later writings like *The Dispersion of Seeds* and *Wild Fruits*. Nègre also studies Thoreau's interest in borders on the level of language, suggesting that Thoreau confers fluidity, through linguistic play, to the deceptive stability of borders. Borders in Thoreau are interpreted as "meaningful interfaces" which are "complexly productive" (a phrase borrowed from Lawrence Buell) and not simply targets of negative critique.

Frédérique Spill's "One man's tenuous hold on the earth': The Metaphor of Barbed Wire in Ron Rash's Writing" deals with contemporary American novelist, short story writer and poet Ron Rash. Rash is very much interested in the question of place, in particular the Appalachian Mountains where his works are usually set. The chapter follows a recurrent metaphor in Rash's writing, that of barbed wire, whose symbolic significance evolves and which uncovers social, cultural and individual tensions. Several texts are analyzed: Rash's first novel *One Foot in Eden*, the short story "Into the Gorge," the poems "Watershed" and "Barbed Wire." The chapter demonstrates how Rash turns "a mundane object into a poetic trope" and unravels the numerous semantic and symbolic meanings of barbed wire. The latter often functions, literally and figuratively, as a border: it "encapsulates man's urge to draw boundaries in order to mark his territory," it signifies transgression, it is associated with punishment and martyrdom, it marks the division between reason and the irrational, the living and the dead, and it can be read as an attempt to master land and fate at the same time.

Stephanie Lethbridge ("The Past in the Present: the Black Forest in Victorian periodicals") discusses Victorian tourism in the Black Forest, a topic that has received little critical attention. In an age of growing travel practices and industrial development, the Victorians entering the Black Forest experienced a phenomenon of border-crossing from their industrialized society into the darkness of the German forest (emblematic of Germany as a whole), which functioned as a spatial and as a temporal border taking the travelers back to pre-modern times. Such "b/ordering

practices” resulted in asserting and reinforcing cultural differences, since they bolstered the self-confidence of British travelers who would find confirmation of the supposed superiority of their culture. Although associated with nature in an obvious way, the Black Forest was also a pre-mediated concept and place, already interpreted by classical sources, fairy tales and gothic literature. The pre-scripted readings of Black Forest spaces rendered the experiences beyond cultural borders less alienating. Simultaneously with the crossing of physical borders, conceptual borders are reinforced, restricting the tourist’s experience to an aesthetic and cultural one. In the end, the material crossing of borders does not entail a crossing of imaginary and conceptual borders, which remain intact.

Parts III and IV underline the role played by gender, class, race and ethnicity in the creation of symbolic and cultural borders, but also in the urge to push back and transgress existing boundaries. By bringing together a diversity of contexts, ranging from the social order of Victorian Britain and of the British empire to contemporary diasporic, multi-ethnic and transnational communities, the chapters outline an unending process of transgression and redefinition, in which the boundaries that divide society shift as required by cultural and social evolutions. These redefinitions are rarely aligned, however: a recurrent theme of these studies is that the opening up of some borders often goes hand in hand with the hardening of others, or that some boundaries are more permeable than others.

“Borders and the Shaping of Transnational Identities” (Part III) explores the dynamic interaction between physical frontiers and discursive and imaginary ones in diasporic literatures and cultures. The three chapters examine the role of boundaries in the process of re-shaping the identities of communities or individuals that have been displaced or have become rootless. They especially highlight the use of borders not just as sites of control, but as discursive or imaginary spaces where migrants or displaced populations reflect about the possibility of making a place for themselves in new societies and conceptualize their marginal positions. The very process of writing and the deterritorialization of language that goes along with it are shown to be essential to such redefinitions.

In “‘dark strangers crossing the nation’s threshold’: Confinement and Border Crossings in the Fiction of George Lamming and Sam Selvon,” Silvia Gerslbeck examines the renegotiation of national and cultural borders experienced by writers of the Windrush generation in Britain, through a study of George Lamming’s *The Emigrants* and Sam Selvon’s *Moses Ascending*. Her analysis of the two novels foregrounds the role of the artist as a cultural mediator, who negotiates the new conceptual spaces that are shaped by the process of migration. The chapter highlights the thresholds that are crossed, the boundaries that are transcended, the attempts to move into the public space in Britain, to secure a safe place, and the new separations that emerge. It also emphasizes the experience of minority authors who cross boundaries “from the cultural margins to the centre” and confront the boundaries placed upon the postcolonial writer within the literary market.

In “‘Whey Mi Belang’: Borders of Class, Race and Gender in Reggae Lyrics and Afro-Caribbean Oral Texts,” David Bousquet analyses the dialectic interplay between literal and metaphorical borders in reggae culture, based on the study of the lyrics of twelve songs dating from 1983 to 2018. The chapter first examines the ambivalent function of literal borders and territorial demarcations, which are either experienced as obstructions to the freedom of movement the reggae culture aspires to, calling for transgressions, or identified with the lost borders of the African homeland that slavery and deportation have shattered. The tension is shown to lead to a displacement of the notion of the border onto a moral and metaphorical level, allowing it to become a discursive space where issues of class, race and gender may be debated, where cultural and social boundaries may be transgressed, but also where they may be consolidated.

Sara Arami’s “Undermining Borders in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*” explores a novel written by Arab-American writer Mohja Kahf, published in 2006. The novel recounts the coming-of-age of Khadra, who had arrived in the United States from Syria with her parents as a child. The chapter discusses borders in the context of recent diasporic literatures, with their interest in migration, in-betweenness, hybridity and the fragmentation of diasporic subjectivities. The analysis demonstrates how the crossing of official borders leads to the destabilization of a multiplicity of other borders,

especially between self and other, and posits the connection between physical frontiers and discursive/imaginary ones. The use of multiple intertexts, the intermingling of genres and the use of Arabic phrases in English suggest multiple connections, crossings and hybrid phenomena. Kahf's fiction "reveals the porosity and artificiality of the lines drawn on the map" and the artificiality of fixed borders. Maps feature profusely in the novel and help develop a reflection on cartography as a patriarchal and ideological enterprise. The novel elaborates a form of remapping, since it claims a place for Arab American women in American society and for Arab American women writers within the American literary canon.

The crossing of conceptual borders such as the ones that divide classes, genders, or ethnic and cultural communities is often a long, drawn-out process, through which lines of separation undergo a variety of experimental reconfigurations. "Navigating Liminal Spaces" (Part IV) presents a variety of the processes through which these borders are undermined and of the transitional spaces that are defined in the process. The lines that are examined separate genders, races, cultural values, colonizer and colonized, yet the patterns through which they are challenged and redefined bear a number of similarities. Sporadic, individual transgressions or crossings are the first to blur the neat separations and to reveal their potential porosity. They enable the creation of in-between spaces, undefined liminal areas where roles are renegotiated, or particular "places" where new social and cultural relations are worked out. Laurence Cristina describes a "semi-independent ideological territory" that Victorian women occupied "before being granted [...] a full access to the public sphere," Julia Siccardi observes the creation of individual "places" by Zadie Smith's characters when they find themselves in situations that are transgressive of accepted racial and social boundaries, while Amandine Guyot outlines the creation of "alternative" liminal spaces where British and Indian cultural identities are blurred, and where an intercultural dialogue may be possible. Such spatial explorations eventually lead to a renegotiation, often an extension, of the existing boundaries rather than a full removal of the original separations.

In "From the 'Angel in the House' to the Suffragette: How the New Woman Crossed the Border Between the Private and the Public Spheres,

Great Britain, 1854-1918,” Laurence Cristina examines three stages of women’s activism in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, during which women gradually pulled down the barrier between the public sphere and the domestic sphere. The chapter starts with the ideal of domesticity that was epitomized by Coventry Patmore’s poem, “The Angel in the House”, published in 1854, arguing that it hardened the borders between the domestic sphere of Victorian middle-class women and the public sphere. It then examines how the mid-Victorian period saw an extension of the range of women’s activities, silently transgressing official Victorian values without explicitly violating frontiers or challenging the masculine public domain. The rest of the chapter focuses on the much more visible transgression of borders that occurred with the emergence of the figure of the “New Woman,” who deliberately encroached onto masculine spaces, and who saw the vote as an entry point into the public sphere.

While Victorian and Edwardian women were subverting the lines that divided the “separate spheres,” the territorial and cultural partitions introduced by British imperialism were being increasingly challenged by nationalist movements as well as metropolitan critics. Amandine Guyot’s “Crossing Lines in Imperial India: a Geocritical Study of Subversive Transgressions in R. Kipling’s *Kim* and E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*” offers a geocritical analysis of the various ways in which Kipling’s *Kim* and E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* expose colonial lines in India by focusing on protagonists who cross racial and social divisions. Guyot explains how the European concept of territorial divide, exported to India as a means to appropriate colonized spaces, was complemented by a specific social etiquette and other invisible lines meant to distance the British from the Indian Other. She then demonstrates that while Kipling’s *Kim* seems to confirm such divisions, even though they are eventually subverted by the main protagonist’s liminality and line-crossing process, Forster’s text deliberately explores their problematic dimension through various figures of transgression and spatial inaccessibility. In both cases, borders and boundaries become in-between spaces where mediating characters negotiate hybrid and conflictual identities, and where “the encounter between Self and Other might, finally, be possible.”

A similar interest in characters who act as cultural and social mediators in multi-cultural contexts is to be found in Julia Siccardi's analysis of Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* ("You people aren't even black anymore': Tentative Reconfigurations of Geographical, Social and Racial Borders in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*"). Using Doreen Massey's concept of "place" as shaped by particular sets of social relations that occur in specific locations, Siccardi examines Smith's reconfigurations of social and cultural spaces through the interpersonal interactions of characters from a diversity of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. She highlights her deliberate blurring of supposedly neat boundaries, her reflection about the role played by language in defining the place where one belongs, but also the ultimate resistance of the social order, of the physical and institutionalized borders that maintain it. Even in complex situations where social and racial borders could be erased, the barriers of prejudice prove to be insurmountable.



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Table of contents

Introduction

Sandrine BAUDRY, H  l  ne IBATA and Monica MANOLESCU5

I. IMPOSED BORDERS AND CONTESTED GEOGRAPHIES

Contested Borders: Northern Irish Murals and the Visualisation of Territory

Caroline LEHNI..... 23

A History of Shifting Settler-colonial Borders: Reading the Native/Non-Native Territorial Palimpsest in and around Rapid City, SD

Sandrine BAUDRY and C  line PLANCHOU 49

The Decolonial Frontier: Landscape, Maps and Borders in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*

Anna-Grace SCULLION 75

"Indigeneity", "Statism" and "Federal Character": The Manufacture of Inter-communal Borders in the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Joseph EGWURUBE 95

II. NATURAL AND SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

- Writing Without Borders? Thoreau's Remapping of Borders
Through Language
Julien NÈGRE..... 121
- "One man's tenuous hold on the earth": The Metaphor
of Barbed Wire in Ron Rash's Writing
Frédérique SPILL 137
- The Past in the Present: The Black Forest in Victorian Periodicals
Stefanie LETHBRIDGE 155

III. BORDERS AND THE SHAPING OF TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES

- "dark strangers crossing the nation's threshold": Confinement
and Border Crossings in the Fiction of George Lamming
and Sam Selvon
Silvia GERLSBECK 177
- "Whey Mi Belang": Borders of Class, Race and Gender
in Reggae Lyrics and Afro-Caribbean Oral Texts
David BOUSQUET 201
- Undermining Borders in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*
Sara ARAMI 221

IV. NAVIGATING LIMINAL SPACES

From the “Angel in the House” to the Suffragette: How the New Woman Crossed the Border Between the Private and the Public Spheres, Great Britain, 1854-1918 <i>Laurence CRISTINA</i>	241
Crossing Lines in Imperial India: a Geocritical Study of Subversive Transgressions in R. Kipling’s <i>Kim</i> and E.M. Forster’s <i>A Passage to India</i> <i>Amandine GUYOT</i>	259
“You people aren’t even black anymore”: Tentative Reconfigurations of Geographical, Social and Racial Borders in Zadie Smith’s <i>On Beauty</i> <i>Julia SICCARDI</i>	283
Contributors’ biographies	301
Credits	307