



**Conflicting Displacements:  
Mobilities and Border Crossing in Recent Fiction**

*Nadia Der-Ohannesian*  
**CONICET - Universidad Nacional de Córdoba  
Argentina**

But the skin of the earth is seamless.  
The sea cannot be fenced,  
*el mar* does not stop at borders.  
Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

When we talk of a dizzyingly mobile world  
we need to remember those who cannot move  
and those who are forced to move  
but would rather stay still.  
Tim Cresswell

According to Caren Kaplan, “women have a history of reading and writing in the interstices of masculine culture, moving between use of the dominant language or form of expression and specific versions of experience based on their marginality” (187). The works that are explored here, Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy* (2002) and the stories “The Book of Miracles” and “Night Talkers” from Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* (2005), are no exception. Even if the authors considered are part of an ever expanding and legitimized canon, their works reflect a search for alternative spaces from which to narrate the specificity of feminine experience of displacement and border inhabiting. In the works object of analysis I consider two phenomena that influence each other: mobility and the configuration of borders. On the one hand I contend that mobility entails relations of power and political disputes, and produces discourses that determine meanings. These power relations and meaning determine and are determined by gender, especially in the pair mobility (coded masculine), stasis (coded feminine). On the other hand, as a consequence of, and simultaneously with mobility, borders, as cultural constructs, are necessarily crossed, resisted and redrawn, producing changes and instability in world and identity perceptions.

To start this exploration, it is productive to consider the conceptualization of mobility that Tim Cresswell offers from the field of human geography. He explores

what the advent of the 'mobility turn' since the nineties can offer to a theorization of mobility. The first aspect he notices is an interest in seeing mobility as a valid object of study in itself, not as a byproduct or consequence of some other process, or “*secondary both ontologically and normatively, to forms of fixity in space*” (Cresswell 575, his emphasis). Cresswell then proposes to repoliticize mobility, in the same ways as critical geographers did with the concept of place<sup>1</sup>. He proposes that “a fruitful way of thinking about mobility is to take the fact of movement (the mobile equivalent of location) and reveal its entanglements with meaning and power to produce mobility (the mobile equivalent of place)” (576). Also, mobilities should be understood in connection to the relative fixity of others. This is exemplified by the fact that

for members of the kinetic elite to fly around the world, there needs to be airports, hotels, people to work in these places and all of the relatively fixed infrastructure that make mobilities possible. Politically it is also the case that some are effectively immobilised by the mobility of others. (576)

Together with the relation to fixities, mobilities need to be considered in relation to each other. Thus, “the mobilities of migrant domestic labour enables the mobilities of the kinetic elite” (576).

Mobility also needs to be understood as taking place at different scales, going from the body and its systems of gestures, to the movements of daily routine, to global level. Also, he emphasizes that mobilities are forms of practice that are the result of human agency, and not merely something that happens, which, I would like to add, directly derives from an understanding of mobility as imbued in power relations.

Most importantly, to my analysis, and in relation to the point just made, his proposal to understand mobilities as meaning-laden and dependent on agency, results in an understanding of mobilities as “produced by and productive of power (...) Global capitalism, systems of patriarchy and racial identities are both the products of and producers of myriad mobilities” (Cresswell 577-578). By way of an example, he offers the studies of feminist geographers who have documented how the everyday work movements of men and women differ, as men have to rely less on public transport and have simpler journeys, while women have to pick up children or do family shopping

more often.

In connection to the power relations and their consequent gendering of mobilities, I will refer now to some concepts proposed in Uteng and Cresswell's work, *Gendered Mobilities*. As regards the ways in which gender and mobility intersect, the latter may enable, disable or modify gendered practices. A key spatial coding in this regard is the dichotomy flow/fixity, analogous to the dichotomy public/private and by extension to the male/female binary that we saw in relation to the construction of national identity and the home. Thus, “narratives of mobility and immobility play a central role in the constitution of gender as a social and cultural construct” (2).

The ways in which people move and the meanings given to their mobilities are gendered. There are differences in the way in which men and women move; “this difference acts to reaffirm and reproduce the power relations that produced these differences in the first place” (Uteng and Cresswell 3). In this regard, I would like to emphasize Uteng and Cresswell's statement that in spite of mobility differential restrictions, “women have constantly upset gendered expectations about who moves, how they move and where they move” (5).

In relation with approaches more strictly related to postcolonialism, I wish to draw some connection between mobility and identity as proposed by Madan Sarup and Iain Chambers. Sarup holds that a subject's identity is transformed, among other factors, through the journey (Sarup 6), as it may involve changing homes and severing or going back to one's roots. Sarup sees great potentiality in the situation of the migrant: “Exile can be deadening, but it can also be very creative. It can be an affliction but it can also be a transfiguration—it can be a resource” (6). In short, traveling has consequences for the traveler's identity, but the transformations that take place in the subject can be assets. Similarly, Caren Kaplan suggests that

men and women who move between the cultures, languages, and the various configurations of power and meaning in complex colonial situations possess [...] the ability to read and write culture on multiple levels [...]. This location is fraught with tensions; it has the potential to lock the subject away in isolation and despair as well as the potential for critical innovation and particular strengths. (Kaplan 1987 187)

To wrap up the notion of mobility in relation to migrancy, I would like to point out Chambers' observation with regards to an emphasis on the migrant's inability to return to the point of departure.

Migrancy (...) implies a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming—completing the story, domesticating the detour—becomes an impossibility. (Chambers 5)

I consider it important to clarify that journey and permanence are not understood here as opposite concepts, but as interplaying and coexisting at times, as was pointed out by Cresswell. Even though continuous movement is characteristic of the identity building process, and even though these characters are mainly migrant characters, their mobility is made possible because there is someone or something else whose position is constructed as fixed.

The idea that mobility is partly defined with relation to fixity is probably most clearly presented in *Lucy*, as the girl's home island and mother are presented as static. The way in which female characters define themselves with respect to mobility and permanence is based partly on personal choice and partly on the constrictions of the socio-political context. As it can be seen recurrently in *Lucy*, though there is some evidence of family encouragement to study abroad and become a nurse, the reasons why the girl migrates are mostly a matter of personal choice—Lucy, at the age of 18, migrates from her Caribbean island to the United States to work as an *au pair* for a wealthy family. As a young teenager, Lucy fantasizes about leaving her island. Her parents envision a future for her in which she becomes a nurse, a profession which she accepts only as a way out. However, after a year abroad, the idea of becoming a nurse disturbs her, as well as the other professions envisioned by her mother for her—always as a subordinate to someone else—whereas for her brothers, more ambitious futures were foreseen. Thus, Lucy drops nursing school and devotes herself to creative pursuits. Put briefly, she is offered mobility on certain grounds, determined by her gender, and, instead, she resists these conditions. Mobility then has consequences in the construction of her gender identity.

The time period that spans during the novel is one year, which is key in developmental terms at that stage of life, especially in combination with an international experience—in this case babysitting and studying in the United States. Throughout this period Lucy progressively cuts the communication with her people on the island, going from not opening the letters that she receives, to finally giving a false address to her mother. Lucy's distancing herself from her family and severing the bonds with her homeland—and especially with her mother—is a crucial and necessary move in order to build her own independent self. That is to say, traveling helps Lucy to differentiate herself from her origins and recreate her identity in new terms, as illustrated when she opens a letter from her mother for the last time.

I received a letter from my mother bringing me up to date on things she thought I would have missed since I left home and would certainly like to know about. “It still has not rained since you left,” she wrote. “How fascinating,” I said to myself with bitterness. It had not rained once for over a year before I left. I did not care about that any longer. The object of my life now was to put as much distance myself and the events mentioned in her letter as I could manage. For I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which that letter came, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be free to take everything as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face? (Kincaid 2002, 31)

As it can be seen, Lucy feels an increasing urge to distance herself from her past, and she alludes to this need several times later in the text; for example when, in the United States, she visits a Paul Gauguin exhibition, she identifies herself with this man in his need to travel, though marked by different circumstances. In Lucy's words:

I identified with the yearnings of this man; I understood finding the place you are born in an unbearable prison and wanting something completely different from what you are familiar with, knowing it represents a haven (...) Of course his life could be found in the pages of a book (...) He was shown to be a man rebelling against an established order he had found corrupt (...) He had the perfume of a hero about him. I was not a man, I was a young woman from the fringes of the world, and when I left my home I had wrapped around my shoulders the mantle of a servant. (Kincaid 95)

Even though she can understand his need to migrate, Lucy is quick to notice that her position is marginal and disadvantageous in terms of gender, class and position with

regards to world hegemony. However, Lucy does not regret but embraces the marginal status that she has acquired due to migration. Going back to Chambers' idea that the home is mobile and open to constant revisions and influences, it is interesting to notice that the home that Lucy rebuilds for herself in the United States is purposefully uncomfortable. As Anzaldúa puts it very graphically when she states “This is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire” (25), inhabiting the borderlands is not necessarily cozy.

In Danticat's “Night Talkers”, it is the male character, Dany, who migrates to the United States ten years before the time of the story, and then goes back to Haiti in order to find out about his parents' murderer. His aunt, Estina, on the contrary, as an elderly female, is the one that stays behind and is constructed in Dany's perception as a fixed depository of the past. We can observe here how the powerful subject—more powerful for being a young man, more desirable labor force than an old woman, and also physically more capable—is the one who can move. He moves away from and back home, which is in turn constructed in relation to stasis and, therefore, feminized.

However, Estina, blind and all, is not as immobile as one would suppose. She is an active and respected member of the community, who moves about her own and other villages in the mountains helping and advising people. Thus, like Dany, she also performs movements, although of a different nature; his are fairly direct and long distance; hers are limited in scope and constant.

At a smaller, more everyday scale, it is interesting to note Estina's movements. Estina is not at home when Dany arrives; she's out assisting a midwife, but she returns as soon as the villagers let her know that her nephew is there. In spite of her blindness, she moves about with ease. Dany's return to Haiti, on the other hand, is presented as epic and life changing—the return of a hero, one might say.

He thought that the mountain would kill him, that he would never see the other side. He had been walking for two hours when suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his side [...].

Hugging his midsection, he left a narrow trail and took cover from the scorching midday sun under a tall, arched wind-deformed tree. Avoiding a row of anthills, he slid down onto his back over a patch of grainy pebble soil and closed his eyes, shutting out along with the sapphire sky, the craggy hills that made up the rest of his journey [...]. The sun was beating down on his face in pretty, symmetrical designs. (Danticat 2005, 87-88)

On the other hand, Estina's mobility around the villages is modest, low-profile and motivated by the very course of life—interestingly, the course of other people's lives. She moves about her home autonomously, as it can be seen at Dany's arrival.

Two people were guiding her by the elbows. As they leading her to him, she pulled herself away and raised her hands in front of her, reaching from him in the breeze (...)

As [Dany and Estina] started for her front door, he took her hand and tried to guide her, but found himself an obstacle in her path and let go. Once they were inside, she left her way to her cot and sat down on the edge. (Danticat 2005, 95)

An interesting difference in these characters in relation to mobility is related to their capacity to move forward and healthily get over the past. In this respect, Estina seems to have more willingness to move on. Her role in the community provides her with a sense of time in which life runs its natural course—she is a midwife and shares her knowledge with younger women, among other types of knowledge that she passes down to newer generations. Dany, on the other hand, is stuck, and he expects his aunt to constitute a static site, a point of origin, where he can return back to the past. He has recurrent dreams about the night when his parents died, unable to get over the traumatic experience, and he thinks about his parent's death most of the time: “Lately what was taking up the most space in his mind was not the way his parents had lived but the way they had died” (Danticat 2005, 99). Estina, however, has not stayed in the past. This shows that women and men move in different ways, and that women, even when expected to stand still, upset gendered preconceptions as regards mobility, as Uteng and Cresswell point out.

Escaping from Haiti to the United States in “The Book of Miracles” is the only possibility of survival for the repentant torturer. Migration signifies for Anne and her husband a movement from crime and sin into salvation. There is no possibility of returning in literal and in metaphorical ways, as his repentance is sincere. Home is then constructed as mobile, as home is not in Haiti but where Anne and her husband can be together and pass unnoticed.

The home they construct in the center of the Haitian community in Brooklyn is

an enclosed home, even if they rent out the basement to some young Haitian men, one of which is Dany. They do not make friends in case they may ask questions about their past. Thus the movements they perform in their everyday lives are regulated by work and close family activities. In the story, the long drive to Ka's apartment in order for her to go to mass with them is also an internal journey for Anne, as it is a meaningful commemoration for her. Ka encourages her to tell one of her miracles, so that Anne mentally revisits what she could call her husband's miraculous transformation. Her imagination is also visited by her dead brother while passing by the cemetery, and her memories of past Christmas Seasons when Ka was a young girl. Her life is marked by apparent exterior stillness but intense internal movement.

“The Book of Miracles” also offers an interesting perspective from the point of view of migration and international politics. It is fair to notice that the torturer and his wife's escape is made possible because of the advantageous position he is still in for having money and contacts who will aid him in leaving and settling in the United States. Anne's husband was aided to enter the United States, which can be read as a denunciation of the fact that Haitian criminals who have power of sorts can actually migrate there and live among the people they tortured. Haitians trying to make their way to Miami on boats, however, are immediately deported as soon as they reach American soil. The fact that there are Haitian *ex-macoutes* and criminals at large in the United States, because somebody allows them to, is pointed out by Edwidge Danticat in an interview:

One of the things that sparked my interest in [writing *The Dew Breaker*] is the case of Emmanuel Constant, who started a militia called FRAPH that was backed by the CIA. FRAPH killed thousands of Haitians in the early 1990s. Now while Constant is living comfortably in Queens, other Haitians are being deported. I wanted to see how those who have been bruised by people like that deal with coming face to face with their torturers (...). He's been tried *in absentia* for crimes against the Haitian people, and has been given a life sentence. But he's safely in the United States. And it's not just Haitian torturers who find refuge here. There are examples of people who carried out massacres in the Balkans, Central America, and Indonesia who are now living with impunity in this country. The Administration is very selective in whom it considers terrorists. (Danticat 2003, n.pag.)

My second hypothesis for reading these fictional texts is that as a consequence



of, and simultaneously with mobility, borders, as cultural constructs, are necessarily crossed, resisted and redrawn, producing changes and instability in world and identity perceptions.

Anzaldúa's epigraph highlights the artificial nature of borders. Thus, the way in which they are drawn and whatever is attributed to them can be contested, as it is based on politics and ideology.

Inhabiting the borderlands as an ideal state is Gloria Anzaldúa's proposal in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and the characters analyzed here can be considered examples of this state. Anzaldúa departs from the physical border separating the United States and Mexico to explore and deconstruct other dualities, such as mother/whore, male/female, and so forth. Her work, based on the Chicana experience, celebrates a *mestiza* identity, but, even though the characters studied in this paper are not Chicana, Anzaldúa's analysis can be extended to include these women who do not conform, and who have experienced oppression and migration in different ways, as we see in the following excerpt where inclusion in the borderland is a key concept.

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal". (Anzaldúa 25)

Some of the richness of the border category, as Anzaldúa proposes it, resides in the possibility of going beyond the situation of the Chicana to include any marginalized subjects.

In order to add to these conceptualizations of borders, I will resort to the field of cultural semantics, specifically to the definitions and characterization of cultural borders proposed by Iuri Lotman. This is because his exploration offers productive insights into the construction, maintenance and understanding of borders that allow me to carry out their analysis at different levels that exceed "material" borderlines. Lotman's concept of semiosphere is a necessary departing point in order to understand borders in

this context. He defines the semiosphere as “the space outside of which the very existence of semiosis is impossible (24)”<sup>2</sup>; that is to say, the semiosphere is the space that contains and enables the meanings in culture, outside of which messages exist, but they are incomprehensible and inconceivable for this culture. This “bounded quality of the semiosphere with respect to the extrasemiotic space (...) that surrounds it” (24) implies the existence of a border in which translations occur so as to allow messages which once were external to the semiosphere to be comprehensible texts in the culture. Also, when Lotman characterizes the semiosphere as a heterogeneous space, he points out that there are internal borders as well, which limit specialized sectors within it. “The transmission of information through these borders (...) determines constructions of meaning, the emergence of new information” (31). It is this last characterization of the borders which results of interest to the present study, since the borders that are constructed and crossed in the corpus determine the semiotic heterogeneity of the (fictional) world.

In relation to borders, understood in a broad sense as they are here, it is necessary to turn to conceptualizations of identity that can account for them. Sarup states that “identities are not free-floating; they are limited by borders and boundaries” (Sarup 3) that are established by groups in order “to limit the type of behavior within a defined cultural territory” (11). Like Anzaldúa, he understands borders in a much broader sense than simply dividing countries. He sees borders as separating/articulating nations, categories, cultures, and so forth. Also, he sees ambiguity in boundaries since they are at the same time a barrier and a place where exchange occurs; they simultaneously enclose and open a (cultural) territory and partake of both the inside and the outside. In the present work, borders are to be understood in those terms, that is to say, in their ambivalence.

As was previously stated, movements imply borders, which can be crossed, reinforced or blurred. In the works object of analysis, the physical displacements are accompanied by politically laden mobilities in identity and, therefore, borderlines, which partake of these characteristics, are constructed and contested. That is to say, a journey, most of the times, involves crossing borders understood in a broad sense. In



different ways, the characters object of analysis inhabit the borderlands as they do not fall within the categories and roles that the mainstream culture has set for them. They consciously resist the impositions and conventions that circulate by either embracing their marginal status or overtly rebelling against whatever it is that constrains them or hinders their search for self knowledge. What follows is an exploration of the borders, as presented in the texts, which, as I have just mentioned, exceed the mere political divisions between countries in agreement with Gloria Anzaldúa's position.

Lucy's relation to borders is ambiguous, highlighting the fact that boundaries are not fixed, but fluid. On the one hand, she inhabits the borderlands and, on the other hand, she tries to erect rigid borders that separate her from her homeland and her past. In both cases, however, these spaces are constructed as conscious choices.

Moving to the United States provides Lucy with the opportunity to cut the bonds with her homeland, and this, in turn, results in greater independence to explore and construct her identity. Having said this, it is important to point out that she does not assimilate—mainly because it is her choice—to the host culture. Her immigrant status marks her off from the rest of society from the very beginning. For example, as soon as she arrives, she realizes that the family she works for, even though they insist that Lucy should feel like a member of the family, accommodate her in the quarters meant for the maid. She finds herself in an ambiguous position with regards to the household: she shares their home as the girl that looks after the children, but she is different from the maid, a situation that does not really upset her, but definitely disrupts the balance in the family, for the adults at least. Eventually, Mariah and Lewis start calling her the Visitor, a vocative which is also capitalized in the original as if it were a proper name given to Lucy, establishing their positions in a structure of power. Through Lucy's voice, we get to know their reasons for calling her so: “They said I seemed not to be a part of things, as if I didn't live in their house with them, as if they weren't like a family to me, as if I were just passing through...” (Kincaid 13). And when she tries to explain to Mariah and Lewis that actually they had become important in her life because they had appeared in one of her dreams, Lucy is misunderstood.

Then they looked at me and Mariah cleared her throat, but it was obvious from the way she did it that her throat did not need clearing at

all (...) Lewis made a chuckling noise, then said, Poor, poor Visitor. And Mariah said, Dr. Freud for Visitor, and I wondered why she said that, for I did not know who Dr. Freud was. Then they laughed in a soft, kind way. I had meant by telling them my dream that I had taken them in, because only people who were really important to me had ever shown up in my dreams. I did not know if they understood that. (Kincaid 15)

Not sharing the codes of this family and culture leads to a breakdown in communication, mostly because Mariah and Lewis seem unable to see beyond the content of Lucy's dream, and because Lucy lacks the background knowledge to actually understand the joke on Freud, which would have given her the chance to explain herself. This is one of the many instances in which Lucy points out a sort of structural impossibility to fully share her interiority with the family, even though she progressively becomes more affectionate towards Mariah and the children. It is also worth noting that both Lewis and Mariah project a patronizing attitude, which clearly establishes their position of power and Lucy's position as borderline.

Even though Lucy has always displayed a tendency to contest certain conventions, as we gather from flashbacks of the time when she lived on her Caribbean island, the new perspectives that she is exposed to in the United States enhance her critical ability to analyze interpersonal relationships as well as social phenomena. This can be seen, for example when she attends a party where there are a number of artists. While she is observing them talk about the world and themselves, Lucy makes the conscious decision of standing apart from conventional people.

They were artists. I had heard of people in this position. I had never seen an example in the place where I came from (...) Yes, I had heard of these people: they died insane, they died paupers, no one much liked them except other people like themselves (...) And I thought, I am not an artist, but I shall always like to be with the people who stand apart. I had just begun to notice that people who knew the correct way to do things such as hold a teacup, put food on a fork and bring it to their mouth without making a mess on the front of their dress—they were the people responsible for the most misery, the people least likely to end up insane or paupers. (Kincaid 98-99)

Lucy is critical of an unfair social order, which is related but not limited to the colonialism that she has experienced in person, and constructs herself as a young



woman who voluntarily resists and disregards the limits, in the form of conventions in this case, that society sets for her.

As the novel advances, she even acquires the determination and certainty that she is never going to be assimilated into the mainstream culture, as she states when she looks through the window of her own apartment after moving out of Mariah's house: "Everything I could see looked unreal to me; everything I could see made me feel I would never be part of it, never penetrate to the inside, never be taken in" (Kincaid 2002, 154). This fragment sheds some more light into the process by which she largely constructs her own identity as a young woman, who, because she has chosen to remain marginal, has the chance to observe reality from a vantage point.

Lucy's will to inhabit the borders, I believe, is best exemplified in her appropriation and resignification of her own name. Even though Lucy's tendency to rebel against the impositions placed on her appears to develop faster and more intensely as a result of her journey, this tendency seems to have been present in the girl since she was much younger back on her island. This is illustrated, for example, in her refusal to sing "Rule Britannia" in a music class at school, based on her dislike of English people, which is a small gesture of resistance, but proportional to a young girl. It is also quite revealing that, as she did not like her name, Lucy, she questioned her mother on her choice, to which the mother—tired, frustrated and pregnant with a child she did not want—answered "I named you after Satan himself. Lucy, short for Lucifer. What a botheration from the moment you were conceived" (Kincaid 2002, 152). This was for Lucy an epiphanic moment, and from then on she embraced her name as a reflection of her true self: "I went from feeling burdened and old and tired to feeling light, new, clean. I was transformed from failure to triumph. It was the moment I knew who I was" (152). The self knowledge that she acquires then becomes relevant to the idea of trespassing borders because Lucy voluntarily adopts for herself and celebrates what Satan stands for—a rebellious angel that contests authority and limits.

I will turn now to the wall-like boundaries that Lucy tries to build in order to separate herself completely from her origins and what they represent. Sharing womanhood with her mother limits her possibilities to mark herself off completely from

her. Even though a return to her mother, either material or symbolic, is impossible for Lucy, she realizes that, regardless of the fact that she has gone across the sea in order to be separated from everything that was familiar to her, the influence that her mother has on her is unavoidable. In Lucy's words:

When I was at home, in my parents' house, I used to make a list of all the things that would not follow me if I could cross the vast ocean that lay before me; I used to think that just a change in venue would banish forever from my life the things that I most despised. But that was not to be so. As each day unfolded before me I could see the sameness in everything; I could see the present take a shape—the shape of my past.

My past was my mother; I could hear her voice [...]; she spoke to me in language anyone female could understand. And I was undeniably that—female. Oh, it was a laugh, for I had spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother that I missed the whole story: I was not like my mother—I was my mother. (Kincaid 90)

Realizing and accepting this, although extremely difficult to stomach, represents a beginning in the process of dealing with it and acknowledging it as one of the many identity marking phenomena that define Lucy.

The idea of severing the ties with her homeland is closely related with an impossible return, in accordance with Chambers' ideas explored before. After the deep transformations that Lucy has gone through, even if some physical displacement to take her back to the island were possible, the process that she has undergone in terms of the reinvention of her identity is irreversible. The sea she has crossed has the potentiality to both symbolize and materialize separation. “I looked at a map. An ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but would it have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water? I could not get back” (Kincaid 9-10).

After a year of being away from her homeland, she has gained emotional and economic independence and has been exposed to new and unexpected experiences. The rigid limits that she has erected to separate herself from her past allow her to reconsider her identity in new albeit unstable terms.

It was January again; the world was thin and pale and cold again; I was making a new beginning again.

I had been a girl of whom certain things were expected, none of them too bad: a career as a nurse, for example; a sense of duty to my parents; obedience to the law and worship of convention. But in one

year of being away from home, that girl had gone out of existence. The person I had become I did not know very well. Oh, on the outside everything was familiar... But the things I could not see about myself, the things I could not put my hands on—those things had changed, and I did not yet know them well. I understood that I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist. I could not count on precision or calculation; I could only count on intuition. (Kincaid 133-4)

Thus, severing the ties with her homeland, which represents all the things she needs to leave behind, has opened up new possibilities for Lucy, which gives her the freedom to reconstruct her self in ways that are not completely under her control, as she states in the last two lines quoted. A new set of options—not available before—is offered all the same as a result of the journey and the crossing of the physical and temporal borderline which she enhances as she gets settled in the United States.

Dany's return to his village after having lived for ten years in the United States uncovers the crossing and redrawing of some borders. An example is the boundaries that separate him from the rest of the inhabitants of the village whom he does not ever remember or that he promised to write to but never did, those that “were not so lucky” as Dany to leave (Danticat 2005, 94). When he arrives, he is only bent on finding out about his parents' murderer and completely overlooks the fact that a sense of belonging can actually help him get over the past more than revenge, a knowledge he only acquires towards the end after listening to Claude's experience and grateful words towards his aunt.

There is the border that separates being a victim or being murderer that Dany has not crossed yet but considers crossing. He has observed his landlord sleeping, who possibly is the *macoute* who killed his parents, and considered suffocating him. He has come very close to doing it. Yet, that border he has still been unable to cross. The visit to his aunt originally revolves around this ethical dilemma, which he sees in black and white, only to find uncertainty and a new set of possibilities as to how to deal with loss. Through meaningful interaction with members of the community, significantly Claude who killed his father in the States and was deported, Dany seems to be able to realize that there are other possibilities of redemption.

Estina, who bears on her own body the marks of the fire, finds the possibility of questioning the very limit between a passive, agencyless victim and murderer, and instead takes on an important role in the community. Moreover, Estina, as a defeminized blind woman, is also an inhabitant of the borderlands, of the cracks of society. She's a healer, a midwife, and a mediator—she is the person that accepts Claude and negotiates his reinsertion into the community. She cannot see, yet she can, in the sense that sight is a long-established metaphor for wisdom.

In “The Book of Miracles” the most noticeable boundaries are those embodied in the main character, Anne. Anne is herself a borderline character. She stands as a translator of the past between her husband and daughter, who ignores that past. Anne herself has not committed crimes, yet she has loved and married a criminal, which places her in a mid position. This border space she occupies is fraught with tension, as she seems unable to smooth the situations with which she is faced. The encounter in church with a supposedly wanted Haitian criminal stirs conflicts and guilt in Anne.

What if it were Constant? What would she do? Would she spit in his face or embrace him, acknowledging a kinship of shame and guilt that she'd inherited by marrying her husband? [...] What right did she have to judge him? As a devout Catholic and the wife of a man like her husband, she didn't have the same freedom to condemn as her daughter did. (Danticat 2005, 81)

Anne has taken on the role of a gatekeeper, keeping everybody, mostly her daughter, out of access to her husband's past. This voluntary isolation, living at the margins of social interaction, is taking its toll on Anne.

The sight of people greeting one another around her made her wish that she and her husband had more friends beyond acquaintances from their respective businesses. [...] She was beginning to rethink the decision she and her husband had made not to get close to anyone who might ask too many questions about his past. (Danticat 2005, 76)

Anne also inhabits the borderlands between the supernatural and the earthly. These borderlands are at a certain point less conflicting for her than earthly life itself. She finds solace in the miracles she reads about and then retells to her family. Also, the fact that her husband repented of the suffering he caused, and became a loving husband and father is somehow interpreted and made acceptable by Anne as a miracle.



Manman, please, tell us about another miracle”.

*Long time ago, more than thirty years ago, in Haiti, your father worked in a prison, where he hurt many people. Now look at him. Look how calm he is. Look how patient he is. Look how he just drove forty miles to your apartment in Westchester, to pick you up for Christmas Eve Mass. That was the miracle Anne wanted to share with her daughter on this Christmas Eve night, the simple miracle of her husband's transformation, but of course she couldn't. (Danticat 2005, 72-73)*

Anne's contact with the supernatural is understood by Ka as a world view that is related to spatial differences, rather than as a personal need to place herself in a borderline zone that is less harmful for her. “There, in Haiti or the Philippines, that's where people see everything, even things they're not supposed to see. So if I see a woman's face in a rose, I think somebody drew it there, but if you see it, Manman, you think it's a miracle” (Danticat 2005, 73).

Anne's contact with the supernatural is also sometimes marked by pain, especially with regards to her own ghosts—the guilt she feels for letting her three-year-old brother drown when she was a girl. This is another secret she keeps from her daughter. She holds her breath and closes her eyes whenever she passes near a cemetery since the incident because she believes that she will see the boy “walking the earth looking for his grave” (Danticat 2005, 71). Her devotion is a kind of solace to her grief and concern at the fact that the child did not get a proper burial. In mass she imagines that at that moment.

The Virgin Mary was choosing among the sleeping children of the world for some to invite to heaven to serenade her son.

Once again, Anne thought that the Virgin would choose her young brother to go up to Heaven and sing with the choir of angels. Technically he was not sleeping, but he'd never been buried, so his spirit was somewhere out there, wondering, searching, and if he were chosen to go up to Heaven, maybe the Holy Mother would keep him there. (Danticat 2005, 77)

Anne, thus, inhabits borders constructed by guilt. On the one hand she walks along in the wall-like border that she and her husband have built around their shameful secret. On the other hand, she partly dwells in the arcane side of life, beyond empirical matter.





## Conclusions

Mobility, which for a long time in geographical disciplines was considered as mere movement between two points, is understood today in the context of power relations, and in a relational way to other phenomena, such as stasis, and other mobilities. Gender determines and is determined by mobility—mobility understood in a broad sense as a phenomenon occurring across different scales, from body movement to transnational displacement. Moreover, to apprehend this category more fully, it is necessary to consider the irreversible nature of certain displacements, such as migration.

In the works object of analysis, the effects of mobility were considered in terms of changes in the character's identity construction, as well as from a gender perspective. In the case of Lucy, the opportunity for moving out of her island are offered on terms she eventually rejects: that of completing her education as a subordinate to someone else. The effect of distancing herself from her family is the construction of homeland as a fixed point to which she refuses to return. She has reshaped her identity and moved on, and the movement has occurred at both physical and symbolic level. In Danticat's "Night Talkers", Dany and his grandmother perform different kind of movements, determined by gender and physical ability. Dany's movement is constructed as epic, whereas Estina's movements are modest and constant, careful and sometimes dependent on somebody else due to her blindness. Also, Dany's return to Haiti, motivated by his need to revisit the past and find answers as to his parents' death, shows a homeland he wrongly believes to have remained static, and an aunt who has moved on and overcome the loss of her loved ones. The widespread misconception of a place called Home, kept intact by women, who are also supposed to remain fixed, is thus shattered in this story. In "The Book of Miracles" there is an interaction between long distance movement, that of exile, and the everyday, low key displacements performed by Anne and the former Haitian torturer in the United States. Their avoidance of Haitians in Brooklyn who may ask questions or recognize them from their previous life back on the island keeps the characters' movements reduced to a minimum, mostly



within an enclosed home.

Borders in these texts are crossed, modified or erected as the result of identity mobilities. Borders, here understood beyond their materiality, show their symbolic and socially constructed nature, thus understanding them as fluid and heterogeneous zones, more than narrow lines. Seen in this way, borders limit and cut across all aspects of culture. In Kincaid's novel, borders are explored in their ambiguity and emancipatory potential. Lucy becomes willfully borderline, for example, by remaining in the United States but outside of the mainstream white culture, as well as embracing her name as the female form of Lucifer. At the same time, she erects rigid borders that separate her from her past and her homeland. In "Night Talkers", the distance that separates Haiti from the United States is also resignified. Borders are crossed again by Dany after many years, only to find answers that he was not looking for. His aunt provides ambiguous, half-way answers to his direct interrogation about avenging his parents's death and instead provides the answers by means of her practices and interaction with members of the community. As a full member of the community, she nevertheless inhabits borders due to her blindness and wisdom, living between shadows and light. Anne, from "The Book of Miracles" inhabits the borderlands but she plays the role of gatekeeper, detaching other subjects from access to her and her husband's dark pasts of guilt—her neglect of her little brother and her husband's past as a *macoute*. However, to release from the load of this role that she has taken on, simultaneously, she appropriates the border zone between the earthly and the supernatural, clinging fervently to her belief in miracles.

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## Notas

1 Of special interest to the present analysis is Doreen Massey's in *Space, Place, and Gender* (2001). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

2 This and the following quotes from Lotman are my translations into English of a Spanish translation.

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