Travel, Permanence and Identity in Cristina Garcia's Dreaming in Cuban and Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy

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RESUMO:
Em Dreaming in Cuban, Cristina Garcia traça a história de uma família cubana ao longo de três gerações. Os contextos cultural e histórico contribuem a desenvolver os temas centrais do exílio, a memória, a identidade e as relações de família. Em Lucy, a protagonista e narradora viaja desde uma pequena ilha caribenha para os Estados Unidos para trabalhar como au pair durante a transição da adolescência para a idade adulta. Esta pesquisa procura analisar a construção e desenvolvimento da identidade individual de Lucy, protagonista e narradora de Lucy, e Celia del Pino e Pilar Puente, uma avó e sua neta em Dreaming in Cuban. As seguintes perguntas guiaram o análise: existe uma relação entre o processo de construção da identidade e a dimensão espacial? De ser assim, como se apresenta esta relação em cada um dos personagens? Uma possível resposta é que a identidade individual em Lucy, Pilar e Celia se constrói em relação com o espaço, particularmente em termos de permanência, viagem, e seu consequente cruzamento de fronteiras.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:
identidade – migração – permanência - fronteira

ABSTRACT:
In Dreaming in Cuban, Cristina Garcia traces the story of a Cuban family across three generations. The cultural and historical contexts help develop the central themes of exile, memory, identity and family relationships. In Kincaid’s Lucy, the protagonist and narrator travels from a Caribbean island to the United States to work as an au pair during the transition between her adolescence and her adult life. The present work aims to analyze the construction and development of the individual identity in Lucy, the narrator and protagonist in Lucy, and Celia del Pino and Pilar Puente, a grandmother and her granddaughter in García’s novel. This analysis has been guided by the following questions. Is there a relationship between this identity building process and the spatial dimension? If so, how does this relationship manifest itself in each of the characters? A possible answer to these interrogations is that individual identity in Lucy, Pilar and Celia is constructed in relation to space, particularly in terms of permanence, travel and its consequent crossing of borders.

KEYWORDS:
identity – migrancy – permanence - borders
INTRODUCTION

The themes of exile and a search for roots seem to be recurrent in Caribbean literature, as West Indians are influenced by many cultures, languages, and movement in search for a better education, job opportunities, and so forth (KING, 1995, p. 2). Such is the case in the novels object of the present analysis, Dreaming in Cuban (1992) by Cristina García, and Lucy (1990) by Jamaica Kincaid.

My interest in exploring these two novels in particular arises mainly from the fact that, although the authors belong to different traditions and mother cultures, the topics and experiences that inform their works quite converge in several aspects. This is in agreement with, for example, George Lamming’s view of the Caribbean that strategically unifies the area as a form of resistance against the long colonial period of political fragmentation, drawing on the common history and experience of the peoples in the West Indies, namely slavery, a plantation system, oppression, and encounters of uprooted cultures.

In Dreaming in Cuban, the author traces the story of a Cuban family across three generations, with Cuba and the United States as settings. The cultural and historical contexts presented serve as background and help develop the central themes of exile, memory, identity and family relationships. In Kincaid’s Lucy, the protagonist and narrator, after whom the novel is named, travels from a Caribbean island to the United States to work as an au pair during the transition between her adolescence and her adult life. This novel approaches similar aspects to those dealt with in Dreaming in Cuban, but the point of departure is more intimate—the interiority of the narrator—and from there the cultural and historical contexts are explored. Thus, the story unfolds in the opposite direction from that of García’s text.

The present work aims to analyze the construction and development of the individual identity in Lucy Josephine Potter, the narrator of Lucy, and Celia del Pino and Pilar Puente, a grandmother and her granddaughter in García’s novel. It is important to mention, however, that even though this work just focuses on three characters, their identities are constructed more or less directly in interaction with other members of the family and the community, which is a necessary and natural consequence of the social nature of the identity building process. This analysis has been guided by the following questions. Is there a relationship between this identity building process and the spatial dimension? If so, how does this relationship manifest itself in each of the characters? In answer to these interrogations, the possibility that I have explored is that individual identity in Lucy, Pilar and Celia is constructed in relation to space, particularly in terms of permanence, travel and its consequent crossing of borders.

The development of this thesis is divided into three sections for the sake of organization. The first one presents the theoretical framework on which I base my analysis, which includes the concept of Thirddspace, the border, and a characterization of the identity building process, among other ideas. The second and third sections are devoted to the analysis proper, guided by the concepts introduced in section 1. Section 2, entitled “Three Characters Marked by Permanence and Traveling”, deals with how the journey and permanence define the construction of identity carried out by Pilar, Celia and Lucy, and section 3, “Going across/Inhabiting Borders”, focuses on the Third spatial borders produced as a result of and in relation to migration and the circumstances that lead to it.

1. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON IDENTITY AND ITS CONNECTIONS WITH MIGRATION AND BORDERS

To approach the topic of identity proposed in the thesis statement, I have focused on Madan Sarup’s work Identity culture and the postmodern world, as it provides a comprehensive view on identity and its relationship with several theories, disciplines and phenomena. Of particular interest to this paper is his conception of identity not as a fixed, given trait that human beings possess, but as an ever incomplete process that takes place in interaction with other people and institutions such as school, family and so forth. In other words, as will be shown below, the three characters under analysis develop their identities in a non-linear way that does not suggest closure but constant mobility, in agreement with Sarup’s assertion that “...identity is not an inherent quality of a person but (...) it arises in interaction with others and the focus [of current research] is on the processes by which identity is constructed” (SARUP, 1996, p. 14). Of the numerous processes that contribute to identity building, I will focus on permanence, the journey and its consequent crossing of borders.

In Chapter 1 “The Home, the Journey and the Border”, Sarup explores the notion of home, providing no final answer to his initial question of “…what makes a place home?” (SARUP, 1996, p.1). This lack of a definite, closed answer is probably an accurate and consistent representation that allows him to connect home and identity in terms of the heterogeneity, incompleteness and mobility that characterize both concepts. For example, Sarup enumerates traditional and widespread beliefs associated with the home, rendered in doxic knowledge, objects or intangible concepts that make you feel home, such as heirlooms, pieces of music, or pleasant memories as well as uncomfortable feelings—the Freudian notion of the female genital organ as an unheimlich place, which is at the same time paradoxically our first home. And yet, as it has been stated, he avoids reaching a final conclusion as to what home is. In other words, he avoids a fixed, rigid definition that might leave out any cultural or temporal aspect. What he suggests, though tentatively, is “that the concept of home seems to be tied in some way to the notion of identity” (SARUP, 1996, p. 3).

Another interesting way in which we could conceptualize the home is provided by Chambers in Migrancy, culture, identity (1994). Because migrancy requires the mind to open to the world—which results in an absence of both divine and secular protection, in uncertainty—the home
should no longer be considered a fixed place. We should consider the home in a sense that means to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movements of the languages that constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging. (CHAMBERS, 1994, p. 4)

The destabilizing view that this author proposes reinforces the view, also held by the other authors cited here and which this work adheres to, of a cultural, dynamic and never final—and even elusive—construction of places and space.

Resuming Madan Sarup, closely connected with the idea of feeling or being at home is the search for one’s “roots”. Of particular relevance to this paper is his assertion that the learning about one’s roots (especially those of subjects that have gone through displacement and have not been able to become established) is a way of gaining a renewed pride in one’s identity (SARUP, 1996, p. 3), as will later be illustrated in the analysis of Pilar’s search for her origins and Lucy’s need to sever the links with hers in order to become her own self.

A subject’s identity is transformed, among other factors, through the journey (SARUP, 1996, p.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” (SARUP, 1996, p.6). In short, traveling has consequences for the traveler’s identity, but the transformations that take place in the subject can be assets. Chambers’s contribution to this point is 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, 1994, p. 5)

Another notion that relates to identity is the border. Sarup states that “…identities are not free-floating; they are limited by borders and boundaries” (SARUP, 1996, p. 3) that are established by groups in order “to limit the type of behavior within a defined cultural territory” (SARUP, 1996, p. 11). Like Anzaldua, 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.

Inhabiting the borderlands as an ideal state is Gloria Anzaldua’s proposal in Borderlands/La frontera (1987), and the characters analyzed here can be considered examples of this state. Anzaldua departs from the physical border separating the United States and Mexico to explore and deconstruct other either/or 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 Chicanas, Anzaldua’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”. (ANZALDUA, 1987, p. 25)

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

Proposed in Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places (1996), Edward Soja’s “critical strategy of ‘thirding-as-Othering’” (SOJA, 1996, p. 5) is key to the present analysis, as it involves the inclusion of a third element in traditionally binary oppositions. He does not intend to entirely dismiss binarisms, though, but to open new alternatives by drawing “selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories” (SOJA, 1996, p. 5). Of the critical “thirdings” that he introduces, Thirdspace is the most relevant to the present analysis. Spatiality, which together with historicality and sociality conform the trialectics of being, is understood by Soja as socially constructed and as the result of the interaction of First, Second and Thirdspace. Firstspace is the perceived space, that is to say, space in its materiality which can be measured and apprehended through the senses. Secondspace is the conceived space; it is the domain of “scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers” and “is also tied to the relations of production and, especially, to the order or design that they impose” (SOJA, 1996, pp. 66-67). Thirdspace is the lived space, “the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (SOJA, 1996, p. 67), which encompasses the other two. Soja also refers to it as the space of representation. This third element that completes the triad of spatiality is given strategic preeminence because by combining the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the
other a priori, these lived spaces of representation are thus
the terrain for the generation of ‘counterspaces,’ spaces of
resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from
their subordinate, peripheral, marginalized positioning.

Thus, the idea of traveling to or staying in a place, the
distance separating the characters and the crossing of
borders are all related to the notion of Thirdspace in that
they can be better appreciated in all their complexity and
metaphorical depth as places in which the marginalized
subjects can go through the process of constructing their
identity.

In agreement with Soja, Sarup also understands that
places are socially constructed and never static. Sarup,
from a Marxist viewpoint, emphasizes that the fact that
places are always changing is greatly the result of class
struggle over the representation of these places. Even though I am not going to adopt a Marxist approach to carry
out my analysis, his contribution is interesting because it
highlights the power relations in the construction of space.
Also, he sees great ambiguity in the meaning of the word
‘place,’ ambiguity that he equates with enormous richness
(SARUP, 1996, p. 4), which happens to be the case in the
novels that I analyze below.

2. THREE CHARACTERS MARKED BY
PERMANENCE AND TRAVELING

To begin this section, I consider it important to clarify
that journey and permanence are not understood here
as opposite concepts, but as interplaying and coexisting at
times. Permanence is, for example, as important to Celia
in order to build her identity as traveling is important to Lucy
or Pilar. Also, in the case of Celia, her physical permanence
on the island throughout her life does not prevent other
types of journey more metaphorical in nature, such as her
journey into insanity, from which she returns wiser. Even
dough dynamism is characteristic of the identity building
process, and even though Lucy and Pilar are mainly mi-
grant characters, their travel is constructed as such because
there is someone else whose position is fixed—there is
Lucy’s mother, who Lucy moves away from, and there is
Celia, who Pilar moves towards.

The way in which these women 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.
On the other hand, Celia’s choice seems to be more limited
due to political circumstances, but she embraces these
same political circumstances, and decides to stay and con-
tribute to the Cuban revolution. Pilar’s leaving Cuba at a
very young age with her parents is a consequence of the
revolution, as probably is her decision to leave the island
again and return to the United States after her encounter
with Celia. In all of the cases we will see how the range
of decisions regarding permanence or travel is limited by
both a personal inclination and a context which is external
to the characters.

CELIA

As stated above, one of the aspects that influences
the identity construction process in the characters is per-
manence. This is mainly the case with Celia, whose life
is most directly defined by it. Her permanence is both a
consequence of the revolution, of being deserted by loved
ones, and by a willingness to stay in order to make herself
useful to others. She stayed in Cuba when the people
she was the closest to left, and was always there to comfort
anybody that should need her. In her youth, Celia was
deserted by her Spanish lover, Gustavo. She became very
depressed and it took her a long time to get over the break
up, but eventually she regained her strength and married
Jorge del Pino.

During her first months of marriage, her husband
spends most of the time traveling and Celia has to stay
behind. She has to put up with loneliness and abuse from
her sister and mother-in-law, which affect her greatly. La-
ter in the novel, we get to know through the ghost of Jorge
del Pino that he left her alone for long periods of time on
purpose, as punishment for her having loved the Spaniard
before him. Getting pregnant does not make Celia any hap-
pier and she decides to leave for Spain if the baby she is
carrying is a boy. However, if she has a girl, which turns
out to be the case, she will stay because “she would not
abandon a daughter to this life, but train her to read the co-

mments of blood and numbers in men’s eyes, to understand
the morphology of survival” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 42). Even
though this training is something she cannot do because
she becomes mentally unstable for some time, her resolu-
tion shows her willingness to stay and struggle for those
who may need it.

At the beginning of the Revolution, Lourdes, Celia’s
eldest daughter, and her husband migrate to the United
States, taking their two-year-old daughter Pilar with them.
The departure of her first granddaughter makes Celia very
sad, but she stays behind, as a sort of lighthouse that will
later guide Pilar back to her origins.

Many years later, Jorge gets cancer and migrates to
the United States for medical treatment. One more time
Celia stays behind. Because she stays, she is capable of help-
ing her daughter Felicia, maddened by syphilis, and her
grandchildren. She is there for her son, when he returns
ill and exhausted from a very long absence, and nurses
him back to health. She also has devoted herself comple-
tely to the revolution. For example, she volunteers to work
in the sugarcane fields, and becomes actively involved in
community life through participation in public posts. The
job at which she excels is being a civilian judge, an occu-
pation that she greatly enjoys because “she feels part of a
great historical unfolding” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 111). The job
mainly consists of helping settle disputes that have to do,
for example, with family affairs. She seems to have gained
great wisdom through the years and has become a respected as well as nursing member of the community.

Celia comforts her daughter Felicia in the last moments of her life and becomes very upset at her death but a few days later, Pilar and Lourdes finally arrive in Cuba. Pilar is the one who can help Celia heal the wounds in her self—Celia cannot even recognize her body—and who can fulfill the mission that her grandmother has set for her, which is the necessary closure for both of them. In Pilar’s words: “Women who outlive their daughters are orphans, Abuela tells me. Only their granddaughters can save them, guard their knowledge like the first fire” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 222). Again, Celia stays behind when her daughter and granddaughter leave, though this time things are slightly different. After passing on to Pilar the role of story keeper, and not having anyone else to look after or wait for, Celia decides to disappear into the sea.

Having said that permanence is essential to Celia’s identity, it is important to highlight that the journey is also of the utmost importance in the construction of her identity. As it has already been established, Celia does not physically leave the island; her journeys are into and out of insanity. In accordance with what happens to the hunter in traditional cultures, Celia becomes wiser as a result of her journey. The figure of the hunter is ambiguous because he is familiar with both the community to which he belongs and the outside world. “The hunter creates passages between the socialized and the natural world. By going from one world to the other, he can have access to extraordinary powers and put them into practice” (BALANDIER, 2003, p. 95). The natural world for the hunter is analogous to the uncivilized, chaotic world of insanity for Celia, and, just like the hunter, her first hand experience of what is beyond culture and conventions helps her to develop capabilities and sensibilities inaccessible to most members of the community, which can in turn be considered analogous to the hunter’s “extraordinary powers”.

When Gustavo leaves Celia to return to Spain, she is left in bad shape in terms of emotional health, takes to her bed and stays there for eight months. That period of her life is referred to as a “housebound exile” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 37), thus drawing on two semantic aspects of the word **exile**: it is a journey, and it is involuntary, caused by force. Also, after marrying Jorge, the circumstances in which she is made to live, as it was just mentioned, cause her to experience a nervous breakdown and be institutionalized. Eventually, she is able to return to sanity and lead an independent life, and through the experience she has gained, she is able to help others by giving herself to them. The full healing of her self and, therefore, her complete return from insanity, only take place when Pilar is born—although the child does not remain on the island for a long time.

**PILAR**

Pilar retrieves her origin and her family’s history through traveling to Cuba. Her journey is more conventional in nature than Celia’s, as it involves physical displacement. However, as in the case of the hunter, through this trip, she gains knowledge about her self, while at the same time becomes the depositary of the family’s history—which is somehow the equivalent to the hunter’s access to “extraordinary powers”.

As a teenager, Pilar attempts to get to Cuba by boat from Miami, and escapes from home—so great is her need to see her grandmother. Later, we are told, she travels to Italy and spends a semester there studying Art. She even thinks about artists who have traveled widely and reaches the conclusion that “you have to live in the world to say anything meaningful about it” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 179). Let us not forget that Pilar’s family exile in the United States has caused her a sense of alienation and created a need to recuperate her roots. “A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration...” (ASHCROFT, 1995, p. 9). Thus, it is this first trip that she—involuntarily—takes, that has severed the bonds with her native land and family and caused the sense of incompleteness in the girl. No matter how much she travels around the world, returning to Cuba at the right moment is the only way in which her eroded self can be restored. This makes her final journey to meet her *Abuela* all the more complex because it does not involve physical displacement only. It is also a way of building a bridge between her past, her present and her future, giving continuity to her sense of self through space and time. Cuba is a *Thirdspace* for Pilar, a space in which she has the possibility of constructing a new, more complete self. However, just going there physically cannot do the trick by itself. In fact, before leaving, she has to go through certain rites of purification and become highly perceptive. She does this and she eventually “can hear fragments of people’s thoughts, glimpse scraps of the future” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 216). Though there seems to be no disappointment in her, during her stay in Cuba, she realizes that she does not belong on the island. Pilar has returned to her roots to recuperate the foundations upon which to build a more integrated identity, as was hinted by the owner of the *botánica* she visited in New York (GARCIA, 1992, p. 200). She also has a mission now—to guard the family’s memory. Both events are directly related to the encounter with her true self, which was her most urgent need. Now she is ready to go back to the United States, wiser and more complete.

**LUCY**

As it was stated above, Lucy, at the age of 18, migrates from the Caribbean to the United States to work as an *au pair* for a wealthy family. The time period that spans during the novel is one year, which is key 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. Thus, it is interesting to note that the role of the journey in Lucy somehow differs from
... 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, p. 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 Gaugain 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, 2002, p. 95)

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

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. This independence and new knowledge have allowed her to question and rebuild her identity:

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, 2002, pp. 133-4)

Thus, severing the ties with her homeland, representing all the things she needs to leave behind, has opened up new possibilities for Lucy, which give her the freedom to reconstruct herself 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 physical and temporal distance that she has put between herself and her home culture. Also, the idea of severing the ties with her homeland is closely related with an impossible return, in accordance with Chambers’ ideas explored in section 1. 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 exploration of the three female characters in relation to the displacement and permanence has shed some light into the process through which they construct their identities. Even though the their mobility is what seems to stand out in the process, I would like to insist on the fact that journeys do have a point of departure and sometimes a point of arrival, which are marked by those who stay. Lucy needs to migrate in order to leave behind all the constraints that her mother stands for and acquire some self knowledge and independence. Pilar’s journey is motivated by a need to return to her origins, where her grandmother awaits as a fixed point. She eventually needs to come back to the United States but this experience has marked her deeply. Celia, the character probably most defined by permanence, projects the light that Pilar, as well as other members of the family, can turn to for comfort. But she has also been on her own painful journeys, which have marked her identity. Thus, no matter if the characters return to a fixed point of departure, it is never a round trip.

3. GOING ACROSS / INHABITING BORDERS

A DISREGARD FOR BOUNDARIES

A journey, most of the times, involves crossing borders understood in a broad sense. This is so in the three characters that are the object of this analysis. These three women in different ways 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 novels, which, as I have just mentioned, exceed the mere political divisions between countries in agreement with Gloria Anzaldúa’s position.

As was analyzed in the previous section, moving to the United States provides Lucy with the opportunity to cut he 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, 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, 2002, p. 13). And when she tries to explain that actually Mariah and Lewis 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, 2002, p. 15)

Not sharing the codes of this family and the 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 a marginal, borderline subject.

However, Lucy does not regret but embrace the marginal status that she has acquired due to migration. Going back to Chambers’s 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” (ANZALDUA, 1987, p. 25), inhabiting the borderlands is not necessarily cozy.

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, 2002, pp. 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 presents 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 conscious 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, p. 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.

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, p. 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” (KINCAID, 2002, p. 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.

Pilar is also an inhabitant of the borderlands, which, as in Lucy’s case, represent a space of resistance from where she questions authority. One of the ways in which Pilar inhabits the borderlands is as a rebellious painter and musician, questioning mainstream culture in her works of art and in the music she listens to and plays. As a concrete instance in which she displays this resistance, we can refer to the painting of the Statue of Liberty that she makes for her mother’s bakery to celebrate Independence Day. After reluctantly fulfilling Lourdes’s request, she paints a controversial version of the monument. Her version has a safety pin pierced through the nose, the background is filled with dark barbed wire and at the base of the statue she writes the punk motto “I’m a mess”. Not without some fear, she challenges her mother’s and her community’s values and trespasses the limits that have been set for her by upsetting the social order.

With regards to Celia, her trespassing of limits takes place mostly when she is young, but what is most significant regarding her rebellious youth is how this creates a space of encounter many years later with her granddaughter living far away. This is because Pilar has inherited from Celia, among other traits, a disregard for boundaries.

I feel much more connected to Abuela than to Mom, even though I haven’t seen my grandmother in seventeen years. We don’t speak at night anymore but she’s left me a legacy nonetheless—a love for the sea and the smoothness of pearls, and an appreciation of music and words, sympathy for the underdog, and a disregard for boundaries. Even in silence, she gives me the confidence to do what I believe is right, to trust my own perceptions. (GARCIA, 1992, p. 176)

According to the quote, both Pilar and her grandmother share a taste for music, among other preferences, which at certain times becomes an escape valve for both of them. When Celia returns to her home after the period she spent in the mental institution, she is given a piano but forbidden to play Debussy, as the doctors agree his “restless style” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 8) can affect her still frail psyche. However, against all prohibitions she plays Debussy anyway when her husband is not home. Likewise, Pilar buys a bass guitar after she breaks up with her college sweetheart and teaches herself how to play the instrument as a way to ease the pain. Grandmother and granddaughter meet in all these coincidences which they find in the cracks of the system. These cracks, their lived spaces, are caused by their transgressions and Pilar seems to find it reassuring that her grandmother before her has defied the roles established for her as well.

Pilar’s disregard for boundaries, the boundaries of what the mainstream culture, and by extension her mother, considers to be acceptable, is also exemplified by Pilar’s criticism of Armstrong’s words on arriving on the moon. We get to know about this through Lourdes’s retrieving of that memory.

Lourdes suddenly remembers how her daughter had ridiculed Armstrong’s first words on the moon. “He had months to think up something and that’s all he could say? Pilar was only ten years old and already mocking everything. Lourdes slapped her for being disrespectful, but it made no difference to her daughter. Pilar was immune to threats. She placed no value on normal things so it was impossible to punish her. Even now, Pilar is not afraid of pain or of losing anything. It’s this indifference that is most maddening. (GARCIA, 1992, p. 128)

It is interesting to note that Pilar is rebellious, showing again her necessity and strong will power to inhabit the Thirdspace in which she can find the voice to contest the conventions imposed on her.

Pilar, Celia and Lucy, each in her own way, inhabit an “interstitial passage” that allows them to escape “fixed identifications” (BHABHA, 1995, p. 4). In this case, the in between in their inner and physical existence can be equated with Soja’s notion of Thirspace, which we took up as a basis for our analysis, in that it is a rich soil for defying given notions and fixed identities imposed on them.

The Sea
But the skin of the earth is seamless.
The sea cannot be fenced,
el mar does not stop at borders. (ANZALDUA, 1987, p.25)

This epilogue highlights the artificiality 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. The sea, due to its depth and dynamism, can be considered a very special kind of border. Its very nature allows it to be considered both a barrier and a means of communication, and either implies a strategic choice. So I would like to focus now on the sea as a Thirdspatial border.

For Lucy, the sea stands for the distance that she has put between her present and her old life. This distance between her past on the island and present in the United States is not the result of physical displacement alone; it also stands for the emotional separation that she seems to need in order to be able to question the expectations bestowed on her by her family and society, and build her identity in her own terms. Thus, the mere physical distance, the material space, that the sea represents is irrelevant. There is no returning, in agreement with Chambers’s statement. This is something that Lucy perceives quite early in the novel: “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, 2002, pp. 9-10).

Even though a return is impossible for her, later in the novel Lucy 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, 2002, p. 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 sea as a Thirdspatial border is also taken up by Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban*. It is at the same time what connects and separates her from Celia, and, unlike Lucy, who needs to put this big stretch of water between her and her mother so as to be able to build her identity, Pilar needs to go across it in her search for roots from which to build her identity.

> It is interesting when she observes how the sea could act as a cultural lubricant to avoid the instantaneous displacement and shock of reaching Havana from Miami by plane in a very short time. The way in which the voyages to the old colonies were made, wave by wave, seems to provide an interstice, an in-between, that allows the mind to adjust to what is going on in a better way than an abrupt arrival by plane. “Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it all” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 219). The paradox presented here of a place that is so close, yet so far, clearly illustrates the idea of Thirdspace. The lived space must come into the picture, as the measures and the abstractions of spaces alone cannot account for the experiences of the people that inhabit it.

Celia finds relief in the sea as an ambiguous, ever changing border. In one of her unsent letters to Gustavo, Celia’s Spanish lover, she refers to the fact that she is bound to live on an island. However, she does not see it as something completely negative. She’s grateful “that the tides rearrange the borders”. This gives her the illusion of dynamism, which is necessary to cancel out familiarity, perceived by Celia as “insistent and deadly”. She also feels that living “within boundaries plotted by priests and politicians would be the only thing more intolerable” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 99). At this point in her life, she has just left the mental asylum and she feels that the powerful are “stealing our geography”. However, due to the passing of time and the revolution, her conception of the sea takes a slightly different turn. Her part of the beach becomes familiar and friendly, and she takes great pride in guarding the cost with her binoculars to be ready in case of an American invasion.

For Celia and Pilar, the sea is a physical barrier that stands between them, but both like it nonetheless, partly because their communication transcends physical obstacles. In terms of plot, the sea is a thread that binds Pilar and Celia together and contributes to the cyclical quality of the novel and their search for some kind of closure, which is at the same time a point of departure. Pilar finally crosses the sea to see her grandmother, an event for which she has prepared carefully and for a long time. She rounds off this preparation by taking baths with specific herbs that she got from an old santera and acquiring a new sensitivity. In Cuba, she is reunited with her grandmother, and eventually starts dreaming in Spanish, which shows the gradual integration of her previously alienated self. When she crosses the sea again to return to the United States, she does so with a more complete sense of self. She has recovered her origins and the history of the family, and by extension, of a people.

Celia’s death by drowning suggested at the end of the story is foreshadowed at the beginning, when her husband’s ghost appears on the shore. On this occasion, she walks into the sea and floats on her back, and memories of her Spanish lover come to her while she hears music from beneath the waves. When “a sudden wave engulfed her (…) Celia is tempted to relax and drop” (GARCIA, 1992, p. 7) but she remembers her duty to guard the coast that night and this gives her the strength to go on with her life. Long before that, when she had decided to die because she could not put up with being separated from her lover, a santera told her that there was a wet landscape in her palm, and thus, in the end, the sea claims her to itself. Her story thus begins and ends with the peaceful abandonment into the deep sea. After the departure of her granddaughter, her duty has been fulfilled and there is no reason why she should not relax and drop this time, first releasing her pearl earrings that extinguish slowly as fireflies, just like her.

As we can see from the previous analysis, the particular characteristics of the sea make it very productive as Thirdspatial border, and its richness lies in the very ambiguity it evokes. For Lucy it functions as a metaphor of the separation from her origins and at the same time as a remainder of the impossibility of this separation. For Pilar and Celia the sea is a fluid connector between Havana and the United States which, however, cannot ameliorate the fact that these places are different worlds. At the same time, the sea is presented as a backbone around which the stories of these women are bound together.
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

I wish now to gather and evaluate the most salient points that have been brought up in the previous analysis. First, I would like to point out that traveling and permanence are not opposite concepts but both are aspects of the same phenomenon. In the case of Pilar, Celia represents the point to which she must direct herself in order to come to terms with her identity. Celia stands for permanence in the novel, mainly for Celia to restore her roots and construct her identity from there, but at different levels she is also mobile and incomplete until the moment she dies. Lucy leaves her mother and her homeland, which stand for the permanence and insistence of the conventions she does not accept, never to return. Traveling away from her origins has offered her new perspectives from which to build her identity in her own terms.

Regarding boundaries, Lucy, Pilar and Celia cannot come to terms with their true selves the beginning mainly due to restrictions imposed on them in terms of staying within the limits of who they are supposed to be. All three of them embrace the marginal status that arises from their unconventional tastes, interests and behavior, and their marginality becomes a site of resistance. Gradually and through an appropriation of borderland spaces, they can claim the right to be unique and fluid. Pilar carries out acts of rebellion that make her go across the limits imposed on her by society and family, as Celia did. Celia and Pilar even in the distance, meet in the borderlands where they contest the impositions that do not allow them to search within themselves and construct their identity. Lucy, through the exposure to new viewpoints that the journey has facilitated for her, purposely decides to place herself on the borderlands by remaining acutely critical of mainstream culture both in her homeland and the United States, and by integrating this as part of her identity when she accepts and celebrates being called Lucy, as a short form for Lucifer.

The sea as Thirdspace, ambiguous border has important implications for the characters analyzed. The vastness of the ocean proves to be relative, as it can also be insignificant for the inner experience of the women. This vastness becomes ridiculously small or non-existent for Lucy when she realizes the impossibility of returning home, or even escaping her mother’s branding, and for Pilar and Celia when the sea is the vehicle for the girl’s return to Cuba. Also, for these two characters in García’s novel, the sea knits their stories together.

Thus our initial proposal that the interplay between the journey and permanence, and the crossing of borders that takes place as a consequence, are phenomena that shape the identity building process in Pilar, Lucy and Celia, though not the only ones. Further research on identity in the novels could be devoted to exploring if and how other circumstances affect this never ending process.

Finally, I would like to add that the social level, the way in which the characters need to migrate and cross borders of many sorts seems to denounce the personal sense of alienation which is caused by the restrictions imposed on subjects to circulate—in the sense of the concrete impossibility to freely move across both geographical borders and borders that have to do with belonging to categories. There is always some pressure to conform and stay within one’s limits. Through the analysis provided, it has been shown how necessary it is to cross and inhabit borders in order to be able to constantly construct one’s identity and achieve a sense of fulfillment.

NOTE

1 The translation of the quotation from Balandier into English is my own.

REFERENCE: