Negotiating Foreignness Across the U.S.–Canadian Border: Narrating the Francoeur Family's Everyday Life in David Plante's *The Family* and *The Native*

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Résumé de l'article

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*Negotiating Foreignness Across the
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Abstract

*This article analyses David Plante’s novels *The Family* (1978) and *The Native* (1988), dealing with instances of Franco-American identity formation in the context of contemporary Providence, Rhode Island, and using the theme of foreignness to discuss the negotiation of cultural identity across the forty-ninth parallel. Plante’s characters dwell at the interstices of the abstract and the concrete, the foreign and the familiar, the global and the local, the borderless and the clear-cut. Immigration is seen in the context of a larger global movement of capital and labour across borders placed within contemporary discourses on globalization and an increasingly borderless world. The material realities within the borders of the parish in Providence are reset around Franco-American subjects as the Francoeur family navigates spaces and debates their cultural integration and social mobility within the adoptive country.*

Résumé

*Cet article contient une analyse de deux romans de David Plante : *The family* (1978) et *The Native* (1988). Il traite du processus de formation de l’identité franco-américaine dans le contexte de la ville moderne de Providence, au Rhode Island. J’utilise le thème de l’étranger pour discuter de la négociation de l’identité culturelle des personnages au-delà du quarante-cinquième parallèle. Mon argument est que les personnages de Plante résident à l’intersection de l’abstrait et du concret, de l’étranger et du familier, du mondial et du local, du sans-frontières et des frontières clairement définies. J’aborde en premier lieu la question de l’immigration comme un exemple de mouvement mondial plus large de capitaux et de main-d’œuvre entre les pays. Je situe l’immigration dans les discours contemporains sur la mondialisation et un monde de plus en plus sans frontières. J’analyse ensuite les conditions de vie matérielles des personnages telles que décrites par David Plante à l’intérieur des limites d’un quartier de Providence. Je soutiens que les frontières sont redessinées autour des sujets franco-américains au fur et à mesure que ces derniers explorent les lieux et discutent de leur intégration culturelle et de leur mobilité sociale à l’intérieur du territoire de leur pays d’adoption.*

Introduction

The Family and *The Native* are set in Providence, the capital city of the state of Rhode Island, and portray the contemporary cultural and material realities of Quebecois immigrant families there. The history of Quebecois communities in the United States dates back to what is now known as the “Quebec diaspora.” Starting in the 1840s and continuing until the Great Depression of the 1930s, many Quebecers immigrated to the U.S. and many settled in Providence, Rhode Island. These waves of immigration were motivated largely by the growing industrial development of New England at the time. *The Family* and *The Native* narrate the particularities of the lives of both first- and second-generation Quebecois-Americans. *The Native* also explores the experience of third-generation Quebecois-Americans through the character of Antoinette, Philip’s daughter. Philip is a central character in both novels. In *The Family*, he appears as the son of Jim Francoeur and a member of the Francoeur family; in *The Native*, he appears as a husband and a father himself. In the Francoeur family series, *The Family* and *The Native* share perspective and focus, both shedding light on the immigrant experience in relation to the social institution of the family. In both novels, the setting of almost every scene is the family house; characters from outside the Francoeur family rarely find their way into the novels. Of the novels in the Francoeur trilogy,¹ *The Family* focuses most on the common family life of the Francoeurs rather than on their individual stories. The focus in *The Native* is Philip’s family while in *The Family* it is Jim’s larger family. Besides Philip, the characters of Philip’s mother Reena and his wife Jenny appear in both novels. The connections and disconnections between both novels reveal much about the different challenges that immigration brings to family culture across the generations.

Plante’s style is mostly descriptive and the novels substitute the classical plot lines with an ongoing narration of the daily routines and life patterns of the Francoeurs. Readers do not witness big events with climaxes and resolutions but rather the detailed minutia of the characters’ lives. The perspective is that of a documentary filmmaker behind a camera capturing full dialogues but without narration or commentary. In this way, Plante’s texts align themselves with the tradition of the New Novel, where the narrator describes the characters’ thoughts and feelings but abstains from commenting on them. As Alain Robbe-Grillet asserts in *For a New Novel*, “It is the commentaries that will be left elsewhere; in the face of his [the character’s] irrefutable presence, they will seem useless, superfluous, even improper” (22). The absence of transformational events and the absence of the writer’s comments draw the readers’ attention away from the representational aspect of the novels and plunge them into the details of the daily lives of the characters. This article examines the unfolding of the lives of the Francoeurs and their connections to the general context of contemporary Providence focussing on the importance of the U.S.–Canadian border to the characters’ negotiation of their sociocultural identities. The first part of the essay

analyses Plante's portrayal of the porousness of the border and the different cross-border operations and then moves to discussing the particularities of the lives of the characters in Providence and their rootedness in the local.

Border Crossing Mechanisms

Daniel, one of the Francoeur brothers and the most prominent character in *The Family*, appears in most scenes and the narrative often takes us into his inner thoughts and perceptions. He muses in *The Family*, "The Island too was a body. It was beneath him, a body, the mass of intertwining roots veins, the embedded stones bones, the water trickling through it blood" (167), suggesting a parallel between the human body and the land. Daniel's experience of his own body more often than not is filtered through a sense of anxiety and blockage. He experiences uneasiness and tries "flexing and positioning his body [...] he want[s] to go onward and upward" (37). Elsewhere, he feels a constant desire to "expand outward" (43). When read as a metaphor for the land, this duality of expansion and obstruction evokes territory and border rhetorics, the unnatural aspect of borders, and the continuity of natural phenomena in the world. Setting the concept of land as open and borderless in opposition to the borders of the modern nation-state makes room for a deeper critical perception of what humanity has come to consider the normal order of things. In this sense, Paul Dumouchel asserts, "Territory is a form of political and social organization at both the domestic and international levels that has profoundly shaped the world in which we live, and that we take for granted as the normal order of things" (175). Yet, when "territory" means setting borders one moment and breaking them the next, one must go back and question the validity and origins of those border enterprises.

The characters in *The Native* and *The Family* negotiate their personal and collective identities in relation to their border experiences and the spaces of exchange these (dis)close to them. It is important to shed light on the unfolding history of the forty-ninth parallel and to discuss its effects on the immigrant experience as analyzed in the novels. The northern U.S. border has been relatively stable—set and maintained for many years—unlike the southern U.S. border. It was crossed militarily during the American Revolution and the War of 1812 "on the north and south banks and on the water of St. Lawrence river, Lakes Ontario, and Lake Erie" (Nugent 74). As historians report, "two armies invaded Quebec in 1775–1776 and were thrown back. In the late 1770s and mid-1782, Benjamin Franklin included Canada on his list of war aims" (Nugent 75). A second attempt to take Quebec resulted in the War of 1812, which ended two years later with the withdrawal of the American forces. The closeness of the border and its accessibility were best expressed by Thomas Jefferson when he wrote to William Duane on August 4, 1812, "The Acquisition of Canada, this year, as far as the neighbourhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of *marching*" (Nugent 73, emphasis mine). Despite the immobility of the border, the closeness of Quebec to the northern territories of the U.S. has

led to common political and economic institutions and shared sociocultural aspects across the border. For this reason, it is not uncommon, in the language of critical theory today, to account for the area in terms of a northern U.S. borderland. Prem Ghandi, for example, speaks about "Ontario-Quebec-New York-Vermont" in terms of the "St. Lawrence borderlands" (201). One must account for these affinities in terms of historical background but also current reality, both of which play an important role in the immigrant experience of Quebecers to the U.S., which indeed shows the permeability of borders.

The northern borderlands share common historical experiences and cultural characteristics, as Victor Konrad explains about the U.S.–Canada border zone:

borderlands regions have emerged, more or less, among peoples with common characteristics, in spite of the political boundary delineated between them. In an extreme sense, borderlands exist when shared characteristics set a region apart from the countries that contain it, and residents share more with each other than with members of their respective national cultures. (viii)

Obviously, sharing cultural traits and economic patterns in the U.S.–Canada borderlands is a tangible reality produced by proximity and shared histories. It is also a conscious political choice made by local governments for material reasons and circumstances. As Russell Brown comments, "American states and Canadian provinces have found it advantageous to directly address numerous cross-boundary issues, including developments affecting boundary waters" (80). Among other things, these cross-border operations destabilize the rigidity of the nation-state borders by testifying for the interaction of both sides. Yet, it is important to remain aware of the political stakes at play at the border. Far from promising a full politico-economic integration, cross-border exchanges still operate *across* national boundaries; the border both influences these exchanges and is influenced by them. Paper identities still function at national boundaries, a fact that makes individual crossings particularly significant in terms of questioning the status of the border and its validity.

The Family and *The Native* represent immigration as another instance of border crossing that marks the borders of the nation-state as crossable and arbitrary. In this sense, immigration is a "challenge to the nation-state" as critic Christian Joppke asserts:

The notion of immigration as a "challenge" to the nation-state has two possible meanings. It may be taken conservatively as a challenge to be incorporated within the existing framework of nation-states, if only in the absence of an alternative political organizing principle. Or it may be taken progressively as a challenge that points to a fundamental transformation of nation-states. (7)

Joppke's argument is that immigration is a challenge to the nation-state in terms of administration and spatial organization. Whether it chooses to accommodate its inner structures to the arriving waves of immigrants or to make immigrants fit into its already settled structures, the hosting nation-state/federation obviously faces big challenges with the arrival of immigrants. To Mark Rifkin, the case is settled in advance for the U.S., even before the arrival of immigrants. He argues that "internalized people are presented within U.S. legal discourses as always-already having accepted their place within national space, a process that involves constructing subjectivities for them that confirm the obviousness of U.S. administrative mapping" (14). Immigration, therefore, deconstructs borders that are central to the definition of the nation-state. For this reason, it represents a challenge to the concept of the nation-state and the integrity of the national space. Immigration enables migrants to live in different localities in a placeless continuity. In this sense, immigration itself makes space abstract.

The immigration of Quebecers to the U.S. and their settlement in New England is at the heart of Plante's novels and is particularly important in the history of the area. As history tells us, "In the 1860s as a result of the unbalancing effects of the civil war, about 20 percent of the Quebecois may have crossed the border to find industrial work. (Anctil 37). The closeness of Quebec to New England and the uncomplicated border formalities (at the time) facilitated the movement back and forth across the Quebec–U.S. border and in many cases it became a daily routine. As Anctil reports:

Franco-Americans crossed the border several times in their lives—and not just to see member of their families. Someone might resume farming in Quebec for a while, then head back to the factory for several months to amass some capital [...] many people remained migrant their whole lives. (43)

The frequency and ease of these crossings is best summed up in Lanctot's phrase "l'absence de frontières géographiques" ² (281).

Immigration brings about different sorts of linguistic, religious, and cultural crossings. *The Family* and *The Native* show the long history of Quebecois-Americans establishing the Catholic Church and the French language in New England. This influence grew to what some historians call a "Quebecois inspiration" of life in New England (Anctil 51). In *The Family*, Daniel takes religious classes at the parish school in French (15). In *The Native*, Antoinette chooses to strike a middle ground between her father's French Catholic background and her mother's English Protestant background one. "[She] didn't become interested in finding out about her mother's religion. She became more and more devout in her father's," she goes to the French parish in Providence, and though "the sermon was in French, and she didn't understand [...] she listened" (43). Anctil's

study of French America provides data that reveals important aspects about the life of Franco-Americans in New England. He writes,

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

Language is another very important element to cross-border lives. Jim and his wife Reena, the first generation immigrants in *The Family*, speak French but also English with no French-Canadian accent. Their son Edmond speaks English and French and is able to pick up the French-Canadian accent from his social milieu in Providence. Plante writes, "At supper, Edmond spoke with a French Canadian accent he'd picked up during the afternoon at the ice-cream parlour near the church. Neither his mother nor his father spoke English with a French Canadian accent. Edmond switched accents easily" (34–35). Switching accents and languages comes across as a natural outcome of the permeability of borders in the immigrant experience.

Interethnic marriages are another cross-cultural dynamic at play in Plante's novels. In *The Native*, Philip marries Jenny, a Protestant American Southerner, who gives birth to Antoinette, who becomes the embodiment of the multiple cross-cultural patterns that immigration allowed for in the first place. Antoinette is torn between her paternal grandmother's Quebecois world and Indian ancestry from one side and her mother's Southern American culture from the other. Philip says, "It's just come to me how much Antoinette is like her [grandmother]," he adds, "together they make up a world I've always wanted to get out of" (33). But Antoinette believes she is different from her grandmother. When her grandmother tells her "you are like me," Antoinette feels "a little pull as of someone pulling her back" and she thinks, "I am not, not really" (49). Antoinette is instead a "mixture" of her mother and grandmother. She is impressed with her grandmother's "Canuck secret" (44), and she "love[s] her mother for her love for the world [...] though her world had no secrets" (61–62). Antoinette travels back and forth between Providence, where her grandmother lives, and Boston, where her parents live, always unsure of where to spend her weekends. "The voices of her grandmother and mother sound far, then near, then far" (56–57). She is constantly oscillating between two worlds, two different lifestyles. She embodies the different lines across which these worlds intersect, display continuities and discontinuities, and ultimately are transformed into a new energy.

Of Global Subjects and Local Maps

The porousness of geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders and their constant crossings in the contemporary world has been analyzed by many cultural theorists in terms of the concept of a borderless universe. Among other literary works concerned with the theme of the border, *The Native* and *The Family* show that the porousness of the borders of the nation-state is not the only movement taking place in the contemporary geopolitical scene. Plante's novels show that borders make up part of the material reality of Quebecois immigrants in the United States. Borders construct their identities and determine their life conditions. In addition to histories of crossings, the novels tell stories lodged in particular settings with clear-cut boundaries. They narrate the importance of the everyday, the neighbourhood, and the family in picturing space as particular and local with clear boundaries. They negotiate the different aspects of the border concept by displaying the movement of Franco-Americans from the global experience of *space* as open and abstract to the notion of *place* as clear-cut and concrete. The novels also discuss the effect of the different aspects of the border on identity debates in the Franco-American context.

The Family and *The Native* tell immigration stories and relate a constant movement across the U.S. border. Yet, the characters remain tied to a particular setting, namely Providence, Rhode Island. In different scenes, the novels relate the importance of the particular setting to the characters' negotiation of their identities and their interaction with the external milieu. The concept of *foreignness* at the heart of Plante's novels reveals that space is not as seamless and crossable as the frontiers of the nation-state seem to suggest. Instead, space is fractured and marked by rigid boundaries. The characters struggle with these boundaries whenever they cross from one side of the border to the other. Talking about the way his family members felt in Boston outside "la paroisse de Notre Dame de Lourdes a Providence, Rhode Island," Daniel asserts, "they were foreign, could be taken, not for a family from a small grey parish in Providence, but a family from anywhere" (*Family* 121). The possibility of movement back and forth across the U.S. border is curtailed by this sense of foreignness that marks space as limited and limiting. The concept of foreignness reveals that borderless space is an abstract construction that does not hold sway whenever held up to material realities. The characters' experiences come across as anchored to particular settings. The latter incite particular affects and engender particular identity contests. Defining place as opposed to space in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan asserts "Place is a pause in movement [...] the pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value" (138). In their movement within a seeming borderless world, the Francoeurs experience foreignness outside the boundaries of the specific milieu of the parish.

Plante tells stories about these “pauses in movement” when particular settings acquire particular meanings and confer a specific sense of identity to their dwellers. Space has always been linked to identity, or as Mark Blacksell writes, “people do define themselves to a significant degree in terms of space, deriving their sense of identity from specified tracts of land, be it the nation state, house and home, or their religion” (18). This connection between space and identity acquires a particular significance in the context of immigrant subjects and cultures. In his reading of the experience of the local in the context of immigrants to the U.S., Yi-Fu Tuan asserts:

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

This statement offers an interesting perception of the experience of the national as opposed to the local/regional in the context of the U.S. Yet, it is hard to read about that yearning for the “small milieu” as merely a simple need for “emotional satisfaction.” Indeed, the sense of place in the immigrant experience must also be read in relation to the possibilities that space provides and/or denies.

Plante focuses on the everyday reality of his characters in their particular socioeconomic contexts and shows the different ways they are (dis)allowed to navigate spaces. A full understanding of the characters’ experience of place in the novels requires a reading of their everyday reality in connection to the politics of global city mapping. Inherent to the notion of place is the everyday as it takes place within the boundaries of a particular setting and deals with the particular. As E. C. Relph asserts, “Places represent ‘the focusing of experiences and intentions onto particular settings full with meanings, with real objects, and with ongoing activities’” (141). *The Family* and *The Native* portray the everyday as interlocked with space by showing that it is lodged within the particularity of places. Sharing the everyday marks people as similar and having different lifestyles marks them as foreigners. Sharing daily routines can be more immediate than blood ties. In *The Native*, having chosen to spend her time in Providence with her grandmother, Antoinette becomes an alien to her father, “Antoinette had become a kind of non-person to him, at best someone from some other country who was a foreigner in this one, and whom he wanted to remain a non-person, a foreigner” (90).

Linguistic and religious practices mark the daily routines of the characters in *The Family* and *The Native* with specific connotations. Despite the experience of bilingualism in the Franco-American context, linguistic usage remains conditioned and highly codified. As in Daniel's reflections:

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

Bilingualism is not border-free, and the use of languages is contextualized. In *The Family*, the characters communicate in English from time to time, yet they believe French to be the "language of the family" (119). French is also the language of their religion. Antoinette does not understand French, yet she attends the sermons in French in the parish church of Notre Dame de Lourdes (43). The split between a private/intimate French language and a public/impersonal English language is seen in Plante's characters throughout all the novels.

Catholicism is shown to be a pillar of a shared immediate reality for those who dwell in the parish in Providence. Sunday masses are part of the weekly routine for some of Plante's characters and references to Catholic religious symbols recur frequently in the novels. At some point in *The Family*, Reena thinks that if Jenny, her Southerner daughter-in-law, had been Catholic, she "would have known how to deal with her; but because she was a Protestant and therefore, even after so many years in the family, a kind of foreigner, Reena was unsure of herself, and she looked at Jenny with shifting eyes" (17). In Reena's terms, Catholicism is part of a culture that shapes a specific sense of identity. It enables/disables sentiments of belonging while allowing/preventing possibilities of communication. Reena never manages to communicate with Jenny, not only because the latter is a Southerner but also because she is a Protestant. In *The Native*, Antoinette sees her mother's world (Jenny's world) and her grandmother's world (Reena's world) in opposite terms and she identifies more with Catholicism, the religion of her father and her grandmother. She believes in "the Canuck secret" and thinks that "the secret was something in the religion which was Canuck Catholic, and being Canuck made the religion, the religion of this one small brick church, in this small clapboard parish" (44). In this sense, Catholicism surfaces as an identity marker anchored in the history and culture of the parishes of Providence. Contrary to his daughter's enthusiasm, Philip depicts the "Canuck secret" in rather negative terms as "Catholic from the Northern woods—woods where the French immigrants had been for so long they'd developed a closed, dark religion of their own, and had intermarried with the Indians" (*Native* 25). Catholicism is thus portrayed as very particular to the context of Providence. In this context, it is interesting to

refer to Henri Lefebvre's argument in his third volume of *Critique of Everyday Life*: "the everyday is [...] closely related to the modes of organization and existence of a (particular) society" (*Modernity* 3). In this sense, the contingency of everyday elements on one another reveals the everyday as the epitome of the particular and the local. "Canuck Catholicism" marks Franco-Americans from Providence with a particular sense of religious and cultural identity, and marks the parishes of Providence with clear geographical boundaries.

The analysis of the everyday in *The Family* and *The Native* through the linguistic, the religious, and the cultural reveals a deep sense of appropriation of space through everyday activities. Through this appropriation, global subjects move from an abstract and boundaryless concept of space to a material experience of place set within concrete boundaries. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre considers the appropriation of space as pertaining to the "use value" of space as opposed to "exchange value" of space. He asserts that "use re-emerges sharply at odds with exchange in space for it implies not 'property' but 'appropriation'" (*Production* 356). The use value of space demarcates it as particular and local, if appropriated. Yet, it is conceptually productive to read the appropriation of space in relation to its exchange value. Exchange value and use value of space are inseparable in the experience of cross-border individuals navigating an increasingly borderless capitalist world. Indeed, the appropriation of space (its use value) is only enabled by a larger scale planning (exchange value). Though it first appears as spontaneous as the characters' narration of their daily realities, the everyday is undergirded with some deeper structures. As Lefebvre maintains, "what appears most contingent and most accidental in the everyday can contain and translate—and sometimes traduce—group tactics and strategies" (*Foundations* 164). The strategies of global city planners and politicians are indeed at play in the context of Providence as in the contexts of the different other ethnic neighbourhoods and city districts. In the first place, it is important to see the borders set around ethnic neighbourhoods as grounded in a politico-economic system of commodification of space. Then, one can move to analyzing the implications of setting rigid neighbourhood boundaries on life quality and potential of their dwellers.

Place does not only stand as a commodity, it is also particularly valuable because it lies at the basis of larger commodity networks. "It infiltrates, even invades, the concept of production, becoming part—perhaps the essential part—of its content" (Lefebvre, *Production* 85). The centrality of space as a commodity in *The Family* and *The Native* becomes inseparable from the ethnocultural component as a carrier of specific daily routines and cultural practices. In this context, it is interesting to refer to John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch's argument that "Ethnicity [...] does often actually represent a shared life style, similar needs in the daily round, and the social boundaries for providing service and gaining interpersonal support" (109). It is noteworthy though that sharing daily routines among the members of the same ethnic group

does not spring from any essential aspects. Instead, the commonality of their lifestyle is carried out by setting rigid neighbourhood boundaries around them. In the analyses of many urban theorists, these ethnic clusters are enabled by the U.S. economic system and encouraged by local state politics because of their high potential for fostering investment. Logan and Molotch for example affirm in *Urban Fortunes*: “The concentration of a large number of similar people stimulates the development of agglomerations especially appropriate to their needs” (108). Indeed, “[economic] growth machine coalition mobilizes these cultural motivations, legitimizes them, and channels them into activities that are consistent with growth goals” (Logan and Molotch 62). The domain of everyday practices and the general politico-economic system overlap in the agendas of national space planners. Providence is far from being a big urban centre like New York or Boston, for example, yet it is by no means excluded from the politics of national space planning. Sociocultural spaces unravel their political undercurrent and the everyday reveals its layers of complexity. As Lefebvre asserts, “Daily life cannot be defined as a ‘sub-system’ within a larger system. On the contrary: it is the ‘base’ from which the mode of production endeavors to constitute itself as a system, by programming this base” (*Modernity* 41).

At the socioeconomic level, the dwellers of the parish suffer from financial hardships and all the characters in the novels are working class. In *The Family*, Richard Francoeur owns a small shop in Providence “in the midst of a sagging clapboard slum” (26). His incapacity to provide the necessary funding to keep up with the demand of his clients hinders his passion for making grinders. When his father Jim asks him what he will do, Richard replies bitterly “I am letting myself be bought by a bigger company. They’ll take over, and I will work for them. I’ll be a designer. It’ll mean moving the household out of Providence” (29). In the context of the mass production economy, small businesses are pushed to merge with larger businesses, and better economic opportunities for small businesses entail moving beyond the local. As for Jim Francoeur, he is laid off because his employers are cutting back on expenses. The financial and social stability of the workers are bound to a changing capitalist job market. Out of this context of economic hardships and ethnic differences, a stereotypical imaginary is born. At some point in *The Family*, Reena thinks, “We were told that Protestants were evil, but we knew they were better. They lived on the East Side. They were the doctors and lawyers and mayors. They were better than we were” (46). The novels advance through such statements about the toughness of the boundaries of the ethnic neighbourhood and the dubiousness of the process of socioeconomic integration constitute the mechanism that creates and sustains stereotypes in a multicultural context. With reference to these material realities and facts, one ought to question some of the theoretical stances, like the one in Tuan’s argument:

What is new [in the U.S.] since the 1960s is a cultural-political ideology that asserts that people ought to be able to retain almost all the

accoutrements of their original culture (language, social custom, kinship networking, and so on) and still be fully American in the sense of enjoying the nation's wealth, its full range of educational opportunities and political privileges. (*Cosmos* 121)

When tested against material grounds, keeping one's social customs and one's kinship network can be socially isolating and financially burdensome, as in the aforementioned examples from *The Family* and *The Native*.

Analyzing the contemporary spatial order of North American cities in *Globalizing Cities*, Logan asserts, "the lines of cleavage, stemming from its economy and reflected in spatial segregation, are overlaid by divisions of race and ethnicity" (164). In this sense, ethnically integrated neighbourhoods and the borders set around them emanate from larger economic maps. The apparent division according to ethnic and cultural differences serves as a cover to the politico-economic dynamics at play in both local and national spatial planning. The spatial order of the city and the categoric logic of the ethnic neighbourhood prove and sustain economic unbalances. As Logan and Molotch's put it, "inequality among individuals thus not only results from differentiation but also causes it" (49). William Goldsmith, on the other hand, reads this spatial compartmentalization and its combination with economic disparities and ethnocultural differences in terms of racism. He argues that it is caused by racism as much as it generates racism, affirming that "the general failures at building cross-racial coalitions in cities played and still play a magic role in reinforcing the racism that exists at the deep core of U.S. national politics" (43). The difficulty of mingling with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds is at the heart of Plante's characters' experience of foreignness and their sense of discomfort and anxiety.

Even when the social structures and thought patterns are flexible enough to make room for inter-ethnic marriages, the playing field is always far from being level. In *The Native*, Philip marries Jenny because he wants to get away from his own Franco-American cultural background, as he mentions many times throughout the novel (25). His daughter Antoinette has lived for some time with her parents in Boston and studies there yet she shares more affinities with her parental ancestry than her father himself does. She has hard time integrating her social milieu at university in Boston, she cannot make friends and feels at home only in Providence with her grandmother. Antoinette asserts, "I feel the life I am leading outside isn't my life" (*Native* 53). The inside/outside poetics are so recurrent in Plante's novels. In *The Family*, Daniel contemplates his colleagues at La Salle Academy, feeling "completely apart," he wonders, "why did he in a very clear way, stand outside them" (188). No wonder: "La Salle academy was outside the parish" (189). The borders of the neighbourhood come across as chasms between an inner familiar world and an outer foreign one. As Pierre Mayol asserts, "the neighbourhood in the middle term is an

existential dialectic (on a personal level) and a social level (on the level of a group of users), between inside and outside” (11). Maintaining this inside/outside duality is simply sustaining the exclusionary logic of the borders of the neighbourhood.

Conclusion

The unfolding lives of Plante's characters show that their cross-border experiences are inhibited by the realities of their immigrant experience inside the rigid borders of the ethnic neighbourhood. The productive multiplicity of the immigrant identity in global identity discourses is reduced to a sheer duality of life inside the ethnic neighbourhood as opposed to life outside it. Binarisms are resuscitated and the complexity of the immigrant experience is reduced to a dichotomous either/or logic in the language of neighbourhood boundaries. The absence of a concretely “hybrid” space confers the richness of the immigrant identity to the abstract terms of global rhetorics. The borders of the parish keep unfulfilled the experience of Quebecois-Americans by constructing differences in terms of contradictions and multiplicity in terms of duality. Through the concept of foreignness at the heart of the Quebecois-American life, *The Family* and *The Native* articulate the complexity of the Franco-American experience and the difficulty of fully representing and articulating it within the abstract terms of global politics. Plante's characters simply dwell at the interstices of the abstract and the concrete, the foreign and the familiar, the global and the local, the borderless and the clear-cut.

Notes

1. *The Family* (1979), *The Country* (1981), and *The Woods* (1982).
2. The absence of geographical borders.

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