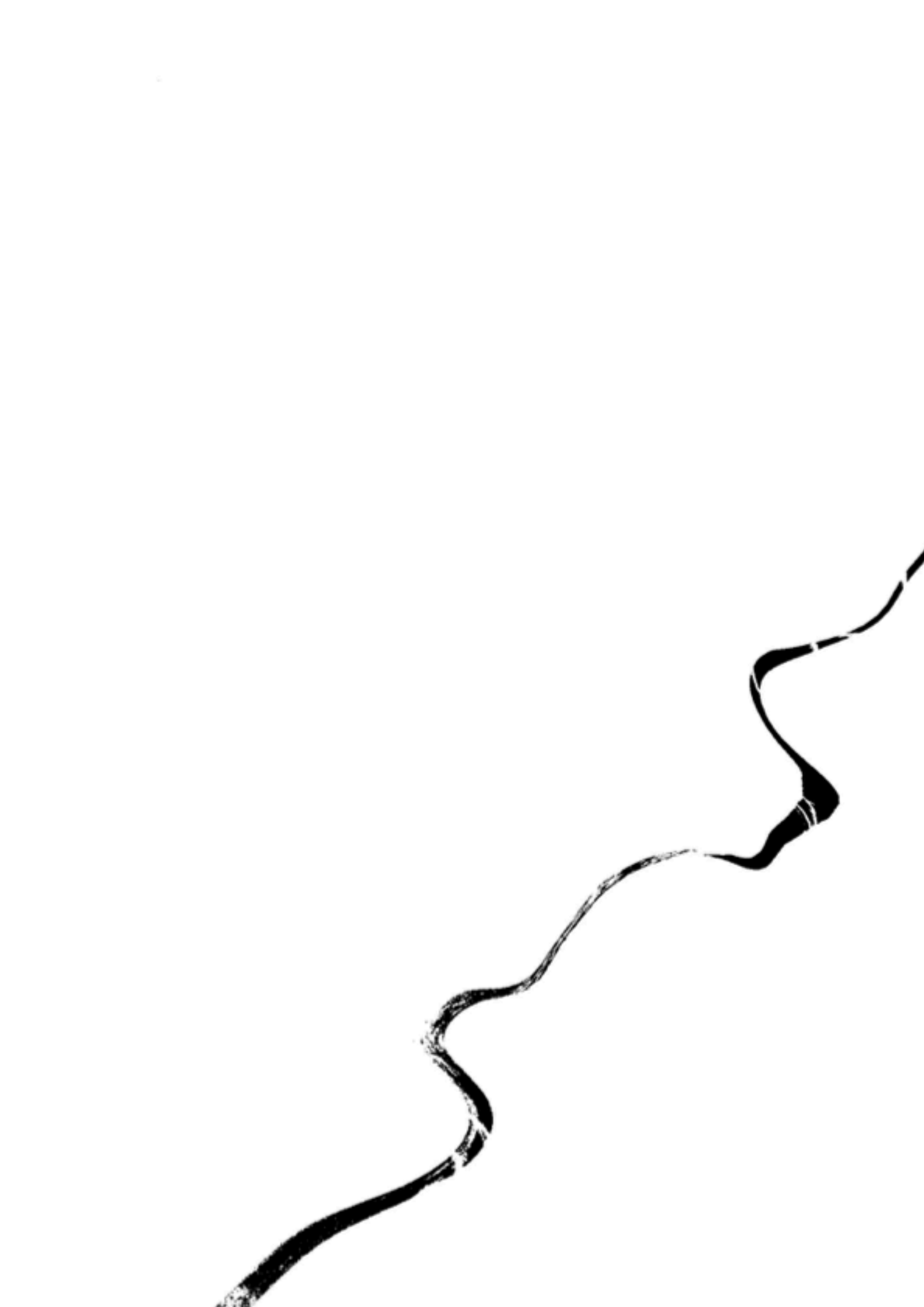
BETWEEN THE LINE

THE SEMIOTICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

IN THE
BRAZIL-URUGUAY
BORDERLANDS



BETWEEN THE LINE

The Semiotics of Everyday Life
in the Brazil-Uruguay Borderlands

By Gianlluca Simi

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ABSTRACT

The border is primarily a polysemic sign, whose meanings are constantly (re)created in the everyday in accordance with the various intentions that individuals might find convenient to enunciate. It does not, therefore, have a universally fixed meaning, especially to those whose lives are permeated by its wavering between a dominant presence and a permissive absence. This thesis builds on the fieldwork in Chuy, a twin town in the borderlands between Brazil and Uruguay, where there is an intense friction between the border as a strategy for division and control as well as an everyday landscape feature that is tactically experienced in terms of its openness and fluidity. Drawing on responses given by 426 local residents, on nine in-depth interviews, and on field notes, a topographic map of meanings and uses assigned to the border in the region is sketched with the following question in mind: what does it mean to live by the border? The semiotic approach adopted in this thesis prefers to look at the border in its utter incorporation into everyday life, from which the word itself comes to convey processes of signification that take into account the meanings and uses that are associated with the border in the present and in relation to the history of Chuy, located in the Neutral Fields, a buffer zone that was created by the Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1777 as an attempt to solve disputes over territory in the region by effectively prohibiting any contact between the outlying sides. Results suggest that instances of re-bordering occur as often as those of de-bordering, ultimately rejecting a totalising view of the borderlands in positive terms, as initially identified by surveys. Individuals calculate the potential risks and gains of certain uses of the border, pointing to three main flows of ideas related to the border in Chuy, namely: shopping, culture, and diversity. The general conclusion of the thesis suggests that the border is as meaningful as its uses, thus calling for further study into the ways in which material culture and the mobilisation of perceptions interrelate in open borderlands.

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PROLOGUE

I had lunch at a place close to my hotel. It was a *buffet por quilo*, a pay-by-weight restaurant. The sign on the door said *abierto* to those who passed by and *cerrado* to those who were sat inside. I had not yet left the Brazilian side of Chuy.

Across from the restaurant, there is a *fruteira*, whose walls read *bebidas*, *hielo*, and *pescado* – a pick-and-mix of words in Spanish and Portuguese. Between bites, it bit me: I had already moved to other countries, yes, but I had never moved to two countries at the same time.

Chuy, Brazil/Uruguay – 7th of June, 2016

INTRODUCTION

This is a line.

A line, indefinite article. The first aim of this thesis is to draw the path to how it becomes *the* line. One that defines the extension of the nation-state, but equally one that has been charged with a plethora of other meanings and functions. It is supposed to separate states, certainly, but it is also supposed to indicate an idea of national culture that is, in principle, conveyed in whichever individual and practice that might exist within the resulting entity.

The line, definite article. In other words, here, the border between countries as the line that marks the immediate, nationalised space of sociability. And, despite the celebration of a so-called borderless age to which the world was heading after the Cold War, the reality points to the contrary for "the current era of globalisation has resulted in the most intensive period of bordering in the history of the world" (Johnson and Jones, 2014, pp.4-5).

If, on the one hand, distances seem shorter, communication is quicker than ever, and the flows of people and goods make us believe that we are heading towards a world without any dividing lines, where there should therefore be no need to study borders, on the other, however, this impression brings about a violent realisation: "we live in a world of borders" (Nail, 2016, p.2). Or rather, I argue, we have always lived in such a world.

According to Johnson and Jones (2014), there are some 20,000km of borders marked with walls and fences and an addi-

tional 18,000km along which security has been hardened. Likewise, the number of security barriers built since 1994 is more than twice as many of those that were created during the Cold War. Amidst such profusion, it is easy to stretch the concept and start seeing them everywhere: there is a border between the masculine and the feminine, between the rich and the poor, between white and black, between road and pavement, and so on. Although these can all be understood as 'borders' on some level, let us not get carried away by the analogy. The border under discussion here is the predominant one in daily parlance: that between countries. That is, the border that, by marking the territory of a particular state, equally marks the scope of national characterisation of bodies and subjectivities, their ways of being in the world and of knowing of the world that depend on a tension, created by the dividing line, between the inside and the outside.

That earlier realisation becomes perhaps even more violent, or more urgent, if we add to it the layer of history. It is, then, not so much that we *now* live in a world of borders, but that there have always been *types of* borders (see Diener and Hagen, 2012). It is inconceivable to think that societies and individuals could exist in an outside of everything, a space of virtual infinity over which no attempts at fixating concepts have been performed.

Borders, therefore, are projects to define by delimiting. They create something that can be seen as unchanging, stable; something that can work as anchorage. So, the initial response to the specific Westphalian model of the border currently in operation addresses the question posed by Acosta (2013, p.91): "how to break away from the limiting cognitive schema that perceives and interprets things in terms of states and territorial borders"?

The history of changing borders leads to the conclusion that they are not natural despite the fact that human groups have a tendency to creating them. To understand them in contemporaneity, that is, instead of speaking of borders, we should speak of *bordering*, a concept and process that "can be understood as an event of becoming" (Woodward and Jones III, 2005, p.239). They convey an image of fixity and stability, but borders are always in the making. The widespread knowledge of how international borders have changed throughout the 20th century alone is indicative of their inconsistency – or, at least, of how they are susceptible to conflicting goals and interests.

The border under discussion here could only be seen as natural, or inevitable, if it were to be accepted that the nation-state itself, marked as it is by this model, is likewise natural. An absurd proposition that implies a linear evolution of political and cultural history according to which the current geopolitical arrangements are the only possible or even ideal outcome. A naturalistic approach to both border and nation-state would completely overlook the maze of different types of entities, from the earliest human groups to city-states and empires, which have all intertwined with an even more befuddling history of human migration, settlement, and sense of identity.

This is not, in other words, an attempt at dissecting how well the current model of the border works or how it could be perfected under whatever political agenda – seemingly conservative or progressive alike. This thesis is interested in the processes that form borders rather than on their efficiency in terms of what they define. It roughly follows the path of what Nail calls *critical limology*, that

is, the "theory of the real conditions for the production of social borders" (2016, p.14). Processes which, as will be developed in Chapter 3, are much more discursive and which mostly depend on how the resulting propositions are reproduced and enacted in the everyday.

The discursive turn to border studies is not new. It has been taken up by scholars from different traditions (see Donnan and Wilson, 1999; Grimson, 2003; Reece and Corey, 2014, to name a few), all of whom, however, share the underlying premise that:

> Most of the cultural matter that at any time is associated with a human population is *not* constrained by this boundary; it can vary, be learnt, and change without any critical relation to the boundary (Barth, 1969, p.38).

Here, the most important perspective to border studies is, therefore, the investigation of the ways in which certain characteristics come to be more closely associated both as reason and result of a certain type and arrangement of the dividing line. These are, in other words, processes of signification, which attach specific meanings to the border, depending on who speaks and under what circumstances. Thus, the second aim of this thesis is to focus on the perception of the border and on the meanings that it comes to signify, both in terms of linguistic description as well as in terms of the sense that is made thereof. That is, meaning understood both as the language that is evoked and as the uses that it activates.

Paasi describes these processes in terms of the construction of the social and political meanings of borders, which "occurs particularly through spatial socialisation and the territorialisation of meaning" (2005, p.20), which brings forth a fundamental milestone for this thesis. Despite the fact that "the location of borders is changing, from the edges of the nation-state" (Cooper, Perkins and Rumford, 2014, p.17) to a notion of mobile borders that are now

embedded in individuals (see Amilhat Szary and Giraut, 2015), the border remains attached to a sense of territoriality. It must be somehow materialised, if not by a wall or a boundary marker, by spatial references that are mostly diluted in everyday life with, amongst many, the spread of national imagery such as flags and coats of arms, as well as with the discursive framework that associates what is thereby represented with the right of a particular political entity not only to exist in its current shape, but also to rule over whatever is seen to belong on the inside, thus somewhat tautologically explaining the institutionalisation of borders in the shape of state apparatuses such as the police, the school system, and the infamous agencies dedicated to border control.

Having said that, the way in which the issue of the meanings and uses of the border will be treated here focuses on what Dorfman (2008a) calls the *border condition*, that is:

> It is about emphasising the agency of the inhabitants of the borderlands, observing the transformation of limitation into opportunities in the experience of this geographical object that originates in the territorialisation of the nation-state.

The border condition is the key to understanding the idea of *borderlands*, that is, the regions that take shape around the boundary line, which "represent liminal spaces where both transnational identity and intergroup conflict occur" (Grimson, 2012, p.201). When both ideas are put to work together, the resulting perspective is one that prioritises not the state itself, with its power and institutions, but the people who live in the area whose most immanent characteristic is that of being the point of contact – and, often, conflict – between the states, especially in terms of their disputes over cultural allegiance, over the imaginary of belonging to one or the other side, along with all its repercussions.

The borderlands form a space that is undoubtedly material in that it is scarred by all endeavours to delimit the reach of the power of the state. Nevertheless, they highlight the prominent element of the relations that are established by groups and individuals around the very existence of a dividing line. The borderlands are a region where interaction becomes more apparent than institution, without, however, denying the relevance of the latter. They push for attention to be paid to the ways in which, according to Donnan and Wilson (1999, p.39), they "are moulded by the human and physical environment, including the boundary itself, and which in turn shape the environment".

The preoccupation of investigating the ways in which local borderpeople perceive and use the border is an area of growing interest within Border Studies. Within an explosive interest in studying the borderlands, "regrettably, however, few such studies have been based on 'empirical, broadly social, research'" (Donnan and Wilson, 1999, p.8). This thesis is an effort to address that lack of research that is fully developed on fieldwork in border communities.

It is particularly focused on the "situated everyday narratives of bordering and border-crossing" (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.14) of a community that is quintessentially marked, at the same time, by the existence of a boundary line between two states as well as by its complete physical openness. In such a type of community, the notion of border, therefore, is no less one that carries an extraordinary sense of distance and potential threat as vividly as it might do for those who live hundreds of miles away from the line, as it is one that ultimately combines the experience of the physical space into a common sphere of sociability that exists because of the boundary line and that, concomitantly, transcends its division.

In the borderlands, communities take shape in the knowledge of the boundary, but they are equally characterised by the subversion or re-appropriation thereof. A study into the everyday of these communities is, accordingly, interested in "the permeability and permanence of borders" (Wilson and Donnan, 2012, p.6). Understanding the ways in which people interact and refer to their border condition is tantamount to:

> Reconstructing the main processes whereby the border has become a common sense for the local people, as well as the processes whereby the border keeps being fabricated by different agents in the present (Grimson, 2003, p.18).

It is Grimson who also reminds us, furthermore, that "the risk of underestimating the role of the state is that one can fall into believing in an essential brotherhood or in an essential hybridity among all border dwellers" (2003, p.200). Prioritising the meanings that are attached to the border and the uses that are activated therewith by the same people whose everyday lives are inextricably marked by the existence of the border should not, therefore, lead to a renewed maxim of a 'borderless world', only one, this time, whose substance is to be found within the patterns of perception and interaction of border communities.

In this sense, behind every section of this thesis ultimately lies the effort not to essentialise any approach to the border. It is not an all-mighty institution that dictates every aspect of people's lives and the ways in which they interact with each other despite the acknowledgement of how heavy a role they have in that. Nor are we to find an idealised model for intercultural and/or intercivilisational dialogue and conviviality in the borderlands.

The very setting of an investigation into the borderlands purely as zone of 'intercultural contact', to paraphrase Grimson, would undermine the fact that this approach, to use his own words, "implies the development of a system of identity contrasts, opposition and manipulations that arise of these links" (2012, p.209). It is not in the best interest of this thesis, that is, to argue neither for a restrictive view of the border as a mechanism for domination and constraint nor for an unwavering progressive view of the borderlands as a space of unproblematic cultural diversity and hybridity. On the contrary, this project is an investigation of how both views are concomitantly at work, thus calling for a situated approach to the everyday of the borderlands.

In this regard, an abstract effort would not suffice. What this demands is an engagement with the reality of the borderlands. In other words, it demands fieldwork, finally pointing to the issue of where this thesis is located in spacetime.

The choice of studying the meanings and uses of the border in Chuy, between Brazil and Uruguay, originates from a triangulation amongst scales. First, Chuy is a twin city: it is divided and united by the boundary line that separates Brazil and Uruguay. Its physical environment spreads across the border between the two countries. Secondly, it is located in the historical region of the Neutral Fields: a somewhat failed attempt to create a buffer zone between Spain and Portugal in colonial times that would put an end to territorial disputes in this region of South America by effectively inscribing a void between the two empires. And, thirdly, it is connected to a history of conflict and dispute, first between Spain and Portugal, and, later, between their heirs par excellence, Argentina

and Brazil, which still characterise the lands that stretch from Brazil's southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul all the way through Uruguay as a transitional space.



Figure 1: Location of Chuy: in South America (left); in the Southern Cone (top right); map of urban Chuy (bottom right). **Source:** Google Maps [Accessed 26 Sep 2018].

To this day, Chuy is lived as an integral space, with no direct impediment to movement and interaction between the two sides of the boundary, which will, henceforth, be referred to Chuí Brazil and Chuy Uruguay when the distinction between the municipalities is necessary. For the most part, however, it will be addressed solely as Chuy because its everyday develops, almost seamlessly, across the open border. People from the city are all treated as *Chuienses* in this thesis regardless of the individual municipality by whose extended national jurisdiction they might hold either Brazilian or Uruguayan citizenship – even both or neither. Not only is the lived experience of Chuy one that takes place across the border, but, likewise, ideas of nationality and citizenship are complicated by the long-running

phenomena of topiary family trees and social relationships which, for the most part, pay no mind to the limits between whichever countries might proclaim themselves in charge at the time.

The issue of studying these borderlands consequently leads to the realisation that the border, in Chuy, is not an element that can be considered to be out of the ordinary. On the contrary, it is the undeniable factuality of the border in the city that makes this a pertinent effort. Understanding what the border means and how it is used in Chuy is, therefore, an effort to understand the ways in which the border has become an everyday element of the landscape that cannot be exoticised or pecualiarised too strongly without considering its ongoing role in the community.

In order to apprehend the meanings that are attached to the border and the uses that are made thereof in the everyday of Chuy, defined and, at the same time, transgressive of the notion of the boundary that unarguably cuts across the city, it is necessary to adopt a semiotic approach to the border. According to this approach, the border is not seen to be determined by a universal or preconceived conception that is then applied elsewhere – which does not, however, lead to the suppression or rejection of the fact that, even here, what is in operation is ultimately a localised interpretation of the Westphalian model. A semiotic approach to the border prefers to look at the dividing line in its utter incorporation into everyday life, from which the word comes to represent more than itself. It argues that:

> The appeal to ordinary language aligns us with the world and with others, and thus with that sense of lived totality which is at the heart of most attempts to 'think' the everyday (Sheringham, 2006, p.229).

That is, the fact that the boundary between Brazil and Uruguay marks how far these two countries go and how far the supposition of cultural and/or national unity or similarity should go does not, in turn, overcome the local reality of integration and conflict alike that takes place in Chuy. And this reality is most accessible through the ways in which the border becomes an item of daily parlance, something that is seen to be intrinsically connected or even representative of the very place where it is used.

In Chuy, that is, the border is a *sign.* The line itself has no width, has no intrinsic materiality that could at least functionally base the signification that is then layered on top of it. So, "precisely because the line has no content, it can have *any* content" (Cameron, 2011, p.427). Even if it can be understood to have a primary function of delimiting territories and demarcating putative allegiances, the reality of those who live in the borderlands, whose lives are inevitably marked by the existence of a dividing line, becomes more complicated because the border, here, is not a distant element of geopolitical imaginary but, rather, an immediate element of landscape. The notion of the border thus becomes confused with the very notion of what develops around it.

Looking at it in this sense is a promising way to access the reality of discourses and practices in the borderlands as it exposes the variability and the arbitrariness of the very notion of the border embedded in a community which might very well comply with the strategic model of delimitation and definition, but which, just as often, uses the existence of the border in its own favour without, however, deposing it from its position of power. The key to understanding the everyday in the borderlands of Chuy does not lie in

trying to gauge instances, but actually in accompanying the quantum leaps that Chuienses take between abiding by the dominant idea of the border and using it to their own advantage.

The methodological question of the best way to study these leaps stems from the further understanding that, as a sign, the border is not a fixed particle that carries with it a set of predictable meanings. Instead, the basilar premise is that "the linguistic sign is not a unit of signification; it is, rather, a detectable unit in the process of communication" (Eco, 1984, p.21). Comprehension of what the border might mean and how it might be used in Chuy is, therefore, attached to the exploration of the very everyday where these processes of signification take place.

Hence the fieldwork. For four months, from June to September 2016, I was based in Chuy, where I had not only the chance to experience the city for myself, but, most importantly, to speak with Chuienses and to collect their perceptions and statements about the border. The words in Spanish and Portuguese – *frontera* and *fronteira*, respectively –, along with fewer references to *la línea* or *a linha* (the line), encompass not only the ideas that are expressed by words such as 'boundary', 'frontier', 'border', and 'borderlands' – all of which are elaborated in Chapter 1 –, but they also work as a toponym, that is, as the very name of the place.

There were three main tools for collecting data on the meanings and uses of the border in the city: surveys, interviews, and observation. In total, 426 valid surveys were collected, an astonishing number within a total combined population that barely exceeds 15,000 inhabitants. Each survey featured four questions: the first was a declaration of nationality/identification; the second a free-association list to the idea of 'fronte(i)ra'; and the third and fourth

ones were open-ended questions on the advantages and the disadvantages of living in the borderlands. The goal with the surveys was to catalogue direct and implied associations to the border as well as their classifications as either positive or negative.

Nine interviews were performed with eight Chuienses and with a History professor from Passo Fundo, in the north of Rio Grande do Sul, who is a specialist in the formation of the borders in the Southern Cone, the broad name that encompasses the extreme south of South America, where both Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay – and, by extension, Chuy – are located. These yielded more than thirteen hours of recording from which to analyse the ways in which the general patterns in signification identified with the surveys pierce through individuals' statements as well as to highlight instances when these meanings are activated in reference to Chuienses' own relation and position with the border.

Thirdly, my own observation in the field, kept in notes, offers a chronological panorama of my engagement with local dynamics. At the same time, it catalogues instances and episodes that often outline a subjective perception that might be seen to challenge the emerging patterns in signification of the border by Chuienses.

All three tools of collecting data as well as the theoretical framework that underpins the understanding of the border and of the everyday in these borderlands ultimately seek for answers and further developments to the question: *what does it mean to live by the border?* The central aim of this thesis is, accordingly, to understand the dual sense of meaning in terms of the narration of the everyday and in terms of the activation of these narratives in daily practices and interactions that are, at some level, filtered or influenced by the border.

In terms of structure, the thesis is divided into two parts. In Part I, called *Archaeology of the Line*, the main goal is to parse out the specificities that characterize the notion of border that ground this investigation and, equally, to outline an overview of the historical processes that led to the establishment of the particular borderlands of Chuy. This part has two chapters. Chapter 1 establishes the border between countries, defined as the *interstate boundary*, as the type of dividing line under investigation. Likewise, it presents the three axioms that support the theoretical framework in operation, formed by premises claiming that: no border is natural, that is, all borders are created by a project to define by delimiting; the border creates the entity and the subsequent references that support ideas of difference between the inside and the outside; and, finally, the border is concomitantly an inscription of power in the physical environment as well as a reality that is experienced across scales.

Chapter 2 provides a brief, yet pertinent historical overview of the Neutral Fields, created by the 1777 Treaty of San Ildefonso, whereby a buffer zone was created between Spanish and Portuguese dominions, stretching from the Taim Stream to the Chuy Stream, the latter of which names the city itself. This chapter contextualises the long territorial disputes between the two Crowns, which led to the idea of fixed jurisdiction and allegiance to be lost amidst ever-changing rule. In this sense, the Neutral Fields became the epitome of a no-one's land where the conceptual emptiness was established as an attempt to put an end to conflicts between the two colonial potencies by impeding the very possibility of communication between subjects from either side of the fields. It is particularly important, in this chapter, the influences that this history has left in present-day Chuy, where, conversely, it is now the incessant

communication and interaction across both sides that seems to dominate.

Next, in Part II, entitled *Topography of the Everyday*, there are three chapters which, together, sketch a semantic and practical map of the meanings and uses that are associated with the border and that might even derive from Chuy's border condition. Chapter 3 presents the methodological framework for both the fieldwork and the analysis of data. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first one is dedicated to parsing out the constitutive elements of the central proposition of this thesis, namely that of conducting a "semiotics of everyday life" (Highmore, 2002, p.104), which concerns the ways in which the concrete expressions of the border as a geopolitical phenomenon intertwine with the perceptions and the practices that develop around the border, at times reinforcing the strategic role of the line to divide and delimit and, at others, tactically re-appropriating this role in order to manage the intricacies of a local reality that is characterised by a dual belonging and by the establishment of cross-border social, political, and cultural relations whose main goal is ultimately to respond to the immediate needs and intentions of Chuienses.

The second section of Chapter 3, in turn, expatiates on the tools that were used to collect data as well as on the overall experience during the four-month period in the field. It unpacks the surveys, the interviews, and the field notes, presenting their trajectory from conception to application and likewise indicating some of the limitations that were identified during the process.

Chapter 4 focuses on the 426 valid surveys collected in Chuy. It dissects them into the four questions asked and contextualises each of them in relation to what was observed in the field. This

chapter elaborates on the process of coding responses and of visualising their intersections as well as contrasts in a semantic web of localised perceptions that are declared by Chuienses in relation to the border. During the analysis of the surveys, it became clear that there might be a discrepancy between what is said about the border and the ways in which these meanings might be enacted in the everyday instances where such meanings could be more easily observable. Furthermore, the analysis showed that there is a strong tendency of approximation between responses given by Chuienses and a widespread positive approach to the notion of borders and borderlands in the Southern Cone, which I have called *normative border subjectivity*, expressed in general patterns of consuming the border, of adjusting its meaning to a romanticised view of this condition that, on closer inspection, might have been behind the original conception of this very thesis.

Finally, in Chapter 5, these tendencies in the processes of signification of the border are compared to individual discursive arrangements used by interviewees. Analysis revolves around the realisation that statements and practices are sometimes wildly contradictory in principle. In other words, individual Chuienses bring their own personal set of beliefs, biases, and personal involvement with this particular border, as well as with the general notion of the border sustained by state-led institutions, into the ways in which they navigate the shared meanings of the border in Chuy and the ways in which they calculate the risks and potential gains from adopting a certain position enabled by such meanings.

In summary, the aim of this thesis is to elaborate routes towards answering the question of what it means to live by the bor-

der, based not only on theoretical efforts to understand the probable implications for communities where the border has become an everyday aspect, but, most importantly, based on the empirical research of Chuy, in the borderlands between Brazil and Uruguay. The effort to understand the border as part of an ongoing process of signification and communication sheds light on how dividing lines, all at once, operate at the strategic level of delimiting the edges of intelligibility of the substance that they are supposed to mark as well as at the tactical level of the experience of an everyday that unfolds in a space of transition, circumstantially defying notions of fixity with those of fluidity. Finally, this thesis is not about advocating either for a borderless or a hyper-divided world. Its goal is precisely to start with the reality of people and groups who, along centuries of history, might have already unconsciously managed to navigate both extremes.

PART



ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE LINE

1. THE SHAPE OF THINGS

> *"Line alone, preceding form, embodies the origin of creation".*[1]

In common parlance, 'borders' are charged with too many functions and too much meaning, sometimes rather contradictorily. They are, as Balibar suggests (2002, pp.78-79), overdetermined and polysemic. This is why this first chapter will lay out the foundational concepts and understanding of the specific type of border under analysis here as well as the processes that create it.

The first section (1.1) establishes the border between countries, defined as an *interstate boundary*, as the specific type of dividing line at the core of this thesis, without, however, denying the importance of a critical scrutiny of such lines in general, in what Nail calls a "critical limology" (2016, p.14). In other words, from the appreciation of theoretical studies on the topic rise the fundamental conceptualisation of the border herein investigated as well as the perspective associated to it.

The second section encompasses the axiomatic triad that supports this study. This has also emerged from an engagement with texts, responding to the popular discourse on borders, thus arguing that: (1.2) every border is artificial; (1.3) the border creates the entity that it bounds by establishing a dichotomy between levels; and (1.4) the dividing line is, at the same time, an inscription in space and a lived reality.

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[1] *"La línia sola, anterior a la forma, encarna l'origen de la creació"*. Text accompanying a series of three paintings by Joan Miró – in exhibition at *Fundació Joan Miró*, in Barcelona, Catalonia –, entitled *Peinture sur fond blanc pour la cellule d'un solitaire I, II, III*. Available at: <https://goo.gl/rucQxd>; <https://goo.gl/uka28S>; <https://goo.gl/U39uTR>. [Accessed 10 Jul 2017].

1.1 WHAT LINE IS IT?

One of my favourite activities, as a child, was browsing through an Atlas that would soon lose its spine from some intense wear and tear. It had sections dedicated to every country in the world at the beginning of the 2000s. Its static nature, just as that of a novel, allowed me the time to recreate faraway lands as I imagined myself roaming the world. Next to every map, there were images supposed to represent some aspect or another of each country. That traced line that shaped the map did something very different, however, to other types of drawing: it represented, on paper, the idea of the nation-state.

Lines are everywhere, Ingold suggests (2016). We write with lines; back and forth strokes of ink. Music can be made out of the location of rhythms and chords along the stave. Labyrinths can only be called so if there is a confusing arrangement of linear paths. And lines, of course, also drew the maps at which I grew up looking.

Yet, there is something peculiar about these lines. Nowadays, atlases gave way to Google Maps, which allows users to instantaneously shift between 'satellite' and 'map' mode. Whereas the latter follows the basic structure of the Atlas, the former not only presents a real image of the planet but it also allows for 'labels to be turned off'. These labels include names of places and roads – as well as borders. Suddenly, we are not exactly looking at a "geo-coded world" (Pickles, 2004) anymore, with fixed shapes and perfectly arranged snapshots of what lies inside, but at a convoluted vastness of land plots, rivers, and mountains. Where should the images of my Atlas go if I do not know where *things* are? Those 'labels' are precisely the lines on which this thesis focuses. The lines between

countries – or, as it will have been defined by the end of this section: *interstate boundaries*.

Lines might be everywhere, but borders are not. This is a fundamental notion throughout this thesis. In studying this topic, it is tempting to start finding them wherever there seems to be some kind of division. Stacked rows of bricks between two rooms – a border? An unrolling smear of tar between pavements – a border? The outermost layer between our skin and everything else – a border?

Yes and no. A border, as we haphazardly refer to it, equates easily with any notion of edge, division, or outline. In other words, it loosely applies to any kind of *liminality*.[2] Yet, if anything or if everything is a border, then it follows that nothing actually *is* a border. Where lies the possibility of calling something what it is as opposed to what it is not if there should be no difference between the two?

So, no, this thesis is not about *lines*; it is about a very specific type of line: the one between what we usually call countries. To be more precise, it is about the boundary between nation-states:

> Borders, in the sense of international limits, were brought to the baptismal font in 1648, when the Treaties of Westphalia were signed [...] [it] founded the idea of the territorial nation-station and invented the border as the convention to materialise it (Amilhat Szary, 2015).

Historically, then, my use of border, in this thesis, refers to what Anderson (1996) calls "the liberal nationalist position", one that binds together the notions of *state*, "covering the institution that exerts administration and power" (Amilhat Szary, 2015), and of *nation*, "referring to a group that has built a common history and identity" (ibid.). The border between nation-states, therefore,

2 The very origin of 'limit' is revealing. It comes from Latin *limes*, meaning an "embankment between fields', which, in turn, is related to *limen*, "threshold". Available at: <https://goo.gl/m795pL> [Accessed 3 Jan 2015].

serves a dual function: it marks the limit of sovereignty, i.e. of the legitimacy of state power, as well as a supposed "common fund of loyalties, values, and characteristics" (Anderson, 1996).

This notion that every state overlaps more or less perfectly with a nation to the point that one is indiscernible from the other has been the dominant narrative according to which the world has been understood. How many lands can we easily name that do not 'belong' or are not 'claimed' by at least one state? The fact remains, however, that most states, according to Paasi (2005, p.17), do not fit this model given that several nations exist within them.

I, on the other hand, would go as far as to say that there has never been and that there will never be an actual nation-state by definition for claiming that people can be divided into clearly self-containing groups that are somehow more relevant in determining our experiences of the self and of the world than whatever other characteristic or potential divisions is simply ludicrous for "groups unsullied by contact with a larger world have probably never existed" (Appadurai, 1988, p.39 cited by Clifford, 1992, p.100). The idea that there could therefore be some kind of naturally occurring entity that is ontogenetically different to all others implies taming whoever people become and whatever they do in advance to their very being in a world that is historical. We come into "a 'ready-made' world" (Heller, 1984, p.6) that is already there and to which we find ways to accommodate ourselves amidst an ongoing historical meshwork of previous contact and displacement – not purity and fixity – that is far from reducible to a clear set of ontological markers.

One need look no further than the very fluctuation in the number of states to find evidence of how the foundational notion

of the nation-state as an inevitable or desirable configuration, leading effortlessly to its current borders, is, at the very least, liable to some scrutiny. According to Krasteva (2015, p.18), there were 55 states at the beginning of the 20th century, then 80 at around 1960, and 193 at the time of publication, a number that has not changed as indicated, at least, by the number of member states of the United Nations.[3] Does it seem remotely conceivable to infer that there are actually only 193 nations? Or that 113 new ones emerged, with all the ancestral weight carried by the concept, in some 50 years?

Now, far from being dedicated to an exegesis of the nation-state or to how accurately the ways in which the categories of nation or nationality are invoked in the everyday of the borderlands, attention is given to the very fact that these borders between nation-states exist. My interest is, thus, in analysing the condition of living by the border, not in analysing dynamics of identity and national allegiance. I am interested in the border for what it enables rather than for what it is supposed to mark. This is to say that, at no point, will this thesis attempt to analyse what the categories of 'Brazilianness' and 'Uruguayanness' might entail beyond the very immediate declarations and everyday practices of Chuienses.

Therefore, if, on the one hand, it is the interstate boundary that is at the core of this thesis, on the other, however, it is not the content of what these boundaries might mark that guide this project. Donnan and Wilson (1999, pp.15-16) argue that borders have three elements: (i) the line itself on the map between nation-states; (ii) the agents and institutions responsible for sustaining the border; and (iii) the immediate region around the line within which people negotiate practices and meanings associated with the line

[3] Available at: < http://www.un.org/en/member-states/> [Accessed 31 Aug 2018].

and with what it has come to represent. In other words, although I acknowledge the pertinence of the two first elements, it is the third one, that of the semiotic fluidity of the areas adjacent to the border, which underpins this research.

Following a threefold typification proposed by the same authors, the type of border under analysis here derives from a combined understanding of what they call 'social' and 'cultural' boundaries. Whereas the former refers to those borders "which order social relations and mark membership in collectivities" (ibid., p.19), the latter refers to those "which separate different worlds of meaning" (ibid.). It is not viable to sustain such a division between social and cultural boundaries because meaning and the social world are inextricably associated (see 3.1), thus leading to the conclusion that a sociocultural approach to borders is the most appropriate.

The use of the word 'approach', instead of type, is not innocuous. It stems from a critical response to what seems to be a dominant attempt, in academic literature, to elaborate a taxonomy of borders (see Ratzel, 1897; Curzon, 1907; Lapradelle, 1928; Boggs, 1940; Prescott, 1965; Donnan and Wilson, 1999). It is ultimately pointless to navigate the plethora of proposed types and subtypes of borders, embedded in a web of contradictory definitions of common words that all relate to the same idea but whose specificities change in relation to the author's perspective of what the most important factors are, because it risks reducing the study of borders to issues of nomenclature in which, according to Rankin and Schofield, "precision and consistency are both key but ambiguity pervades the operations of professional bodies as well as academic literature" (2004, p.10). Thus, the difficulty in establishing unwa-

vering definitions and classifications of borders is, at first, a problem that befalls all words. Speakers will clearly resort to their own repertoire in using language and, in addition to that, the definitional maze of the border is also associated with: (a) the variety of terms used throughout history to refer to similar phenomena (see Diener and Hagen, 2012), which do not necessarily translate well in relation to the Westphalian model described earlier; as well as (b) variations emerging from how terms are used in different languages.

Amongst them, three language families are particularly relevant in Eurocentric literature on borders: Slavic, Germanic, and Romance. These refer to the origins of several words that are in current use across different languages, not all of which necessarily derive from the same family as the word that is used to refer to 'border'. Of Slavic origin, there are variations of *granica* (граница) in use in Russian, Polish, and Serbian as well as in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and German. They all share an original sense of tethering (see Amilhat Szary, 2015). Of Germanic origin, there are: *rand*[4], *bound*[5] (related to the verb *to bind*), and *border*[6], the first of which suggests a sense of extremity; the second, of fastening; and the third, of margin or rim. Finally, of Latin origin is the term *front*[7], meaning 'facing, adjacent'.

The etymology of words does not necessarily tell much about how they are used nowadays, but it enlightens the reasoning behind how they were originally coined to refer to this general idea to

4 Available at: <https://goo.gl/nYacdC> [Accessed 19 Aug 2017].
5 Available at: <https://goo.gl/6oXQoP> [Accessed 19 Aug 2017]. It also shares a Latin origin of similar sense.
6 Available at: <https://goo.gl/Zfpae5> [Accessed 17 Aug 2017].
7 Available at: <https://goo.gl/pjm1FS> and <https://goo.gl/q6V4Rz> [Accessed 17 Aug 2017].

which I have been referring as 'border'. Out of all those terms, 'border', 'boundary', and 'frontier' are the most common within the scope of literature permitted by my linguistic abilities. And it is, accordingly, these three which deserve some closer attention so that terminology is not the centre of our discussion but whose use can, nevertheless, aim at consistency.

The oldest term in use, *frontier*, carries a martial history that is made evident by Foucher's claim that, as of the 14th century, it came to replace the word *marche* in French (1988, p.51), where this means precisely the extent of military advancement by conquest. Later, as suggested by Anderson (1996), 'frontier' came to be used "in specific cases to refer to the moving zone of settlement in the interior of a continent".[8] Despite its widespread use in Romance languages, in which it functions similarly to 'border' in English, the term 'frontier' will not be used in this thesis apart from quotes.

The term *boundary* is the simplest of the three because its meaning has not significantly changed from its original one of "what serves to indicate the limits of something, as well as the limit itself" (Foucher, 1988, p.51). This is, furthermore, the way in which the term is used in this thesis: to refer specifically to the dividing line between countries alone. It might be occasionally used, however, to avoid repeating the word 'border' too often.

Finally, *border* is the broadest of the three, referring:

> At one and the same time to very different processes and categories: a line appearing on a map, a concrete landmark or river, what separates legal systems and sovereignties, and the limit between identities and cultures (Grimson, 2012, p.206).

[8] See also Turner (1894) for his thesis that US democracy is linked to the so-called 'American frontier'.

It is impossible to assert whether it is the broadest of terms because of its widespread use or its use stems from its extensive applicability. Irrespectively, 'border' will be used in this thesis to evoke its universal intelligibility in the English language as well as to highlight what I consider to be its sense of entirety (see Anderson, 1996; Van Houtum, 2005). That is, it points to several levels that are interrelated and equally associated with the notion of the nation-state, without reducing it to a geopolitical category.

In sum, these terms are not just the most common in the literature on borders most readily available, but they also represent three scalar movements that, amidst a baffling taxonomic endeavour, seem to be shared by all lines of division, including the one under discussion here. These are illustrated below:

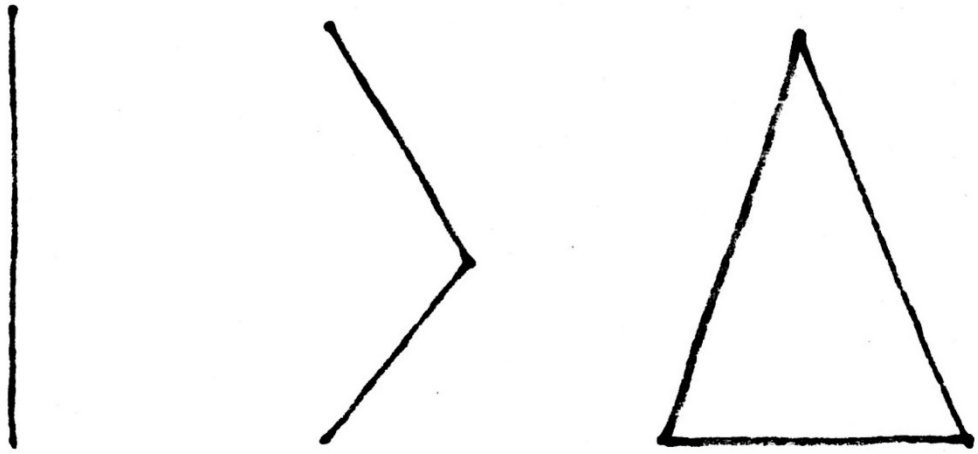


Figure 2: From left to right, representations of *boundary*, *frontier*, and *border*.

The first drawing, that of the straight line, illustrates the concept of *boundary* adopted in this thesis. The curved line in the middle represents the *frontier*. And, finally, the triangle to the right

illustrates the concept of *border*. As I signalled above, they also synthesise what I consider to be the three scalar movements that take place with any line of division.

The boundary indicates the movement of *inscription*. Any dividing line must express the intention to tear into two. By definition, any line inscribes a separate potential entity in reality even if it is intended to join already existing bodies. The line between Brazil and Uruguay might certainly join the two sides of Chuy, but it can be taken as a sole phenomenon. The indispensable first step for division is, therefore, to create an inscription of what it might become (see 1.3). It highlights an intent to create or establish something. This invokes what Wallman (1978) describes as meanings and functions of any social boundary. First, it operates as an *interface*, that is, the point "between two systems of activity, of organisation, or of meaning" (ibid., p.206). The boundary, in other words, arranges space between two opposite sides (inside and outside). Secondly, it adds the element of *identity*, which "marks the significance given to that change and expresses the participants' relation to it" (Wallman, 1978, p.207). A boundary cannot be made to mean nothing, otherwise what would be the point of the line anyway? The boundary, thus, etches an intention to split into distinct parts.

The frontier represents the movement of *expansion*. Rather, the movement of inclusion by expansion. The line alone is unidimensional, it does not cover any ground unless it propels itself forward (see Ching, 2007). In order to acquire area, that is, the frontier projects itself in a progressive movement to "connect points marked out in space upon some arbitrary territory" (Ingold, 2006). Here, I draw on Ingold somewhat tangentially as he describes these "lines of transport" (ibid.) in reference to an idea of genealogy,

which, in turn, supports my argument that it is not sufficient to inscribe a line alone; it has to expand to be more than an intention.

This progression is not complete, however, without a sense of finitude to the thing that can only be achieved in a movement of *foundation*. A boundary can keep growing – after all, every line is always virtually infinite and only apprehensible by the segments. Likewise, the frontier can keep moving forward, but that, in and of itself, does not make it a total phenomenon. It is at the volumetric level, "where reality itself is grasped" (Lefebvre, 2008b, p.154), that the line folds back around, finally becoming *one* thing. Thus, as a self-contained unit, the conception of border dawns as the putative totality, made of shape and substance.

Having said that, the critical path of this thesis is not anchored on any of the movements alone. It travels along (*percorre*) the three, finding in the total notion of 'border' the most suitable point of apprehension of this process of linear division. Coupled with the sociocultural approach to interstate boundaries, it follows that "crucial to an understanding of borders is not so much their material morphology, but the various forms of interpretation and representation that they embody" (Von Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer, 2005, p.2). This is, furthermore, what Salter (2011, p.66) describes as the "popular register" of borders, "wherein the meanings of borders are disseminated and contested" (Wilson and Donnan, 2012, p.19).

Finally, I would amend the statement by replacing 'embody' with 'enable' precisely because the border is never finished, it is, as indicated by Anderson (1996), a process which needs to be constantly performed – imagine those illustrations above as frames of a GIF. It needs, in other words, constant 'border work', which "is not

only top-down oriented [...] the multiplicity of individual detours contribute as much to border design as the dominant stake-holders' agency" (Amilhat Szary, 2014, p.223). Things do not *have* shapes, that is. They are always *taking* shape. In a place like Chuy, this is the more evident because, stripped of institutional practices and state symbols, the remaining space is simply one of contiguity in which the border cannot be easily reinforced at its fullest.

1.2 AXIOM I: NO BORDER IS NATURAL

If things are always taking shape, it means that they have no primordial outline. In the specific case of countries, this implies the realisation that borders have to be constantly (re)made. What is made, to use a common term in literature on borders, is therefore artificial. Thus, the first axiom of this thesis is irreducible: no border is natural. All borders are made up.

That they are made up does not mean that borders are not real. On the contrary, it starts with the acknowledgement that they do exist but that "every border has a story, every line on a map, every marker in the landscape, was derived from some complex negotiation of power and culture" (Diener and Hagen, 2012, p.55). There is no division between nation-states that is predestined to arise from any geographical features. As Nail points out, borders are "the material technologies of social division" (2016, p.17). It is not a representation of a direct causality between nature and culture. Borders "are part of political beliefs and myths about the unity of the people, and sometimes myths about the 'natural' unity of a territory" (Anderson, 1996).

If it should be inevitable that some feature of the landscape would mark the existence or legitimacy of a national claim over

land, how do we explain the fact, for example, that the Thames did not originate two different countries on each of its banks at the same time that the Uruguay River, rather ironically, marks the boundary between Argentina and Brazil? How do we explain that the limit between Brazil and Uruguay, in turn, starts with the Chuy Stream but continues into indistinct, dry land? The first conclusion is, therefore, that geographical features might only present themselves as 'natural borders' for as long as connective technologies are not readily available or whose use does not fit a certain agenda. That, in turn, highlights the fact that the possibility of overcoming a geographical impediment does not forcibly lead to the rearrangement of national ideals over territory. For example, the Binational Avenue in Chuy alone will not mark unification, even though it certainly enables a higher degree of connectivity and exchange.

Thus, borders are "*dated geopolitical constructions* [...] *time inscribed in space*" (Foucher, 1988, p.11). In order to understand them, it is necessary to abandon the conception that borders are natural, perennial phenomena. They are created in a web of historical relations between claims to land and self-perceived boundaries between communities (Anderson, 1996) that "make them *seem* natural" (Braudel, 1985, p.218 cited by Anderson, 1996, my emphasis).

It follows that all borders, as I have hinted at earlier, carry a degree of intentionality. They are expressions of a desire to divide and control. They create an area that triggers claims to identity, "created to promote a sense of distinctiveness and separateness" (Anderson, 1996) that underpin "the principle through which people and resources are controlled and governed by the establishment of specific territories" (Paasi, 2005, p.19). In addition to being processes, then, borders can be equally construed as *projects*, rather

than outcomes. Their shape and extension does not emerge effortlessly from a self-contained set of quintessential characteristics that simply reflect on space. There is nothing *that* objective about them apart from the fact that "in practice individuals tended to select natural features that supported their geopolitical goals" (Diener and Hagen, 2012, p.42).

Foucher questions if "drawing limits is not one of the attributes of power" (1988, p.36)? The consequences of this attribution being hefty: it justifies the control over prime-matter and labour, thus authorising the dominion over what is produced within that space in the shape of fiscal tools (see Anderson, 1996) as well as over the bodies of those who are turned into what Balibar calls the "national citizen-subject" (2002, p.78), who is imputable by the law in force – pure biopolitics, in other words, the ultimate right that the state grants itself to rule over life, death, and everything in between (see Arendt, 1958; Foucault, 1978; Agamben, 1998).

The artificiality of borders demands the construction of an apparatus that allows for their constant reproduction in order to sustain the extent of state sovereignty, which, as Salter argues, "has no essence, and must continually be articulated and rearticulated" (2011, p.66). The 'national citizen-subject' thus becomes both the agent and the victim of *the nationalisation of bodies* or *the naturalisation of a subjectivity* in the entirety of their faculties and possibilities: to work and produce wealth, indeed, but, likewise, to conceive of the world and their relations to and in the world in terms of clear units of incompatible ways of being that seem to easily justify the existence of the entity in which they are counted.

If the state is no longer an indisputable expression of divine power, its sovereignty depends on the firm establishment of a *national subject* across whom "the old power of death that symbolised sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault, 1978, pp.139-140). Here, there is a turn from thinking that individuals, taken as a nearly homogeneous community, form the nation that then fits within the extension of a state in what Anderson famously describes as 'an imagined community', that is, "a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning" (2006). Instead, "*it can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power*" (Agamben, 1998, p.11). In this sense, the border is the mechanism by which the state measures the absolute extent of the power to rule itself – the very literal meaning of 'sovereignty'[9] –, based on a notion between *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*[10] and *Volksgemeinschaft*[11], a community of equals that is naturally destined to its country.

Consequently, that paradigmatic shift in the study of borders, warns Grimson, leads to "a weakening of the idea that national borders had a real existence that was inevitably significant in dividing populations" (2012, p.199). What the border can be said to do, therefore, is enable a cartographic exercise of power, the ability to create and reproduce "representational practices aimed at inscribing exclusive territorial entities with a content, history, meaning, and trajectory" (Krishna, 1994 cited by Paasi, 2005, p.21). It is

9 'Sovereignty' is composed of the Latin *super*, meaning 'above, on top of' and the suffix *–ānus*, which forms an adjective from a stem word. Together, it can be literally understood as the quality of being in control of one's own self. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Wk3XNg>; <https://goo.gl/uobNjF>; <https://goo.gl/h47TnU>; <https://goo.gl/2W2Jt4> [Accessed 02 Sep 2018].

10 Literally, a 'community of destiny'.

11 Literally, a 'people's community'.

not a given, that is, but a discursive process (see 3.1) that continuously states the existence of the line in accordance to the original intention and project to divide and control based on any assumed pre-existing commonalities amongst a group in relation to space (see Groupe Frontière, 2004; Anderson, 1996).

The idea that a river, a mountain range, or any other geographical feature is an unquestionable marker of the nation-state is, to conclude, nothing other than a convenient way to externalise political objectives onto specific landmarks by assigning meaning to these accidents in a manoeuvre whereby *space* becomes *place* (see 3.1.4). Absolutely no border, in the sense of interstate or international boundary in operation here, is natural. Rather, they are "socio-spatially produced" (Von Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer, 2005, p.4) by the discursive projection of political intentions, founded on putative cultural differences, onto geographical features, thus configuring a space where power and culture are idealistically interwoven.

1.3 AXIOM II: THE FOUNDING SCHISM

All borders are created and, so, form precedes foundation, thus bringing us to, arguably, the most ambitious axiom of this thesis for it flips the core conception of how and why borders are made. Instead of marking the extension of the state by virtue of any presumed differences of the group that, in principle, claims sovereignty from the 'inside', I agree with Nail's argument that "societies and states are the products of (b)ordering, not the other way around" (2016, p.222), which is to say that the border, in fact, manufactures difference. Or, in other words, the state creates the nation and the very idea of an underlying national culture.

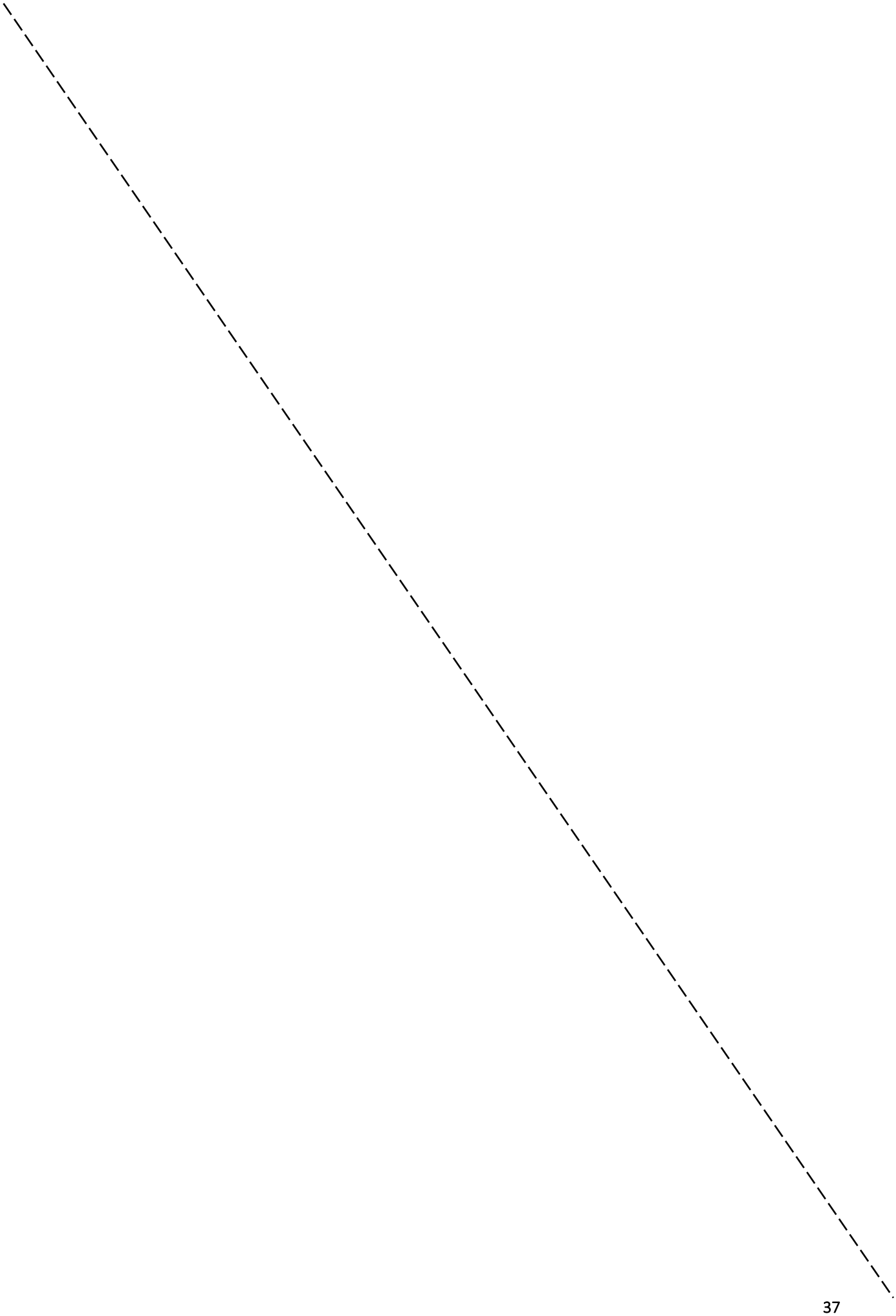
This process demands for there to be a line to indicate its inception. Or, rather, to trigger it. The border, thus, comes to be understood as a *fold* in space that "introduces distance in proximity" (Arbaret-Schulz, 2002 cited by Groupe Frontière, 2004). Here, I am borrowing the Deleuzian concept, according to which the fold "determines and brings form into being and into appearance, it makes of it a form of expression, *Gestaltung*[12], the genetic element or the line of infinite inflexion" (Deleuze and Strauss, 1991, p.242). This is not a metaphorical use, however, for the border is quite literally a fold, a bend, a curl in physical space as well as in our imaginary of what space-turned-place is and represents.

Allow me to use origami as an analogy. Think of the plain sheet of paper that is folded into an infinity of shapes.[13] A bird, a house, or a flower – it all comes from the same 'blank canvas' that is the paper. The shape depends on the position, length, and arrangement of folds. Now, compare the paper, before it is folded, to the physical world, to space – all of it, everywhere. If there are no natural borders, then the world becomes a blank sheet of paper that can be made into whatever shape. The *fold*, that is, creates the shape.

Observe and feel the next page carefully.

[12] Layout, composition.

13 *Origami*, in Japanese (折り紙), literally means 'folding paper'. Available at: <https://goo.gl/UTdYQ3> [Accessed 13 Jan 2017].



The previous page is/has a fold. In what was sheer emptiness, now lies a groove that bisects the paper. It is no longer a smooth surface of virtually infinite potency; it has been made into something other. Likewise, this is what a border does: it creates places out of space, but this is far from implying that, due to their artificiality, the world would only be authentic *without* borders. This is a naïvely simplistic approach to interstate boundaries that claims a romanticised version of the world as an inevitable fraternity, oblivious to the fact that there have always been several different mechanisms for dividing and classifying both physically and symbolically (see Grimson, 2011; 2012). It implies that there is, somehow, a purer world that is only accessible in the absence of dividing lines, but, as Anderson (1996) argues, "no rule-bound economic, social, or political life in complex societies could be organized without them".

The issue, therefore, has nothing to do with advocating for a 'borderless' world as if it were possible to imagine social life in an ether of indistinct beings. On the contrary:

> We start with fragmented pieces *as they are already assembled* [...] the pieces, whatever and wherever they may be, produce a whole that is *immanent* to the multiplicities that constitute an assemblage [...] Such a whole points not to Identity or essence, but is rather a temporary stabilisation, a contingent consistency of the parts within the space upon and with which they assemble (Woodward and Jones III, 2005, p.238).

Understanding the border as a fold, in this sense, is not equal to claiming that the world has somehow been perverted by boundaries. It acknowledges *that* the border creates something, without necessarily assigning any moral value to *what* it creates. It acknowledges that borders are, in fact, just as folds, necessary for there *to be* something. Just as it would be impossible to distinguish

the self from everything else without some kind of division, there can only be *one* country in the presence of many, invoking Donnan and Wilson's claim that "a boundary occurs only as a reaction of one system to another, and is thus necessarily oppositional, having two sides" (1999, p.22). The preoccupation here is, accordingly, to approach borders as constitutive of that 'assemblage' rather than as mere products thereof.

Emphasising that "boundaries *actively* order space" (Novak, 2011, p.743) entails, in other words, treating the border as a *founding schism*. There being two elements to this notion. First, the idea of *schism*, of a break, the inscription of a vector for separation. Secondly, the idea of *foundation*, of the establishment of something new in what used to be *no*-thing.

Another way of thinking of the founding schism is to see it as a *shibboleth*, an element that tests belonging by precisely extrapolating its meaning. In popular history, the ultimate example of such an element is the use of 'parsley' (*perejil*, in Spanish) in the Dominican Republic in 1937 to distinguish Spanish-speaking Dominicans, capable of trilling the letter R, from the French-speaking Haitians, who would pronounce it as a guttural consonant. Trill, you lived; guttural, you died. This is, undoubtedly, a gross oversimplification of an episode that involves many other reasons (see Turits, 2002), but it illustrates well the concept of 'shibboleth' in what came to be known as the Perejil Massacre.[14]

From, perhaps, a less macabre perspective, though not unimportant because of that, *Shibboleth* is also the name of a 2007 exhibition at the Tate Modern by artist Doris Salcedo. See images below.

14 See: <https://goo.gl/U8EjdJ> and <https://goo.gl/YUG9Kz> [Accessed 03 Jul 2018].



Figure 3: *Shibboleth II* at the Tate Modern, London. Author: Doris Salcedo, 2007. Available at: <https://goo.gl/rKSZ9K> [Accessed 14 Mar 2017].



Figure 4: Angles of *Shibboleth* at the Tate Modern. Image on the left by Diogo da Silva. Available at: https://goo.gl/a2nmDs. Image on the right by Gdobon. Available at: https://goo.gl/vVawUi. [Both accessed 14 Mar 2017].

Salcedo's piece consisted of a long narrow crack running along the floor of the Turbine Hall at the Tate. According to the artist, it represents "the divisions between creed, colour, class, and culture that maintain our social order, precariously balanced as it is on the precipice of a chaotic void of hatred"[15] by creating a material intrusion in the physical space of the museum. This crack is analogous to any border in that it introduces, as Nail argues, "a process of social division [...] a division or bifurcation of some sort" (2016, p.2). Certainly, Salcedo's piece is a hyperbolic materialisation of the idea of borders, but it is precisely because of it that it works so efficiently to convey the concept of the founding schism.

This crack is not a marker of pre-existing differences in culture, for example. Instead, it is what creates difference because it institutes a gap between levels, that of the inside juxtaposed to that of the outside, allowing for "the compartmentalisation and classification by area [...] whereby people and things are categorised by location in space" (Novak, 2011, p.743). In other words, the border

15 Available at: https://goo.gl/v3YKTP [Accessed 14 Mar 2017].

is the cleft that forges difference. As it will be explored in Chapter 2, the history of Chuy has been one of indistinction between different sides, so how is it that, now, it can be split into two different countries, invoking such uneven symbols and practices?

In terms of interstate boundaries, difference between the two sides, now bestowed with the maxim of 'national cultures', must be understood as the result of the border, not the motivation thereto. The border enables the state that it demarcates to operate symbolically on behalf of the nation that it is supposed to contain. As it has already been established, however, there is no tight fit between the two precisely because the state creates the very idea of 'nation' and 'national culture', not the other way around, thus illuminating the tension between state control and the possibilities to escape it. Consequently:

> The border produces cultural differences *to a much greater degree* than these differences produce it. There are innumerable populated areas where differences are the exclusive product of the border and all that it implies: school systems; military units; means of communication; the condition of being affected by a 'national' economy and political system when there is a territory where there is an economic crisis or political repression on one side but not on the other; and where the potential or real border is perceived as a tool for improving living conditions, which makes it worthwhile for local sectors to sustain (Grimson, 2012, p.205).

The concept of the founding schism sheds light on the practices of drawing borders, that is, "the process of 'Othering' […] the construction of symbolic/cultural boundaries between 'us' and 'the Other'" (Paasi, 2005, p.18). More than that, in fact, the concept argues that whatever differences are used to legitimise the nation-state occur – are induced, rather – *a posteriori*, thus eliciting the very establishment of a border as the foundational act, not of difference,

but of differentiation (Morehouse, 2004, p.20) whose resulting elements are, then, applied across this manufactured entity.

My specific intention with this axiomatic concept is to highlight, finally, that this process of differentiation founded by the border must be somehow experienced in the everyday to be deemed real as well as pertinent (see 3.1.1). Within the scope of the popular register of borders, this is achieved by means of performative acts – i.e., enunciation (see 3.1.3) – that render the border, and its implied differences, perceptible and relevant especially to those who live precisely by the interstate boundary, where the tension between the levels of the inside and outside is at its peak. The immanent tension that is experienced in the everyday of border communities thus refers to the idea of bordering as "the everyday construction of borders through ideology, cultural mediation, discourses, political institutions, attitudes, and everyday forms of transnationalism" (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.10). And what is particularly intriguing about these communities is their rather ambiguous situation as both part of their own nation-state as well as imbricated in what Grimson describes as "cultural contact" in which "these groups relate to each other and engage in different kinds of disputes, all of which tend to generate common patterns and a shared logic for marking differences among themselves" (2012, p.209).

The challenge, in this sense, is to further develop the understanding of the border not only as an epiphenomenon of the nation-state but, rather, as an ongoing process that must, most of all, be pursued symbolically, according to Donnan and Wilson (1999, p.24), by those whose immediate landscape is marked by the existence of an interstate boundary. It is from the everydayness acquired by the border in these communities that emerges a critical

understanding of interstate boundaries as schisms that found difference based on the conflictual relations established around ideas of position and consequent belonging in relation to the border.

1.4 AXIOM III: BORDERLANDS, LINE AND ZONE

On several occasions in Chuy, I set myself the task of walking along the actual boundary. The border between Brazil and Uruguay crosses Chuy as a straight line, on top of which runs the Binational Avenue. On the Brazilian side, the Avenue is called Uruguay and, on the Uruguayan side, it is called Brazil. A small, yet important symptom of how integrated the city is in spite or because of the boundary. Between the two lanes of the Avenue, there is a paved interval adorned with trees and benches. This is the space that effectively works as the city square, common in small towns, where people socialise or just kill time.

My task of walking along the line was, however, met with the reality of those trees, flower pots, and benches. For as straight as I could possibly try to make my journey, it was impossible to follow the boundary. I had to dodge a series of obstacles that bent my path back and forth, constantly leaving Brazil and entering Uruguay, or vice versa, to the point of rendering the question of 'which side' completely unproductive. Where is this tree located: Brazil or Uruguay? Is this bench here or there? Is someone who is sat on one of them split into the two countries? Paired with the fact that the boundary itself has no actual width (see Chapter 3), it became evident that one cannot ever walk along the line as much as around it.

The idea of following the boundary was, therefore, hit with the experience of it. The line might have its precise coordinates, true, but the way in which space has been arranged and built means

that the line is diluted, traversed, disfigured between pavements that start in Brazil and end in Uruguay; trees whose trunks sprawl between the two sides of the Avenue and whose crowns and roots cannot even be classified within this system as they spread at will. The reality of the border, that is, is much different to the assumed rigidity of boundaries. They never fully separate because their very existence depends on the tension between levels. Consequently, for those who live by that point of explicit tension, life is not easily, if ever, compartmentalised between this side and the other. The border divides as much as it connects, defying the very notion of incongruence between in- and outside.

In this sense, it is from a maxim written in the final years of the 19th century that comes a vivid realisation about border communities up to this day. Ratzel decreed that "the border fringe is the reality and the border line is the abstraction thereof" (1897, p.538 cited by Prescott, 1987, p.12). In its original publication, he uses the word *Grenzraum* to indicate 'fringe' and *Grenzlinie* to indicate 'line'. Here, *Grenz-* refers to the Slavic root in use in several languages to refer to 'border' (see 1.1), the crucial difference, therefore, lying in the understanding of the two other words attached. *Raum* means area or space and is connected to the English word 'room'. *Linie*, quite clearly, means 'line'.

But what do these words tell us about the border? They highlight their dual character as an inscription in geopolitical space – the very *boundary*, that is – and, on the other hand, as an area in its own right, which is part of the local reality of the people who live by the boundary. The border, as any break, yields inevitably two sides. These sides do not exist only within the national spaces of which they are part, but, likewise, in immanent proximity to the

edge that marks, at the same time, the end of one side and the beginning of the other. In practice, that is, there is no Chuí Brazil and Chuy Uruguay but always *Chuy*.

Ratzel's statement needs to be interpreted carefully, nonetheless, so as not to infer that the boundary derives from the lived reality. It has already been established that, at their inception, borders do not respond to pre-existing differences that are then marked in space but, rather, to projects of division which, in their exercise, enable differentiation between the resulting segments. This is no clearer than in this region that develops at the margin, unarguably characterised by the adjacency of the boundary. "The notion of border zone, in this case, refers to a *relational space*, not a dichotomous one", Machado writes (2010, p.63), laying the basis for this third, and final, axiom of the border as both a *line* of separation and a *zone* of connection (Ratti, 1992, p.326).

Thus emerges the concept of *borderlands* that is at the core of this thesis. The border is not merely a line that bisects reality into dichotomous sides within which neatly distinguishable units exist. There is no stark jump between the inside and the outside *of Brazil* and *of Uruguay*. In contiguous spaces, such as Chuy, interaction between the two sides of the border is always on the edge of progressive scalar displacement.

Borderlands are not, therefore, an indication of "a fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures), but an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialisation" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, p.18 cited by Donnan and Wilson, 1999, p.38). They are the result of the processual interaction between space and the sociocultural relations developed in it. It acknowledges that, in a place like Chuy, both sides are, at the same

time, marked by the boundary between the two states and by the contiguity of both the urban as well as the symbolic space in which, as Steiman (2010, p.161) argues, interdependence between the two sides is more prominent than the relations between each of the sides and their respective national territories.

This axiom offers an understanding of borders as necessarily experienceable phenomena, anchoring the central question in the thesis of what it means to live *by* the border. It is a space where ideas of belonging to one or the other nation are complicated by the tension between state control, its subsumed national culture, and likewise, for Grimson (2000), the possibility to escape – or constantly resignify – the idea of dichotomous allegiance imposed by the boundary. As part of the everyday, therefore, the concept of borders evolves into one of borderlands, the material and symbolic space where the set of assumptions laid by the interstate boundary are under constant stress.

In conclusion, this thesis focuses on the concept of border as a line that marks the division between nation-states, first and foremost, as a discursive mechanism that makes explicit a project to divide and control by attempting to materialise presumed ontological differences, expressed in terms of 'culture'. This text addresses the issue by claiming that the Westphalian model of the nation-state and its border is not a phenomenon whose inevitability derives from any geographical features but, rather, one that searches for landmarks with which to concretely demarcate power. It conceives of the border as a *maker*, rather than a marker, of processes of differentiation which are then retroactively projected onto the political boundary as a clear reason for the division. Finally, it places the border in the real world, where it is susceptible to being assigned different meanings and functions according to the local reality of communities as well as to the relations that these establish with their respective national territories and the symbolic matrixes of their national-*ised* cultures.

On par with the theoretical framework hitherto developed, the study of the borderlands in Chuy will, in the next chapter, move from an overview of the historical conditions that led to the establishment of the interstate boundary between Brazil and Uruguay to a descriptive panorama of contemporary Chuy. The historical contextualisation of the city in light of the three axioms herein presented not only locates Chuy in relation to the current framework but, likewise, allows the city to emerge in its own shape.

2. THE NEUTRAL FIELDS

> *"But, in daily contact, far from political doctrines and acts, people make and live their own border".*[16]

Although not completely dependent on the history of the formation of the border between Brazil and Uruguay, the understanding of Chuy, as it stands today, needs to be situated in this historical context. This first section of this chapter presents an overview of the main patterns and events that led to the current situation, thus paving the way for an introduction to present-day Chuy in the second section. This is not, however, intended to provide a critical analysis of history but a general panorama of the formation of the border between the two countries, which ultimately sheds light on the present, pointing to certain continuities as well as peculiarities of the role of Chuy within its larger historical context.

Brazil is gigantic and Uruguay, tiny. It might seem almost unfair to even consider comparing the two. To understand their relationship, therefore, we have to peruse where they meet, along 1,069km[17] of a single Brazilian state, Rio Grande do Sul. Uruguay and Rio Grande do Sul have many things in common. They share geographical characteristics, such as the *pampas*, the lowlands of prairie-like features. They share customs and habits, such as that of drinking *mate*, eating absurd amounts of barbecue, and a proclivity to horseback riding. Out of all commonalities, nonetheless, both have historically been more or less of a buffer zone between Portuguese and Spanish dominions and, later, as Garcia (2011) and Goes

[16] Neves, 1976, p.42

[17] According to the *Ministério das Relações Exteriores*, n.d.: <https://goo.gl/DUwRz3> [Accessed 31 Jan 2018].

Filho (2013) highlight, between Brazil and Argentina, resurfacing old imperial disputes which frequently lashed against the region.

Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay have been conquered, lost, reconquered, divided, merged, subdivided, and contested at several occasions in some 500 years of history until no earlier than 1909, when the final arrangements were made to the boundary. Amidst the turmoil of different interpretations to a long list of pre- and post-independence treaties, Uruguay has been claiming, as of 1934, to no avail or further complications, two small portions of land: Rincão de Artigas or Rincón de Artigas, a 237km^2 enclave in the Brazilian municipality of Santana do Livramento, and Ilha Brasileira or Isla Brasileña, a small uninhabited river island at the confluence of two rivers in the triple frontier amongst Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay (Vargas, 2017, p.299). Officially, though, as far as Brazil is concerned, there have been no issues since the early 20th century, when the final treaty was signed by the two neighbours.

It seems fair, then, to follow the traces of ink that have embossed declarations of war and peace along hundreds of years of geopolitical dispute and confabulation. In light of that, the first section of this chapter drafts a historical overview of some of the most important episodes in the relations between the two countries, focusing on four key Treaties, highlighted in the timeline below.



Figure 5: Timeline of the formation of the Brazil-Uruguay boundary.

2.1 TORDESILLAS TO TAIM: THE BRAZIL-URUGUAY BORDER

The Treaties of Tordesillas (1494), Madrid (1750), San Ildefonso (1777), as well as the Treaty of Limits (1851) offer a brief, yet sufficient historical contextualization to the Brazil-Uruguay border for the purposes of this thesis. This is particularly relevant when studying Chuy because it is located in the Neutral Fields, a toponym that is as often used today as it has been since its conception, in 1777, as a buffer zone between Portugal and Spain in an attempt, as Félix Ruben Flügel González (2016), one of my *in situ* interviewees in Chuy, describes it, "to leave a void to keep the problems at bay".[18]

Despite its brevity, the timeline above conveys those facts that seem to be the most important aspects of the region's history. It is important to highlight that, by 'region', I refer to what is now the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul and to Uruguay as historically connected beyond the foundations of their national states. This is a warning against thinking that they could be somehow identified throughout history as inevitably leading to what they have become. In fact, from a brief historical overview of the two, it is possible to note, as Flügel (2016) highlights in our interview, that there have been several occasions throughout the centuries when the slightest of variations would have greatly shifted the sociocultural and geopolitical scenario in the region. The case, in referring to Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay, therefore, is not for a retroactive labelling of history based on our current understanding of the past, but it brings forth the choice to refer to these regions by their current names for their convenience in communicating and locating statements and ideas.

[18] "Fue un intento de dejar un vacío para alejar los problemas".

Secondly, the distinctions established in the first chapter, particularly between boundary and border, are still in operation. The treaties and official decrees by which political entities have negotiated and fought over dominion in the region is a matter of the establishment of boundaries as markers of legal division. Those disputes are undoubtedly connected to how communities and individuals interacted amongst themselves in the region, but they have never fully determined the line itself for, as Neves (1976, p.30) argues, the *border*, in this region, precedes the *boundary*.

This is not to say, nevertheless, that there were clear indications of a separation between groups that would inevitably lead to the formation of certain boundaries. On the contrary, it highlights the peculiarity of both Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay as having historically served as a transitional zone for the imperial clash between Portugal and Spain in the Americas as well as between their heirs after independence. The distinctive interstitial character of the region arises precisely from this clash, along whose many twists and turns Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay became accustomed to sudden shifts in *de jure* national status, allowing for these to become borderlands par excellence, categorically identifiable, most of all, for how efficient they have been in eliciting interrelations, rather than separation, between political and social groups.

Pucci (2010, p.75) argues that Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay have been imbricated since, at least, the first Portuguese expedition between 1530 and 1532, led by Martim Afonso de Sousa. Curiously, this is the first record available of Chuy, when some of his fleet "wrecked at the base level of a small river or stream that the indigenous people called *Xiuê*, whose spelling would later change into

Chuy" (Azambuja, 2001, p.37 cited by Fernandes, 2010, p.27, emphasis added). Such an early mention to the city locates it as part of an incipient coastal route between Portuguese and Spanish dominions, along which several, conflicting boundaries would be drawn.

The oscillation of boundary lines can be visualised in the evolution of the treaties that established them. It is the preferred approach in this chapter because, on the one hand, it points to Golin's claim that "the limits were relatively flexible in the colonial period, in comparison to the modern concept of border. The precision of the boundary line is directly linked to the construction of the national State" (2002, p.10). In other words, the attempts themselves to outline dominions are inextricably connected to political projects that have nothing to do with essential claims, but that are determined by the intention to colonise and mobilise the population scattered across the region, a strategy that was later officialised in 1750, with the Treaty of Madrid, under the Roman concept of *uti possidetis*, a shortening of the Latin maxim *uti possidetis, ita possideatis*, which means something to the effect of 'as you possess, so you may possess'[19], understood, therefore, as the prerogative to *retain* control at the moment of dispute over land (see Amaral, 1973; Boggs, 1940; Doratioto, 2014; Goes Filho, 2013; Mattos, 1990; Vargas, 2017). That is, any later claim to popular allegiance in the shape of cultural differences in the establishment of the boundary needs to be comprehended in this context of instrumental mobilisation of human presence, effectively manufacturing the idea of the *Volk* on whose behalf to claim territory.

On the other hand, this approach highlights the tension between the rigidity of official attempts to draw boundaries and the

19 Available at: <https://goo.gl/bAqBNR> [Accessed 14 Sep 2018].

volatility of allegiance or the quasi-irrelevance of national status in the everyday of those who inhabited the region regardless of whichever treaty was in force. Not only did jurisdictions change, imposing a scenario where illegality depended less on individuals' decision to break the law and more on the circumstantial reach and location thereof, but people were likewise left with a weak idea of who was in power, which ultimately paved the way to an ongoing condition in which the local has, throughout the centuries, held primacy over the national (MI, 2005, p.146).

What matters most in any comprehension of the history of the formation of the Brazil-Uruguay border is, therefore, "the interpretations assumed by statespeople in each sociopolitical era in order to support theses that are pertinent to the conjuncture in which conversations to fix the boundary lines were established" (Golin, 2002, p.165). Beyond the comprehension of the text of treaties between Portugal and Spain as well as, later, between the independent states, it is a concatenated reading of the historical conditions under which these treaties were conceived that brings to light the development of this region as one that has been created not despite but precisely by the convoluted strategies adopted by central powers to colonise, mobilise, and then claim dominion. As Teixeira Soares argues, for most of the colonial period, "the panorama of activities across Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay's *pampas*, if intensely military, is likewise intensely colonial. Each army base becomes the husk of a future city" (1975, p.186), in a wider history of conflictual dominion that ultimately failed to create a sense of cultural belonging that extended too far from people's immediate horizons.

It is in light of the persistently litigious character of the history of boundaries in this region that the Treaty of Tordesillas,

signed in 1494, stands out as the seed of all future animosities. Two years before, in 1492, when the Catholic kings of Spain and Portugal finally managed to defeat the Moors after some 700 years of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula, followed by the expulsion of Jews from the region as well in what became known as the *Reconquista* (see Martínez, 2015), the Spanish Crown had accepted to finance Cristopher Columbus' expedition, which took him to an island in the Bahamas, popularly described as the 'discovery' of the Americas. The prospect of expansion led to an arms race of sorts between Spain and Portugal, calling for the arbitrage of Pope Alexander VI, who issued three edicts in the year of 1493, known as the Bulls of Donation, which culminated with the Treaty of Tordesillas a year later.

Tordesillas "redefined the distribution of the world between the two Iberian powers" (Vargas, 2017, p.105). In reality, however, it was never as successful as its writing had intended in face of the literal impossibility of drawing such a line that, 370 miles to the west of Cape Verde, would mark Spanish dominions to the west and Portuguese to the east. For Boggs (1940, p.76), there were three reasons for the failure of Tordesillas, namely that: (i) it did not specify the initial point in Cape Verde from where the distance would be measured; (ii) the exact circumference of the Earth was not yet known, making it impossible to establish, in turn, the exact measure of a mile; and (iii) it would be at least a century before it was possible to determine longitude at sea.

Boggs' claims are particularly important because they link back to Golin's earlier argument on the role of interpretation and political machinations behind the establishment of boundaries as,

“at the time, miles corresponded to countless measurements, in accordance with each country and culture. In fact, even with each pilot” (Garcia, 2011, p.30). The technical limitations of the time do not, however, imply that precision equates to neutrality, potentially invoking the debate on ‘natural borders’ (see 1.2). In the case of Tordesillas, what this imprecision did was set the ground for constant disputes from which different positions of the boundary emerged in accordance with the interpretations and systems of measurement available. In there being no practical agreement, “the line of Tordesillas was never demarcated with precision during the entire colonial period” (Vargas, 2017, p.106), having served only as what Foucher (2012) calls a “meta-border”, a preemptive boundary drawn from afar, with absolutely no knowledge of what it will outline. In other words, Tordesillas had no content; it was only an attempt to distribute power between Portugal and Spain.

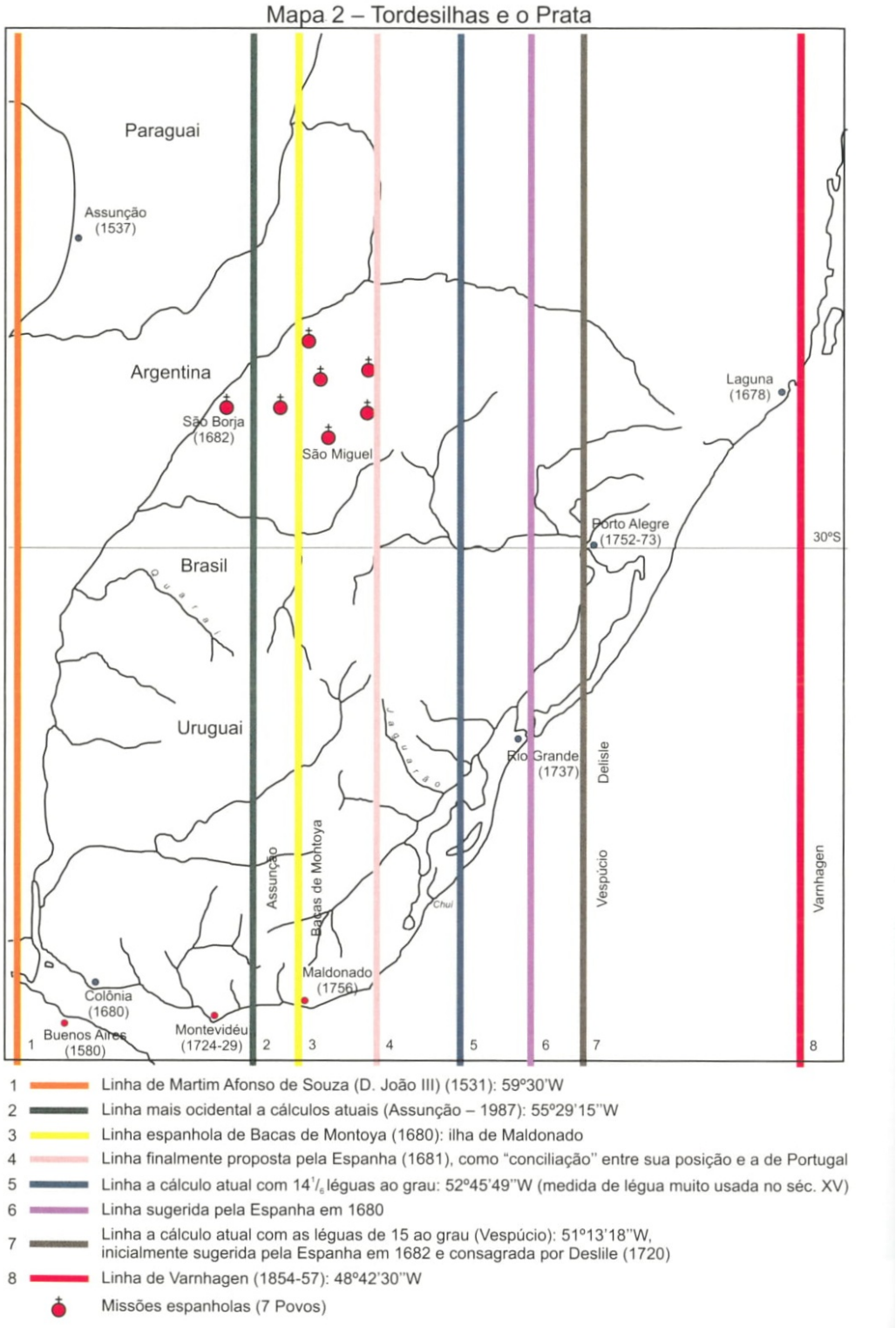


Figure 6: Different interpretations of the position of the line of Tordesillas.
Source: Garcia, 2011, n.p.

As suggested above, so fierce was the competition between interpretations of the Treaty, especially around the River Plate basin (see Doratioto, 2014), that, in 1680, Portugal founded Colonia del Sacramento, now part of Uruguay, whose goal was:

> To widen the borders of the Portuguese colonial empire in the River Plate basin and establish new contacts as well as new commercial and smuggling relations with the Province of Paraguay and with Upper Peru, which faced shortages in the supply of merchandise from Europe and of slave labour from Africa (Myskiw, 2015, pp.44-45).

The location of the new village was not without its reasons. Portugal's decision to establish a new colony *vis-à-vis* Buenos Aires, the epicentre of Spanish power in the region, right across from the River Plate, was an explicit warning of Portuguese plans to expand its dominions. In 1682, Spain adopted a similar strategy, reaching far into the northwestern part of Rio Grande do Sul, via what is now the city of São Borja, where construction began for the *Misiones Orientales*, part of the greater Jesuit Reductions (Golin, 2002, p.48).[20] As tensions grew, Spain decided to send a stronger message to Portugal by founding its first colony in Uruguay in 1726 – a little village by the name of Montevideo, the country's capital to this day (Fernandes, 2010, p.28).

Together, Buenos Aires, Colonia del Sacramento, and Montevideo formed a belligerent triangle by the margins of the River Plate which inaugurated a new era of territorial disputes in the region. The proximity amongst them marked an imminent clash between the two waves of occupation. If Spain had always dominated the River Plate basin, Portugal had thus far been somewhat secluded to the coast (MI, 2005, p.59). Fights over these lands that now form

[20] See also: Negro and Marzal, 2000.

Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay intensified until 1750, when Spain and Portugal agreed to sign the Treaty of Madrid, which "defined the limits between the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in South America, replacing all previous treaties and putting an end to territorial disputes" (Vargas, 2017, p.127).

The Treaty of Madrid introduced two new instruments for drawing the boundary (Vargas, 2017, p.128). On the one hand, it employed geographical features, mostly bodies of water, as points of reference as, in the overall indistinguishable vastness of the *pampas*, it can be assumed that rivers were, at the time, the most reliable way to somewhat unmistakably map the region. On the other hand, this was the first time that the two countries used the aforementioned concept of *uti possidetis*.

No longer than 11 years later, however, the treaty proved incapable of establishing long-lasting peace between the two Crowns. Demarcation of boundaries took several years, with enormous bilateral commissions having to march side by side, during which time disagreements as to where exactly the marker should be built far outnumbered the times when there was some kind of consensus. Meanwhile, due to the concept in force, the unspoken imperative had, in effect, morphed into settling as much land as possible in order to claim possession, which led to each party venturing into underpopulated portions of each other's dominions. It is clear by now that the entire region was a *frontier* (see 1.1) for much of its history and, as each side tried to expand, at the end of the day, the growing population had ever less security as to whose rules to obey. As misunderstandings and disputes did not cease, in 1761, Spain and Portugal signed the Treaty of El Pardo, which effectively annulled the previous one and restored the determinations of pre-

1750 treaties (Vargas, 2017, pp.132-133). This vacillation did only worsen the sense of national status amongst the local populations.

From this point onwards, the relations between Portugal and Spain in the River Plate region became more complicated and the risk of insolubility was imminent. Occupation of land had mostly taken place by means of founding military settlements, there being four of which are worth mentioning at this point, as per Pucci (2010, pp.80-81) and Golin (2012, p.1108). Prior to the Treaty of Madrid, José da Silva Pais, a Portuguese brigadier, had coordinated the construction of two posts, both in the year of 1737: the defunct Fort Jesus-Maria-José, in what is now the Brazilian city of Rio Pardo; and the Fort San Miguel, now located in the Uruguayan city of Dieciocho de Julio, 10km west of Chuy. Soon after the Treaty of El Pardo, in 1762, Portuguese lieutenant colonel Tomás Luís Osório had begun the construction of the Fortress Santa Teresa, which, following the usual changing tides, was actually finished by the Spanish. Around the same time, Spain ordered the construction of the defunct Fort Santa Tecla, near the current Brazilian city of Bagé.

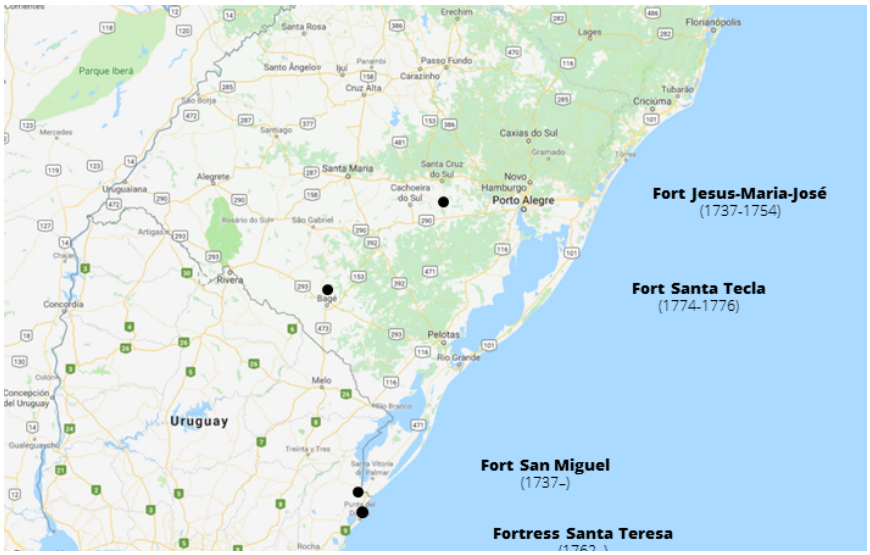


Figure 7: Approximate location of military posts.
Source: Background image retrieved from Google Maps [Accessed 15 Sep 2018].

These forts were constructed precisely in the most unstable of the portions of Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay, roughly indicating what, later in 1777, Spain and Portugal would finally describe as the Neutral Fields in the Treaty of San Ildefonso, thus reading:

> There shall be reserved, between the dominions of each Crown, both the Lagoon Mirim and the Lagoon Mangueira as well as the swathes of land that connect these to the sea, free from occupation by either of the two Nations, serving solely as separation; so that neither the Portuguese shall cross the Taim Stream, in a straight line along the sea down to its southernmost part, nor the Spanish the Chuy and the San Miguel streams up to its northernmost part (Golin, 2002, p.171).

The underlying notion was that, given the severity and frequency of conflict in this area, the best solution was to create a buffer zone between the two dominions, which could not be occupied by either part (Cesar, 1919, p.200). The Treaty aimed to solve the problem once and for all by resorting to the idea of an abyssal separation by emptying this area where confrontation had been most common (Golin, 2002, p.168). Had it been enacted in its entirety, the Neutral Fields would have looked something like this:



Figure 8: Proposed extension of the Neutral Fields.

"The Treaty of San Ildefonso, from 1777, created a neutral territory between the Iberian colonies. To the exception of the areas between Taim and Chuy as well as Santa Tecla (Bagé) and Boca do Monte (Santa Maria), commissioners faced divergences during demarcation that were insoluble in several sectors [...] The lines over the contemporary map illustrate the neutral territories and the itineraries of the boundary according to the theses of both commissions of demarcation".

Source: Golin, 2002, p.197.

San Ildefonso was an attempt to create a "border desert", as Neves describes it (1976, p.24). Inspired by the limits established by the Treaty of Madrid (1750), the current agreement to fully separate the dominions of the two Crowns was complemented by a process of devolution: on the one hand, Portugal ceded Colonia del Sacramento to Spain and recognised the *Misiones Orientales* as Spanish dominion; on the other, Spain surrendered power over the Island of Santa Catarina, where the city of Florianópolis is now located, back to Portugal (Vargas, 2017, pp.133-134).

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that, yet again, the new treaty never fully came into fruition, as evidenced below:

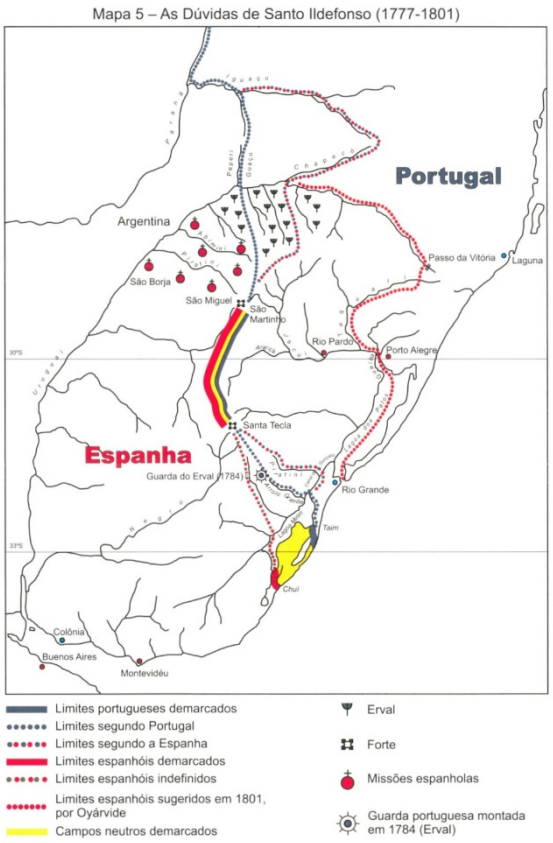


Figure 9: The doubts around San Ildefonso. **Source:** Garcia, 2011, n.p.

The traced lines in the map show the conflicting interpretations of where the boundaries of the Neutral Fields should lie. The thick red lines indicate demarcated Spanish boundaries and the ones in grey, in turn, indicate those of Portugal. In yellow, the areas of the original 1777 plan that were actually demarcated as the Neutral Fields.

To my surprise, I came to learn in detail during my research that the actual, demarcated Neutral Fields did not only include that southernmost portion (in yellow in Figure 9) stretching from the wetlands of Taim to the Chuy Stream, but they also included a long strip across the Midwest of Rio Grande do Sul, where I was born and raised. According to Cesar (1979, p.204), the commissions in charge of marking the boundary often disagreed, which led them to being stationed for long periods of time whilst waiting for Lisbon and Madrid to send further instructions. At one such occasion, in 1787, when demarcation within the framework established by the Treaty of San Ildefonso was still under way, troops from both Crowns set up camp facing each other and remained so for 14 years, by the end of which time a village had already started to take shape. The village became the city of Santa Maria, where I lived for eight years and where I went to university. The location where the camp had been set up became the most important street in the city, appropriately named *Rua do Acampamento*, i.e. 'Camp Street'.

This example, in fact, shows how slow and ineffective San Ildefonso ended up being. Far from solving the conflicts between Spain and Portugal that emerged precisely from the volatility of boundaries, it complicated the scenario even further. In Europe, relations between the two countries did not look any better, where war was imminent between Portugal, one of the remaining allies of England, and Spain, an ally of France under the emerging influence of Napoléon Bonaparte. Animosity in the Old Continent stranded the evolution of boundary marking in South America, where bands kept crisscrossing the fields, neutral and otherwise, building settlements and building *up* the case for future claims over territory.

In 1801, war broke in the Iberian Peninsula and, later that year, the Treaty of Badajoz was signed, putting an end to the War of the Oranges. Four years later, when the Franco-Spanish alliance was defeated in the Battle of Trafalgar, Portugal resumed its own alliance with England, causing the wrath of the Spanish and the French, which led to the Peninsular War of 1807, which culminated with the transfer of the entire Portuguese Court to Rio de Janeiro in 1808, an unprecedented action that effectively transformed Brazil into the seat of power of the Portuguese Empire.

Back in 1801, though, when the Treaty of Badajoz was signed, word took long to reach the depths of South America, and "*gaúcho* troops armed by the local government attacked and conquered several Spanish villages and forts in the region of the *Misiones*, significantly expanding the territories of Southern Brazil" (Vargas, 2017, p.135). Given that the 1801 Treaty would have characterised such advancements as acts of war, Portugal later claimed that the agreement had not in fact been valid as the country had been coerced into signing it under threats of invasion by the French troops stationed between Spain and Portugal. Here, one more time, it was as if territorial disputes had officially gone back to square one, reinforcing the no-one's-land character that had always ruled over the whole region of Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay.

Two years after Brazil had been made into the centre of the Portuguese Empire, its powerful neighbour to the South took its first steps towards independence, which it would finally gain in 1816 under the name of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata, the embryo of modern Argentina. Brazil, in turn, in what can only be described as a bizarre process, had its independence declared in

1822 by Peter IV, who also happened to be the monarch representing the same United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves from which he then broke apart. Thus, Peter IV of Portugal became Peter I of Brazil, reigning over the only American colony to become a monarchy rather than a republic after independence, something with which the country would only catch up as late as 1889 (see Fausto, 1995; Starling and Schwarcz, 2015).

One year before its independence, Brazil had shown signs of the imperial lust that would dominate its foreign relations until the early 20th century with the annexation of the Eastern Bank of the River Plate as the Cisplatina Province. For a few years, then, Uruguay was officially and entirely part of Portuguese and, later, Brazilian dominion. As of 1825, when Uruguayan independence became a real possibility, it was no longer Spain and Portugal that were fighting over territory in South America, but the heirs of their colonial diplomacy, Argentina and Brazil. Finally, in 1828, the two countries agreed, between themselves (Teixeira Soares, 1975, p.189), to grant the then Cisplatina Province independence with the Treaty of Montevideo as the new Oriental Republic of Uruguay.[21] This seemed to be the beginning of the end of nearly 400 years of dispute over the buffer zone "in a formal renouncement of rights that they [Argentina and Brazil] might judge to have to the buffer zone" (Azambuja, 1978, p.47).

In 1831, Uruguay tried to negotiate its boundaries with its Northern neighbour, but Brazil refused to do so, claiming that no adjustments would be made to the boundaries between the two be-

[21] Uruguay's official name is *República Oriental del Uruguay*, in reference to its position to the east of the River Plate.

fore Brazil and Argentina had, themselves first, come to an understanding on the matter (Teixeira Soares, 1975, p.190). Only twenty years later, in 1851, would Brazil and Uruguay come to an agreement, with the Treaty of Limits, which stipulated:

> Let the first marker be placed on the left margin of Chuy, next to the river mouth into the ocean, and as far as the sea waves and their effects should not be destructive. This marker will sport the following words: starting from the East, then North, West, and South: Long. West Greenwich 53º 25' 05"; Lat. South 33º 45' 00" (Azambuja, 1978, p.224).

To the exception of the 1909 adjustment proposed by the Baron of Rio Branco, after whom Brazil's diplomatic academy is solemnly named, when the Jaguarão River and the Lagoon Mirim were opened to navigation by Uruguayan vessels, effectively retracting Brazil's boundary to the thalweg of both bodies, the 1851 Treaty of Limits remains in force. Since the 1930s, however, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, when Brazil's and Uruguay's boundary commissions met to ratify their limits, the latter has claimed that a couple of mistakes in the placement of markers according to the 1851 agreement have hijacked Uruguay from two portions of land: the Ilha Brasileira, in the triple frontier amongst Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, as well as Rincão de Artigas, a swath of land encompassing Uruguay's Masoller and Brazil's Thomaz Albornoz.

Unlike much of the two countries' history, Brazil has never fully engaged with Uruguay's claims. On the contrary, though, as has always been the case, those who live in the borderlands, contested or not, go about their daily lives in relative detachment from whatever issues there might emerge between the capitals.[22] On the one hand, that is, addressing the claims to, once more, tweak the

22 See: <https://goo.gl/xkgP3X> and <https://goo.gl/mA6jzn> [Both accessed 16 Jun 2018].

boundary between the countries would resume the historical quarrels over an impossible entanglement of lines. On the other, nonetheless, borderpeople might acknowledge disputes, "*pero no mucho*"[23], as Mascarenhas and Rodrigues (2014) describe it rather slyly.

In conclusion, there seems to be a gargantuan discrepancy between the official acts of power that try to delimit their dominions and the ordinary people whose lives to this day, in the region, go by somewhat oblivious to grand projects to nationalise the borderlands. There is, nevertheless, a limit to this immunity. As has been evidenced in this first section, the history of the powers which formed the boundary between Brazil and Uruguay might be distant and relatively incapable of overshadowing centuries of topiary sociocultural relations, but that does not preclude the remnants of those disputes and their mobilisation of meaning towards the nation from emerging in the everyday of Chuy.

2.2 CHUY, WHERE 1 + 1 = 1

The decision to study Chuy came down to three factors: (i) it is a *twin city*, where both sides of the boundary effectively constitute a single urban fabric; (ii) it is a *small town*[24], where, on the one hand, social relations are not easily defined by the dichotomy between the private and the public and which, on the other, complicates the association between exceeding the national space and big urban centres; and, finally, (iii) it is the only border city *located in*

[23] This expression literally means 'but not much'. Pragmatically, however, it works as if saying 'not really' or 'not at all'.

[24] I use the word 'city' to refer to the general idea of urban space. The word 'town', in turn, reinforces the idea of 'small urban space'. The word 'municipality' might be occasionally used to mirror the technical nomenclature in the political taxonomy of Brazil and Uruguay.

the Neutral Fields. This section will use these factors to sketch an overview of present-day Chuy and to contextualise it in reference to the historical outline from the previous section.

The category of twin city can be unpacked with Dorfman's notion of "transborder urban continuities" (2008b). These are spaces that stretch across the boundary, forming a unit of sociability that, if marked by the dividing line, is not separated from what lies beyond such division in any straightforward manner. In the case of Chuy, "both urban and rural relations have a long common history, with farms that stretch from one side of the boundary onto the other, [with] strong cultural and labour exchange" (MI, 2005, p.147). In other words, a twin city works as a mechanism that compromises scalar fixity because it complicates the role of the interstate boundary in separating two countries. Chuy is, all at once, two separate municipalities, that of Chuí Brazil and that of Chuy Uruguay, which, furthermore, are not only subjected to the jurisdiction of two different nation-states but also of two different regions within their countries, Chuí Brazil being part of the state of Rio Grande do Sul and Chuy Uruguay, of the department of Rocha. Likewise, and most importantly for this thesis, Chuy is a contiguous urban space where everyday life emerges from this tension between and across scales.

These shifts are central to the border zone, or to the border *as* a zone (*faixa de fronteira*[25]), where all levels of geopolitical and sociocultural divisions are available at the same time. They create a great deal of confusion, for someone who is studying this everyday, as to the level in operation at each instance of social interaction. In

[25] The *border strip* is a legal concept of Brazilian legislation created in 1850 and ratified at five other occasions (1891, 1934, 1937, 1955, and 1988), which enacts special legislation within 150km from the country's boundaries to ascertain national sovereignty (Mattos, 1990, p.73).

this sense, Chuy is officially classified as a *capillary* border zone, where there is little state intervention, leading to the primacy of the local over the national or the international (see MI, 2005).

The predominance of locality, here, links back to the very history of the region, marked by the casual detachment resulting from the maze of boundaries that have scarred both Rio Grande do Sul and Uruguay since the colonial period. Chuy was affected in one way or another by practically all treaties, conventions, and overall disputes in the region:

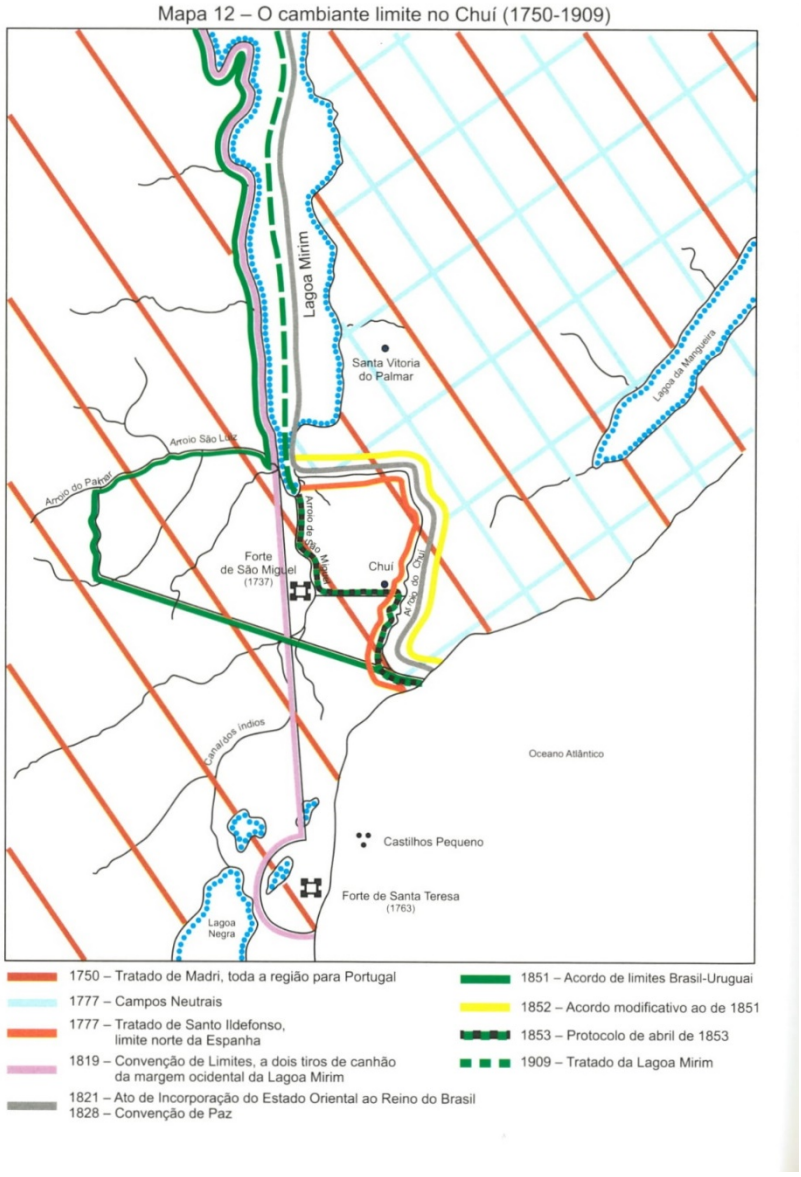


Figure 10: The changing line in Chuy (middle point). **Source:** Garcia, 2011, n.p.

There is barely any need to go into detail of each of the lines shown in the image above to support the claim that it is comprehensible to infer that, given its history, the idea of a border in Chuy is pervasive, yet inexhaustive. The sheer fact that there have been so many boundaries cutting through or around what is now Chuy backs the approach to the idea of the border as clearly relevant, but, at the same time, extremely ordinary. It is unlikely to imagine that any area, regardless of its population density, would be historically prone to responding in a significant manner to this inconsistency in establishing the limit.

When I asked Mr Flügel about the origins of Chuy, he offered an answer that illustrates the city's situation. He started by nearly admitting that "well, we would have to go all the way back, we could refer to Chuy as a zone of dispute between Spain and Portugal"[26] (Flügel, 2016). Later, he states that the origin of 'both Chuys', so to speak, "takes place at the same time because, back then, there wasn't much of this 'here and there'", quickly adding that "it's a bit like now"[27] (Flügel, 2016). So, not only is Chuy inherent to the disputes that were waged over this region, but, likewise, both sides of the city came about at the same time to the point that, I would argue, it becomes counterproductive to engage with Chuy today by its parts instead of its totality.

If the first mention to Chuy comes from the 16th century, when the first Portuguese expedition of 1530-1532 wrecked by the stream that names the city (see 2.1), it was only in 1888 that it was officially recognised (Azambuja, 1978, p.149), which is not to say

[26] "¿El origen? Ahí nos tendríamos que remontar prácticamente, diríamos que lo podemos asociar al Chuy como zona de disputa entre España y Portugal".
[27] "Se da al mismo tiempo porque, en aquella época, no existía mucho aquello de 'allá y acá'. Es un poco como ahora".

that it had been completely unpopulated until then. By that time, Brazil and Uruguay had already agreed to use the stream as a boundary, but there is an interesting detail here. The waters of the Chuy stream run perpendicularly to the interstate boundary, which, in turn, runs dry westwards for about 8km before it meets the San Miguel stream and moves north. It is precisely along this dry patch that Chuy originated.

And it originated as a fiscal gate. Before it was officially recognised as a village, Uruguay set a customs office in the area in 1876, followed by a police station (Azambuja, 1978, p.149). As Chuy Uruguay grew, small ranches and scattered houses started to be built on the Brazilian side, "under the circumstances dictated by the nature of border trade", leading to the emergence of Chuí Brazil, "sheepishly, at first, nearly fully dependent on its counterpart, absorbed in the uses and customs of its inhabitants, with profound reflections in language, folklore, and the traditional arts" (Azambuja, 1978, p.150).

Its recognition, initially by Uruguay, does not imply that the area had been previously unpopulated. The establishment of the customs office in 1876 marks, instead, the confluence between sedentary occupation and acknowledgement by the agents of the law. There are three aspects that need to be considered in trying to understand the origins of Chuy in this sense.

First, prior to the establishment of state checkpoints, Chuy had, for long, as shown in the previous section, been part of the region of most intense conflict between Spain and Portugal. It is located on the coastal roads built by the latter to connect Colonia del Sacramento to the city of Rio Grande, in Portuguese dominions, and

was later incorporated to Spanish dominions, followed by the creation of Uruguay. To this day, Chuy is still an important route between places as far as Montevideo and São Paulo. Secondly, in 1777, Chuy became the very boundary of the Neutral Fields, which started north at the Taim Stream. As, in principle, neither Spanish nor Portuguese authorities could enter these Fields, it became no-one's land and, as Dr Luiz Carlos Tau Golin points out in our interview, "everyone sought refuge [from the law] in the Neutral Fields" (2016). And, finally, "for most of the 19th century, 'contact' had been invigorated by elliptical ultranational spheres of economic, political, and cultural implications" (Golin, 2004, p.193), meaning that the post-1851 period (see 2.1) was one of gradual nationalisation of the newly established boundaries between Brazil and Uruguay, in which this process of state-led occupation somewhat emulated the historical tendency of villages growing from the points where the two colonial powers would clash.

Therefore, the conclusion offered by these aspects is that there is a continuity of Chuy as a point of conflict and communication, both of which have always been intertwined. In other words, it is not possible to fix the history of the city to its official recognition because this is connected to a wider historical context.

Conversely, there is an important aspect of the origin of Chuy as an urban space that can be traced back to its 1888 recognition, as per Azambuja (1978, pp.149-152). Chuí Brazil originates effectively as an extension to Chuy Uruguay and, if Uruguay had already recognised Chuy as a village by then, all that Brazil had set up was a small customs post that was attached to the municipality of Santa Vitória do Palmar, some 20km north. Chuy Uruguay gained its first

telegraph in 1890 and its first school in 1905. Brazil only established its presence beyond controlling the flow of trade as late as 1927, when the first Brazilian school was built, one of whose two founders was, ironically, a Uruguayan teacher. Only in 1939 was Chuí Brazil officially recognised by the state, 51 years after Uruguay had done the same. It was a district of Santa Vitória do Palmar until its emancipation, in 1997, when it acquired the legal status of a municipality, finally on par with its Uruguayan counterpart.

The difference in which each nominal side of Chuy has been treated by its respective country points to an important scalar inversion. If, on the one hand, Brazil has always been the bigger, more powerful neighbour in comparison to Uruguay, on the other, nonetheless, it is clear that Chuí Brazil is historically dependent on Chuy Uruguay. Ultimately, an extra layer is added as there emerges a scalar inversion between the international and the local levels. Brazil is politically and economically more powerful than Uruguay, but, locally, Chuy Uruguay assumes that position in relation to Chuí Brazil.

This inversion comes through not least of all in the population of each side. First, as a disclaimer, given the volatility with which Chuienses fix residence between the sides and with which individuals can be registered on both or neither side, I assume that figures might be slightly off. However, as far as official estimates go, the situations is as follows. Chuy Uruguay, in 2011[28], had 9,675 inhabitants, which represents about 13% of 2016's estimates for the total population of its department of Rocha as well as 0.28% of Uruguay's total population of 3,480,222 inhabitants in the same

28 These are the latest data available about the municipality specifically. Available at: < https://goo.gl/LS9BvQ> [Accessed 13 Sep 2018].

year (see INE, 2017). A very different picture for Chuí Brazil, though, as the municipality counted 6,413 inhabitants in 2016, which represents 0.057% of Rio Grande do Sul's population of 11,286,500 – already more than three times larger than all of Uruguay alone – and some quite incommensurable 0.003% of Brazil's 206,081,432 inhabitants.[29] The estimated combined population of Chuy reaches, therefore, around 16,088 inhabitants. Its situation does not change in relation to the Brazil-Uruguay borderlands either, against which Chuy counts for about 2.23% of the total population of 720,000 in the region (Dorfman, 2008b).

In other words, Chuy qualifies as a small town on all levels: in relation to the borderlands, to their political regions within their countries, and most of all in relation to their national states. This aspect is relevant for this research because it highlights a sense of immediacy of sociocultural relations that is inherent to any small town at the same time, however, that the multiscalar location of Chuy creates a tension between associations of provincialism and small towns, on the one hand, and of globality and big urban centres on the other. The question therefore being: if it is undeniable that Chuy is a space that stretches across national spaces, thus positioning it in what could be considered at least as an 'international' space, how might that position be expressed or rejected in the ways in which Chuienses interact with their local space in the everyday?

In addition to its size, "the decisive factor of the history of this zone is its isolation" (Flügel, 2016). Chuy is served by four motorways, only two of which efficiently connect it nationwide. Brazil's BR-471, on the way to Santa Vitória do Palmar and Pelotas, runs

29 All data about Brazil retrieved from IBGE, the country's statistics agency. Available at: < https://goo.gl/A71x1S> [Accessed 13 Sep 2018].

alone for some 222km, across the wetlands of Taim, until it reaches the junction with BR-392, taking to Rio Grande. Uruguay's *Ruta 9*, in turn, arrives in Montevideo after some 329km, which, despite the obvious discrepancy in comparison to Brazil, is still significant considering that the farthest straight line across Uruguay would not exceed 550km from either Montevideo or Chuy itself. The image below illustrates the physical distance of Chuy from its regional and national capitals.

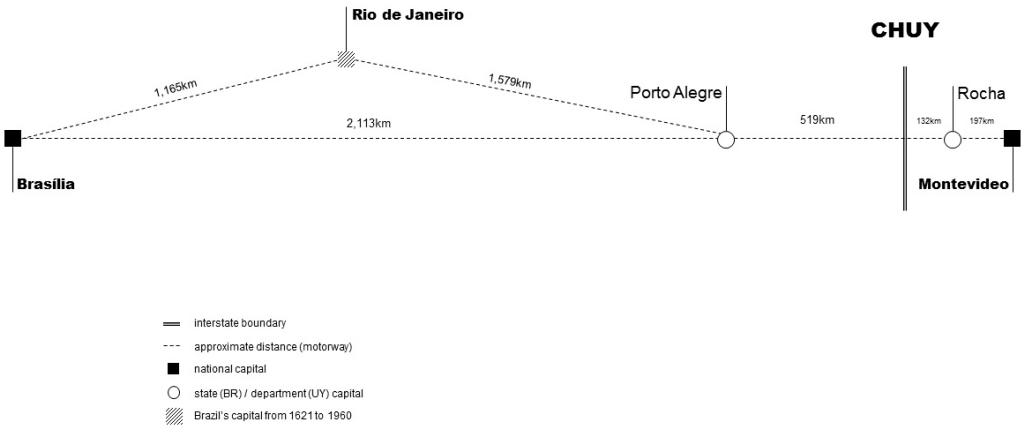


Figure 11: Approximate distances between Chuy and capitals.

Historically, the isolation is even starker, especially for Chuí Brazil. The only motorway that currently connects it to the rest of the country was finished in 1970 (Azambuja, 1978, p.61). Before then, trips into the country did not go much further than Santa Vitória do Palmar as options included a coach that literally used the beach as its road or, then, boats. On the other hand, I was told by Chuienses that *Ruta 9* might date to as early as 1929, though I have not been able to verify this information. Either way, this goes to prove how isolated Chuy is from the rest of its countries or, in other

words, how it has been restricted to its own *place*, a situation that is not too different nowadays.

On the topic of roads, they evoke two fascinating characteristics of Chuy. One of them is the main street, commonly known as the International Avenue, which, on the Brazilian side, is called *Avenida Uruguay* and, on the Uruguayan side, is called *Avenida Brasil*. Despite the popularity of 'International Avenue', I consider this to be a misnomer because, first, it does not lead into either country, only running across Chuy, and, secondly, each of its sides only has one lane, which means that, to circumnavigate the Avenue, one would technically need to enter one of the countries to then re-enter the other. The second characteristic has to do with the pattern, on the Brazilian side, to name streets after countries, so one could address a letter to, amongst many others, *Rua Chile, Rua Nicarágua,* or *Rua Palestina*. Chuy Uruguay, in turn, has a more traditional approach, naming streets after notable figures such as *Avenida General Artigas* or *Calle Sargento Francisco de los Santos*.

Both sides, however, have streets named after Chuy's own Samuel Priliac. Mr Priliac was born to a Jewish family in Bender in 1909, then the Bessarabia Oblast of the Russian Empire. Although his hometown is now legally part of Moldova[30], he is still described in Chuy as 'Romanian', possibly referring to his first language. After his one-year venture in Buenos Aires did not take off, in 1931, he decided that he would try his luck in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. On the way, he met Dominga Hernández, his future wife, in Chuy and, after a couple of years of metropolitan life, the couple were back in the borderlands. Mr Priliac is largely credited for modernising com-

[30] Bender is located in the self-proclaimed independent state of Transnistria.

mercial activity in the city, which had, until then, differed very little to the casual smuggling, farming, and cattle raising that had been dominant since colonial times. It was him, says Mr Flügel (2016), "who gave Chuí Brazil an identity. All of Chuy because he worked for the good of the community and made no distinction between Uruguay and Brazil".[31] Mr Priliac's actions paved the way for Chuy to become a commercial hub, a transformation that was all the more intensified with the Arab migration of the 1960s (ibid.).

Today's Chuy can finally be described as a city that is torn into two. No, this is not to refer to the two sides of the boundary, but, rather, to the tension between its two 'identites'. At one extreme, it is true that state intervention has morphed from conflict over territory to a preoccupation with 'national development' (see MI, 2005; 2009), especially in the context of Mercosur, created in 1991. In this sense, an event from the 1960s illustrates the still feeble, yet growing interest on the part of the two countries to intervene in the region.

The boundary between Brazil and Uruguay has its first point of reference at the Chuy Stream, which empties into the Atlantic Ocean. By the 1960s, however, it had been noted that the actual course of the water could vary in up to 4km, ultimately defying the notion of a rigid line. The solution for this issue was to literally build a wall of jetties that restrained the stream from changing its course in a project that would only be taken up in the 1970s (Azambuja, 1978, p.225). It is no coincidence that this obsession with the fixity of the boundary emerged during a period when both Brazil

[31] "Que le dio una identidad al Chuí brasileño, a Chuy todo, porque él, diríamos, funcionó mucho en bien de la comunidad y no distinguía entre Uruguay y Brasil".

and Uruguay were under military dictatorships that, accordingly, imposed an extreme nationalist reading of the meaning of borders.

At the other extreme, Chuy still retains much of its *mergulhão* character. This is a nickname for the people from the region, in allusion to the homonymous bird (*Mergus octosetaceus*), which dives (*mergulha*) into the water when it feels threatened. According to Pucci:

> the demonym recalls the times when the inhabitants of the Neutral Fields fled into the bushes with their families in fear of outsiders, who could be criminals or even military patrols looking to recruit soldiers by force (2010, p.83).

In the turmoil of territorial disputes, moving boundaries, and the conceptual emptiness of a buffer zone, Chuy was forced to develop its owns sense of integrity without any firm support from whatever political entity. In the past century, nonetheless, it has faced a growing interest on the part of the current states to nationalise the borderlands. All of which is met with the tension between discourses on globalisation and the 'borderlessness' of the world as of the 1990s as well as the return to chauvinism and border control that seems to be regaining force in these past ten years.

It is impossible to say to which extreme Chuy tends because, at least from what was observed during the field, neither is fully operative at all times. If there is one thing that Chuy conveys very poignantly is that, perhaps, the success or failure of borders depends less on weapons and declaration of power and much more on how efficiently discourse can be mobilised and polarised towards a particular agenda to the detriment of an everyday that has always been as open and fluid as it has been marked by attempts to shut down communication. Studying the borderlands, therefore, is not a statistical calculation, but a quantum equation in which plurality

and unity depend not on themselves per se but on how they are made to conceptually interact with one another.



Figure 12: *Mergulhão* next to a boundary marker.
Image caption reads: "The *mergulhão*, the heraldic bird of the Neutral Fields".
Source: Credited to Brondina Pires (Azambuja, 1978, p.110)

PART



TOPOGRAPHY OF THE EVERYDAY

3. THE PATH TO MAKING

"There is no reality except when it is intelligible".[32]

In Chuy, the boundary line is as visible as it is open and it is as invisible as it is closed. It is, therefore, just as ambivalent and fluid as this introductory statement. It shifts between a permissive absence of which Chuienses take advantage in the articulation of their everyday and a dominant presence that, more often than anticipated, influences the ways in which people not only deal with the state, or in which the state itself categorises people, but also in which individuals modulate their immediate relationships.

In this third chapter, I will develop the theoretical-methodological framework of this thesis. Whereas the second section unpacks the steps, the tools, and the overall experience during the four-month period in the field, from June to September 2016, the first section develops the two main arguments that lay the foundation of my approach to everyday life in the borderlands.

First, the border is, as frequently suggested here, an indissociable element of the immediate landscape in which Chuy develops as a social space, clearly acknowledging that the material implications of the boundary, as the geopolitical line, are themselves important but neither exclusive nor omnipotent, considering that landscape itself is a social product of layers of meaning and use added to physical reality (see Cosgrove, 1984). I hope that it is clear by now that I do not agree with an essentialist take on the border, as though its very existence predetermined and, at the same time, explained social life in and of itself. This ultimately points to the

[32] Barthes, 1968, p.42.

fundamental understanding that the borderlands should, here, be analysed from a semiotic perspective.

In general terms, it implies an understanding that the ways in which Chuienses speak of the border form a web of potential meanings – a local semiosphere, i.e. a group of signs available for communication (see Lotman, 1990; Torop, 1999; 2005) – whereby both the experience of the border and the discourse about the border are inextricably interrelated for, as Benveniste argues, "language is given with society" (1974, p.91) and vice versa. What is said about the border thus shapes how the border is experienced as much as the reciprocal is true. In this sense, any attempt at developing a "semiotics of everyday life" (Highmore, 2002, p.104) in the borderlands must deal with the fundamental question of what it *means* to live here, that is:

> The appeal to ordinary language [that] aligns us with the world and with others, and thus with that sense of lived totality which is at the heart of most attempts to 'think' the everyday (Sheringham, 2006, p.229).

In that the dividing line itself does not exist in material reality, for it does not have any width (see Blake, 1995, p.46 cited by Cameron, 2011, p.424), despite having obvious consequences therein, it will always require for something else to stand in its place, therefore highlighting its role as a sign (see Barthes, 1968; Benveniste, 1974; Posner, 2004; Saussure, 1983). Accordingly, the entity of the border, which results from this combination between geopolitical division (boundary) and immanent arena of the life-world (borderlands), operates as a *zero sign* (see Eco, 1976), implying *what* is said and *how* this might affect life on the ground from the very inception of Chuy as a potency always in the making. The

border, therefore, is always a metaphor of itself (see Barthes, 1968; Eco, 1984; 2014; Winner and Winner, 1976).

Secondly, far from something that is only apprehended by mediations, as seems to be the case with those who live inland, in Chuy, the border is a distinctive element of immediate materiality. It is not spectacular or out of the ordinary, it is the very foundation of the everyday to the point at which speaking of Chuy implies speaking of the border and vice versa. Ubiquitous as it is, the border is not constantly invoked for this would create an implosive tautology of sorts. As raised by Vergopoulos, "turning this ordinary into an extraordinary one, does it not bring one to scarify the object itself"? (2015, p.11). That is, the more one speaks of what makes the everyday what it is, the less everyday it becomes, which might ultimately defy its very character as such in the process.

In other words, the border is infraordinary, it is a crucial element of life, but one whose impact and influence is not perennially appreciated. It has sunk to the background of repetition and sameness. To bring it back into light is, thus, already an act of violence, so to speak, against the apparent eurhythmia, in which "rhythms unite with one another in the state of health; in *normal* (which is to say normed!) everydayness" (Lefebvre, 2004, p.16, emphasis added). Violence, here, refers perhaps to a disruption in that appearance of normality without which the invisible markers of the everyday would otherwise often remain unconscious. Disruption, in turn, refers to the very attempt at understanding what is, after all, one of, if not the most important element of Chuy: the fact that this a contiguous anthropological space cut across by the boundary between Brazil and Uruguay.

The resulting condition, that of the border, is not one, however, that fails to be noticed. It is, again, ambivalent in that it both is and is not there. There is no denying that everyone is aware of the border, but, at the same time, Chuy does not exist in a constant state of self-awareness. There is a tension between presence and absence, which, in light of the very understanding of the kind of border on which this thesis focuses (see Chapter 1), leads to the realisation that, in relation to the everyday in Chuy, there is a tension between instances and scales, describable as one between *strategy* and *tactics*.

Two undeniable facts remain though, namely that (i) there is a boundary marking the division between two countries and that (ii) Chuy lies in an open intersection between the two. Both are concomitantly true, thus leading to the assumption that there must also be a founding friction between these two levels, one at which the boundary imposes the extension of the state and, consequently, the unwavering allegiance thereto as well as the ontological markers thereof, and the other at which the everyday develops, almost antagonistically, as an experience of circumstantial positioning between complying with the ever-impending division and subverting it when convenient all at once.

3.1 THE SEMIOTICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

The question guiding this thesis has to do with the meanings and uses of the border in an everyday that is marked by the former's role as an intrinsic element of the physical landscape as well as by its inevitable implications in how people live *by* and in relation *to* the line and its repercussions. No material aspect has any *a priori*

meaning that seamlessly translates into social and cultural practices. Nor do these take place in an ethereal space that is completely detachable from the geometrical vicinity that pins all, at first at least, to a shared materiality. A semiotics of everyday life in the borderlands is, therefore, interested in the issues of *representation* and *performance* of the border (Cameron, 2011, p.42) as they emerge in the everyday, understood as the "site where experience is made manifest, where it takes shape, where sense is made" (DeNora, 2014, p.xx).

3.1.1 Discourses of reality

When I asked Chuienses to explain their lives in the borderlands, this was not a request for an opinion on something distant and, to a certain degree, hypothetical. This was a straightforward demand for sense to be made of their own lives and, then, for that sense to be communicated. In this context, my question turned out to be partly redundant for asking about 'life in the borderlands' is a somewhat unnecessary qualification of a reality that is already inextricable to Chuy's liminal position.

The question seems innocuous at first, but it lies on the edge of responsiveness. In asking, I already establish my subjectivity as one that exists outside the space of Chuy – why would a local ask another of 'our life here'? In answering, the speaker must position themselves as a metonymical figure who must communicate reality even though they can access it uniquely as themselves. This disjunction between the demand of universal representation on the one hand and the limitation of personal experience on the other brings into light the relationship between language and reality. As

one speaks only from the position of their own self, even if the question demands a degree of universality, whatever Chuienses say of their lives *in* the borderlands becomes what is said *of* the border given that this is their immediate lifeworld.

The question asked about 'life', not 'your life', and, at the same time, the only possible answer will be that of the individual who speaks. In each one of their answers, however, and across all of Chuienses' answers, these specific instances are interconnected by language and constitute not a pristine copy of reality but discourses thereof: ways of speaking about life in the borderlands that arise from how people experience it, how they reflect on it, and how these are always taking place at the same time.

The reference to life *in the borderlands*, therefore, yields various texts about reality in its indissociability from the border, where a text is understood as "a structure of messages, or message traces, which has a socially ascribed unity" (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p.6) – 'the borderlands', in this case, as the object on which meaning could be elaborated. As these texts grow into each other, exposing the universe of possible verbalisations that enable them, they become a discourse, i.e. arrangements that allow for language to be produced inside the same reality about which it speaks, evoking Fiorin's definition of discourse as "the social production of language [*linguagem*]" (2017, p.973), a consensual understanding of it as the production of knowledge about reality (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p.94), condensed in the idea of "language [*langue*] as a producer of messages" (Benveniste, 1974, p.64).

In other words, in every statement about life in the borderlands lies a proposition about reality. This draws on Saussure's un-

derstanding of language as far more than "a list of terms corresponding to a list of things", arguing that this conception "assumes that ideas already exist independently of words" (1983, p.65). Words do not describe reality as much as they make sense of what this can become in the process. Chuienses are not offering a mere nomenclature that emerges from physical space; the many names of the line that they might use to describe life in the borderlands make reality in speaking thereof. This action is always one that is performed by individuals primarily through language. Rather than an image of reality, that is, the meaning that is attached to the border is, itself, already an action: that of naming. This use of language to render the border meaningful is the use *of* the border (Wittgenstein, 1958, sec. 43).

The semiotic approach to the border understands, at the same time, that no fragment or element of the world is self-explanatory and that, to be considered as part of reality, it must be rendered meaningful (see Barthes, 1968; Randviir, 2004; Winner, 1978). If something does not mean anything, it is not computed as part of reality. In other words, descriptions found spaces (Certeau, 1990, pp.181-182).

Conversely, a semiotic approach should not lead to the conclusion that only what is perceived exists in itself. I am not interested in establishing an absolutely relativistic view of reality with this approach. What interests me is the fact that we cannot be in the world without somehow binding ourselves to it through meaning. Reality, from a semiotic perspective, is "concerned not with the absolute truth but with the truth as speakers and writers and other sign producers *see* it, and with the semiotic resources they use to express it" (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p.160).

This is especially valid in the case of the border because the boundary line itself has no magnitude (see Cameron, 2011). As no dividing line can be said to be fully natural as much as a naturalization of motivations to divide (Barthes, 1968, pp.53-54), the border does not even refer to a real object in the material world – it must be assigned some meaning in order to be perceptible. The border, that is, only exists as sense is made of it. "The conceptual emptiness of the line", Cameron writes, "is both central to its meaning and fundamentally contradictory to its function" (2011, p.419). Which is to say that the border is always a function, an action that can only be apprehended as it is part of signification processes.

Its conceptual emptiness, nonetheless, does not imply that it is, in fact, nothing (Cameron, 2011, p.427). As a word and a concept, 'border' – and whatever related terms – has to be embedded in a system of possible interpretations from which a necessary degree of shared understanding is already given. Without it, there is no communication – the primary function of language (Lotman, 1990, p.12) – for one would simply not know to what idea, concept, and/or object the word would be referring. If the border is not communicated, if it is not part of a process of assigning meaning to a linguistic vehicle, in other words, it ceases to exist. At the same time, it can only be part of that process if it is somehow associated to an already-existing realm of meanings. This refers to the semiosic character of 'border', which is what I infer from Cameron's proposition that "the enacting of the line takes place within the terms of a pre-established global semiotic founded on the magnitudeless zero of the line" (2011, p.431).

This seems to justify my choice of a semiotic approach in looking at the discourses of reality in the borderlands for it mirrors

Fiorin's verdict that semiotics is "a theory of signification" (2006, p.75). The border does not exist as such unless it is communicated or, as Houtum describes it, "the reality of the border is created by the meaning that is attached to it. A line is geometry, a border is interpretation" (2012, p.412).

3.1.2 *Aliquid stat pro aliquot*: sign and signification

Whether it is taken in what has come to be known as its literal or figurative meaning, the border will have to mean something in order to be counted as part of reality. After all, as already established, *how* we speak of reality and *what* we consider reality to be are inseparable from one another. Likewise, in that the myth of the natural border has already been superseded (see 1.2), the border does not emerge as a concept that refers to a real object. It is a "spatial 'not'", as Cameron puts it, one that does not hold in itself any particular intention to describe or refer to something that already exists in the world, but one that is "a differentiation and/or negation of all that lies 'beyond it'" (2011, p.418).

The border is, moreover, a 'spatial *knot*'. And what it ties together is the dynamic relation between the intention to create by marking its edges – that is, giving it a name [=concept] – and the paradoxical implication of also creating, by extension, what lies beyond its edges in naming what it is not. This "interiorisation by exception" (Cameron, 2011, p.430) is fundamental for the construction of the concept of the border at the same time that it makes it ontologically ambiguous (see Cameron, 2011, p.432). It is always in-between, always dependent on a relation between at least two entities. It can never be something in its own right, only a relation.

Relationality works as a metaphor, "in which the associations by substitution predominate" (Barthes, 1968, p.60). The peculiarity of 'border' is, however, that it can only be understood as the association between two entities or concepts. The border operates exclusively as *aliquid stat pro aliquot* – that is, something that stands for something else (see Eco, 1984). On the contrary, when the border is dissolved into common parlance and toponymy, as is the case in Chuy, the categories of Brazilian and Uruguayan, for example, become comprehensible only in explicit reference to the state; they mean nothing unless the marker of the division is somehow reinstated at the moment of speaking. In other words, the border is the transitional device that permits the conceptual displacement from 'Brazilian' to 'Uruguayan'. One does not exist without the other. And the border, at the same time that it marks the division between the two, can only be understood as their interface.

'Border' is thus a *zero sign*. Here, despite the clear reference to Barthes' discussion of the concept, which "testifies to the power held by any system of signs, of creating meaning 'out of nothing'" (1968, p.77), my proposition results from the following assertions:

(i) A *sign* is a compound unit holding content and expression (Barthes, 1969, p.39) that represents something (Benveniste, 1974, p.51);

(ii) A *sign-function* emphasises the active role of the sign in attaching a certain content to its respective expression (see Eco, 1984) as utilitarian and functional objects in the everyday (Barthes, 1968, p.41);

(iii) *Zero* does not represent nothingness but, rather, an emptiness that can potentially turn into any value (see Cameron, 2011)

In summary, 'border' is a zero sign because it is conceptually void of meaning to mark its function as a threshold whose incision creates opposite senses. It does not mean anything in and of itself; it will always refer to something other, which, in turn, can only be understood in the presence of this "*significant absence*" (Barthes, 1968, p.77). In practice, "precisely because the line has no content, it can have *any* content. Zero may denote nothing, but that does not mean that it *is* nothing" (Cameron, 2011, p.427).

Consequently, it cannot be sustained that 'border' has a primordial meaning per se. Rather than seeing it to denote anything in particular *a priori*, it:

> [...] appears, therefore, as the manifest and recognisable end of a net of aggregations and disintegrations constantly open to further combinations. The linguistic sign is not a unit of signification; it is, rather, a detectable unit in the process of communication (Eco, 1984, p.21).

Despite not having any meaning in advance, 'border' has a function – and that function is to signify something else. That is why I earlier referred to the border as a metaphor of itself. Its reason for being is to enable other meanings. It is always 'zero' because it has the potency of becoming any value precisely because of this inherent ambivalence between nothing and something.

As a zero sign, therefore, it can be argued that 'border' only acquires a plane of content inasmuch as it is, in Eco's words, "a detectable unit in the process of communication" (ibid.). It comes to

mean something, in other words, inasmuch as it is part of *signification*, which "can be conceived as a process; it is the act which binds the signifier and the signified, an act whose product is the sign" (Barthes, 1968, p.48). In other words, it has meaning if and only if it is involved in semiosis.

The consequence of this condition is that, first, as I have already argued, 'border' can mean anything, but, secondly, that it can *only* mean something else, ratifying its function to always stand for something other. Or else, I would argue, not so much that as to *enable* something other to be. Ultimately, the border is a semantic void that allows for meaning to be expressed through itself in a process (semiosis) during which separation [this meaning from other meanings] and conceptualisation [this is the meaning] are indivisible (Torop, 2005, p.164). The border is a double-edged *word*.

3.1.3 *Ego, hic, nunc*: uttering the self in the everyday

The third, and final, aspect of a semiotic approach to the everyday has to do with the ways in which it might be possible to apprehend the polyvalence of the border as it forms discourses of reality in the borderlands. Developing from DeNora's suggestion that, to understand how sense is made of reality, we need "less focus on places and practices as topics in their own right, and more focus on how the enactment of place, practice, and meaning actually takes shape" (2014, p.xx), the semiotics of everyday life must consider the path from *enunciation* to *speech act*.

Languages exist to communicate, which, therefore, implies their use. "Enunciation is this activation of language by an individual act of use" (Benveniste, 1974, p.80). It is "the instance of mediation between language and discourse", Fiorin adds (2017, p.971). It

is the expression of messages and their concepts through an act of communication. To enunciate is literally to speak.

Furthermore, speaking is only possible from the position of the user. No one truly speaks on behalf of another without, to some extent, paradoxically silencing them. One only speaks as an *ego*, in the *hic*, and *nunc*: I-here-now. When a Chuiense says that 'the borderlands are diverse', there is an elliptical 'I' who says that – '*I say that* the borderlands are diverse'. And the instance of speech is, likewise, one that only pierces through reality as it is professed in the present and in the place when and where communication is realised. This space of realisation of language is:

> The sphere from which persons, spaces, and times are projected to settle the statement and, at the same time, they organise the figures of the world and discursive configurations that either create linguistic simulacra of the natural world or explain it (Fiorin, 2017, p.971).

This way, speaking does not only imply speaking of something; it implies a subject who, in the very act of communicating a message, literally expresses themselves too, inevitably locating their relation to the object of the message (Certeau, 1990, p.56). Saying that, for example, 'there is *a lot of* mixture in the borderlands' is different to saying that 'there is *too much* mixture in the borderlands', exceeding the notion of perceptible differences that both share by qualifying not only the mixture itself but also the speaker in relation to it.

Accordingly, the ways in which language is realised by the individual user brings forward the issue of intentionality. As much as we can ask *what*, *who*, and *how,* we can also wonder *why*. This question is extremely important, even if there might not be a straightforward answer to it, in the case of Chuy, because it contrasts the meaning that is intentionally assigned to the border to

the uses that are made thereof. That is, it could be argued that it is about keeping track of subjective coherence on the part of the speaker. A Chuiense could not be expected to abhor the border itself or anything about it and, at the same time, use it in the same way in their own favour.

The appearance of contradiction, however, can be elusive. As we will see in Chapter 4, someone can very well say that, on the one hand, diversity is an advantage of living in the borderlands but that, on the other, one of the disadvantages is the uncontrolled flow of strange people even if, when taken together, both statements refer to interdependent notions – after all, could there be diversity without an element that is not, in advance, somewhat strange? Or, more tangibly, someone can say that they appreciate how easy it is to buy products from the other side of the border at one's discretion at the same time that they resent smuggling – which, again, is problematic because fiscal restrictions to what are technically international purchases still apply irrespective of these two statements.

It so follows that, in addition to mapping what meanings are assigned to the border as well as how subjective positions are implied in the expression of those meanings, it is equally relevant to understand those instances of communication as *performative speech acts*. That is, as utterances that, again, are not as much interesting for how accurately they might describe reality as they are for the effect that "they *become* true by the very act of uttering them" (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p.117). In understanding Chuienses' responses to questions on everyday life in the borderlands as speech acts, therefore, the reason why someone says what they say is highlighted much more incisively than perhaps the validity or the very content of the statement because:

> In particular, they have no unique position over the matter of being related to facts in a unique way called being true or false, because truth and falsity are [...] not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a dimension of assessment – *how the words stand in respect of* satisfactoriness to the facts, events, situations, etc., to which they refer (Austin, 1962, p.148, emphasis added).

Now, the apprehension of the speaker's assessment of the border transpires in the very description of the line by means of two mechanisms: *disengagements* and *engagements*, thus illuminating the path from enunciation to speech acts. Disengagement is the device "of establishing persons, spaces, and times in the statement" (Fiorin, 2017, p.980). It brings to light who is speaking and, to some degree, under what circumstances, but, more importantly, it shows *that* someone is speaking, rather than considering the statement as a purely factual description of the object by virtue of the (implied) speaker's proximity to it. In turn, engagement is the mechanism that conceals the categories of *ego-hic-nunc* in an attempt to neutralise the implications of their arrangement, ultimately producing what Fiorin calls "*proximity* and *distancing* effects" (2017, p.982).

With those mechanisms in mind, it is possible to look for cues in statements that might unveil both what the border means as well as indications of how the individual acts on such meanings in the everyday. Going back to this example, saying that 'there is a lot of diversity in the borderlands', though putatively carrying the same direct content, is effectively different to saying 'I think there is a lot of diversity in the borderlands' because, whereas the latter highlights the statement as personal opinion, the former produces an effect of objectivity by distancing the speaker from their statement. Another common example in the analysis of surveys and interviews are the leaps in pronouns and adjectives in speaking of the

borderlands. In the same sentence, that is, the speaker replaces words such as 'us' or 'my' with 'them' or '*the* Uruguayans/Brazilians', or vice versa, despite the object under discussion remaining the same, thus actually indicating a change in the speaker's position.

Ultimately, the consideration of these *leaps in-stance*, along with the direct meanings expressed by statements, demonstrates, on the one hand, the primordial relation between perception of reality, discourses of reality, and the experience of both, as well as, on the other, the likely intentions and implications arising from these discursive arrangements and adjustments. This finally segues into the second argument of my theoretical-methodological approach for it pins the meanings and uses indicated of the border in the immanent space where these take place – the everyday.

3.1.4 The everyday is not a thing

Attention to the everyday brings along the excruciating question as to what it entails. Given our scientific tradition of dissecting particular phenomena in their own right (see Certeau, 1990), the first realisation is that, as it evokes ideas of banality, routine, and even boredom, the everyday is precisely something "that falls between the borders of disciplinary knowledge" (Highmore, 2007, p.23). It is hard to define, in other words, because it can be easily misconstrued to include any aspect of life.

Comparable to the issue of borders, where, if suddenly everything is susceptible to be seen as a dividing line, then it follows that nothing actually is distinguishable as such, the everyday is equally volatile in its applicability as a category of things in the world. Were we to include anything under this all-encompassing category, it

would likewise follow that this attempt would actually have the opposite effect. Thus, it is important to establish, *a priori*, that the everyday is not a thing in itself. It is not a set of neatly recognisable phenomena that can then be scrutinised in isolation to its very moment of apprehension. "The everyday", writes Sheringham, "is a dimension of human experience rather than an abstract category" (2006, p.16).

This qualification is key not to reduce the everyday to patterns in behaviour and practice, invoking Chico Buarque's words: "every day she does the same thing".[33] On the contrary, it construes the everyday as the "level of existence" (ibid.) or "lived experience" (Highmore, 2002, p.115). Now, what these definitions offer is the appraisal that these trivialities of daily life, whatever they might be, "no longer designate the *object* of discourse, but rather its *place*" (Certeau, 1990, p.18).

The everyday is not, therefore, a set of particular experiences that can be independently categorised as such regardless of place and time. It is the realm of socialisation, where people go about their own lives and establish relationships with other people and with the environment itself. It is, par excellence, the space in which individuals come into being in their interaction with concrete materiality and with other members of their communities. It is the most immanent space of action, "it depicts the socialisation of nature on the one hand, and on the other hand, the degree and manner of its humanisation" (Heller, 1984, p.4). It is, simply put, what emerges from the lifeworld, alluding to Husserl's concept of *Lebenswelt*: "the only real world, the one that is actually given through

33 *"Todo dia ela faz tudo sempre igual"* is the opening verse in Chico Buarque's 1971 song *'Cotidiano'* [Quotidian or Everyday]. Available at: <https://goo.gl/1rV2cq>. [Accessed 15 Aug 2018].

perception, that is ever experienced and experienceable" (1970, pp.48-49).

What is helpful in approaching a definition of the everyday in spatial terms is that it makes explicit the irreducibility of the everyday to its points of apprehension. It is not possible to fetishise any aspect of a given reality (Lefebvre, 2008b, p.197), material and/or symbolic, only to then analyse it because it is only recognisable as an *everyday* aspect as and where it unfolds. Certeau defined the everyday not as an object, but as a place precisely to clarify that its character is not linked to any specific actions but to how they come to be perceived, which he later develops, drawing on Merleau-Ponty (1976, cited by Certeau, 1990), into the categories of "geometrical space" and "anthropological space" (see Certeau, 1990, p.173). Whereas the first simply indicates the physicality of space in relation to the Pauli Exclusion Principle according to which, in common parlance, two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time, the latter refers to the product of the interaction between the inanimate and animate levels of existence. That is, it refers to what is made on top of that space, what Certeau summarises in stating that "space is a practiced place" (1990, p.173) and what Massey develops in saying that:

> If, however, the spatial is thought of in the context of space-time and as formed out of social interrelations at all scales, then one view of a place is as a particular articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings (1994, p.5).

It thus follows that the everyday must be likewise understood in terms of an anthropological space, a 'practiced place' where life, well, *takes place*. It points to "the limit of our effective radius of actions and movement" (Heller, 1984, p.238), what we perceive as

the horizon of our sociability and the extent to which we can apprehend our own lives in trying to define them, to articulate them intelligibly. Finally, I would add Highmore's argument that the everyday can be seen as a "useful non-category" (2002, p.60). Not a discernible notion that identifies phenomena, that is, but always a "totality of fragments" (2002, p.82).

Having said that, understanding it as a 'totality of fragments' does not imply that the everyday is inaccessible or that it would be inevitably uncommunicable because it always implies a subjective view amidst a meshwork of other views. The understanding of it not as a thing does not lead to the conclusion that it does not exist or that it is not apprehensible but to the clarification that the everyday is inevitably a partial capture for "there is no privileged access to the real" (Highmore, 2007, p.16).

The everyday is a perspective from which to access the real. It is a way of looking at life at the level of experience in order to visualise what there is and how that unfolds rather than looking to apply ready-made categories and abstractions. It certainly encompasses the banal and the routines that mark the uneventfulness of our daily lives, but it does so in relation to the specific context in which it takes place. Thus, my approach to the everyday in Chuy is focused on its border condition for no other reason than the categorical realisation that the border, here, is an angle from which to enter the anthropological space of these borderlands, which is easily evidenced in the very use of the word 'fronte(i)ra' as a toponym – i.e., as the very name that bounds the reach of Chuy as a self-enclosed semiosphere.

The particularity of this approach, however, is that it looks for objects of study nowhere else but in the very daily interactions

with and across the border as these emerge in locals' discourses of reality. It highlights those aspects that, elsewhere, have been neglected as implications of greater political shifts as in assuming, for instance, that the existence of an interstate boundary affects the ways in which people think of themselves and of others as a direct extension of the line itself. On the contrary, in looking at how the border does not simply impose parameters of sociability but also at how it is acted on, subverted, and resignified by those whose lives are marked by its existence, I am unhesitantly responding to the proposition that "new sensitive methods have to be developed by boundary scholars that could reveal *the social meanings of boundaries* as well as their *functions in local daily life*" (Paasi, 2005, p.28, emphasis added).

This approach brings forth an auspicious possibility and an inescapable limitation. The possibility is that of drawing a distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, between which the former refers to "that which is simply lived-through" and the latter to "experience as something that can be accumulated, reflected upon and communicated" (Highmore, 2002, p.67). In other words, it does not relegate the everyday to the shadows of insignificant repetition and drudgery; it recognises that what happens on a daily basis is not ethereal and is, therefore, at the same time cause and effect of macro-conditions whose universal relevance, perhaps, stems not from any elevated character but precisely from the ways in which it entangles with menial existence. To use Lefebvre's words, that is, "the everyday 'lived', doubly determined as the *residual deposit* and as the *product* of all sets considered (and thus, in a way, a *total* phenomenon [...] a level in totality, and on its own level, a totality" (2008b, p.57). The possibility to acknowledge the everyday as a

level of the total sum of concomitant realities by focusing on aspects that are relevant locally undoes the apparent conundrum whereby it would be impossible to engage with everyday life because of its primary quality of uneventfulness.

The limitation, on the other hand, has to do with the path from (a) the fact that the everyday is not a distinct phenomenon that escapes positionality to (b) the realisation of the necessity to ultimately decide on an angle that seems most important in search for answers to one's questions. Or, as Clifford suggests:

> Every focus excludes; there is no politically innocent methodology for intercultural interpretation. Some strategy of localisation is inevitable if significantly different ways of life are to be represented (1992, p.97).

My choice to focus on the meanings and uses of the border in everyday Chuy, therefore, come forth to the detriment of other ways to access local reality. It responds, as I have stated earlier, to the perception that, given its aesthetic of implacability, the border is usually treated from a perspective that assumes that it is either omnipotent or constantly equipped to refute breaches. In that the line itself is an inextricable element of Chuy's landscape to the point of oblivion in everyday life, it thus seems legitimate to pursue an investigation of precisely the ways in which the border is constantly (re)signified locally. This points to Colebrook's argument that "life is, therefore, necessarily meaningful, for the experience of the world as present, as there for me, requires that I interpret my experience to be an experience *of* some presence" (2002, p.693).

'Border' and 'Chuy' are roughly interchangeable names for the ambiguous experience of a line that is as effective in dividing as it is in uniting: an interface of the everyday, that is.

The decision to concentrate on the border itself, therefore, indicates the identification of this condition as both constitutive and implicative in Chuy, forming a web of "symbols and signs in so far as they are practically effective" (Lefebvre, 2008b, p.108). The sheer pervasiveness of a regional mythology of sorts that, in the Southern Cone, is based around the notion of the border is indicative that this is a relevant way to access the real (see 4.3). Furthermore, the decision to approach this reality via localised semiosic imbrications of discourse and action stems from the understanding that "we look for meanings, not behind our vernacular artefacts and interactions, but in them" (Abrahams, 2005, p.1). Simply put, the everyday of Chuy is the everyday viewed from the perspective of the "insider's knowledge' of particular social processes" (Gardiner, 2000, p.4), which are, here, the dynamic sociosemiotic relations established around and across the border.

3.1.5 Infra-ordinary: the background of existence

It follows that the question about what the everyday entails transforms into one about the reasoning behind the choice to study, out of all things, the meanings and uses of the border in Chuy. There are three reasons for that decision, all of which arise from the foundational understanding that the border is *infra-ordinary*. Two of the reasons were articulated before the period in the field whereas the third one emerged *a posteriori*, as a result of a pattern in Chuienses' responses.

Before delving into the reasons, it is paramount to develop what it means to look at the border as an infra-ordinary element of everyday life. It clearly alludes to the work of Perec when he questions:

> How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, *the infra-ordinary*, the background noise, the habitual? (1999, p.210, emphasis added)

Despite this being the first reference to the term 'infra-ordinary', it does not particularly stand out as a proposition in its own right. It gains prominence through later readings of Perec's oeuvre (see Sheringham, 2006), for which, in fact, there still seems to be a lot of room in terms of engagement with the concept itself. There is very little in the original text to explain the concept, but it remains a pivotal, though subtle, prefixation of the notion of 'ordinary'.

The tone of Perec's text is one that seeks to "affirm the depth of the superficial, the tragedy of nullity" (Blanchot, 1987, p.13). Even though Blanchot himself was not writing of Perec, I find his words to resonate perfectly with the latter's text due to both their allusion to the sheer lackadaisical character of the everyday. Blanchot claimed that the study of everyday life was set to be one marked by a contradiction between banality and relevance, finally concluding that "to experience everydayness is to be tested by the radical nihilism that is as if its essence, and by which, in the void that animates it, it does not cease to hold the principle of its own critique" (1987, p.19). For him, therefore, the study of everyday life is not to be discarded, but it will always be linked to a sense of nothingness that seems to equally transpire from Perec's idea of the infra-ordinary.

Perhaps a comparison will highlight the importance not just of the concept in its entirety but, especially, of the prefix *infra-*. When one speaks of 'infrastructure', for example, the reference is to the most basic material necessities that antecede whatever uses or later developments might take shape. In other words, it is undeniable that our existence as logocentric beings still depends on a degree of concreteness that must be there at the very inception of the social world. Nothing appears from thin air, that is. Alone, in turn, *infra-* means 'below, under, low'.[34] It is the origin of the idea of *infernus*, a derivative adjective that came to be used to mean 'hell'[35] via its denotation of 'lower regions'.[36] Two senses of *infra-* thus emerge. It is both what supports physical reality and what sinks below the ground level of perception: what allows for life to exist in a continuum, but also what makes it unremarkable.

Now, bringing this understanding to the concept under discussion, I can propose to define the infra-ordinary as the background of existence, thus referring to an idea of a *Gründlichkeit*[37] of the everyday, i.e. a state of exhaustive presence.

That the infra-ordinary might be categorically taken as "the opposite of events" (Sheringham, 2006, p.279) does not then lead to it being either null or irrelevant for, just as Highmore wrote of the everyday, "to treat everyday life as a realm of experience unavailable for representation or reflection is to condemn it to silence" (2002, p.21). The infra-ordinary is, in other words, the everyday stripped to its bare minimum, to the indivisible atomic level of

34 Available at: <https://goo.gl/7EdpUM> [Accessed 17 Aug 2018].
35 Romance languages still use a variation of this term to mean 'hell': e.g., *inferno* in Italian and Portuguese, *infierno* in Spanish, *enfer* in French, *infern* in Romanian and Catalan.
36 Available at: <https://goo.gl/UzrrCb> [Accessed 17 Aug 2018].
37 This is a German word that, despite its common translation as 'thoroughness', can be literally understood as 'groundliness' – effectively, a state of utter factuality. *Grund*, in turn, means 'ground' but is even more frequently translated as 'reason'.

what sets the ground for daily existence. It is not, however, inaccessible, under three conditions.

In order to identify the infra-ordinary elements of the everyday, we need to look for:

(a) *What is invisible*. Rather, what is rendered invisible due to its taken-for-grantedness, i.e. "the illusion of naturalness and transparency" (Chandler and Munday, 2016);
(b) *Yet perceptible*. Drawing on the relationship between physical elements of the world and the meaning-making processes that lead those to being counted as part of reality (see 3.1.1), the infra-ordinary is for the most part invisible, but this does not mean that it cannot be perceived. It is, therefore, counted in the 'lower depths' of reality for those who live it, where "people and relationships gravitate around symbols, the general meaning of which they do not understand, perceiving them only as given realities" (Lefebvre, 2008b, p.53);
(c) *Though unconscious*. Again, this is not to say that it cannot be apprehended for its blunt nullity. It refers to elements of the everyday that have been voided of prompt signification due to their ubiquity. This is what Highmore describes as "nothing much", the articulation of nothingness into an expression that "stands in relation to that which can be remarked upon" (2011, p.3).

How, then, is the border infra-ordinary in Chuy? Not only is the boundary line itself literally invisible in the absence of some markers, the very notion that there is a border cutting across Chuy as well goes unseen because it has been normalised as simply what

there is. Nevertheless, it is still susceptible to perception, that is, it goes unnoticed, but it is not unnoticeable in "the process through which the line traced on a map became a realised border in territorial space and was thus incorporated into the ways of thinking and the routines of locals" (Grimson, 2003, p.241). It re-emerges under some material circumstances, such as going through customs and immigration, on the different state symbols on official documents and in certain public services, as well as in more subtle occasions like the shift from a Brazilian network into a Uruguayan one or vice versa the longer one carries their mobile away from the Binational Avenue. Likewise, it re-emerges even more often under certain discursive circumstances (speech acts) in which people somewhat loosely reinstate the dividing line when convenient. Finally, as I will develop in Chapter 5, Chuienses usually refer to the borderlands as 'normal' – effectively, 'nothing much', thus attesting to its internalisation as a perceptible element of immediate reality though not worthy, at first, of further remarks.

The identification of one of the infra-ordinary elements of the everyday in Chuy along the trajectory of invisibility, perception, and unconsciousness ultimately highlights that the border is not merely an imposition of the state and those in control thereof. The border is, in other words, designed to fulfil certain functions, but it is equally cannibalised both more and less figuratively. Less so as it has been absorbed into the immediate physical landscape and more so as it is constantly being adjusted in Chuienses' discourse. The border is, in other words, the background of existence in the city and is best apprehended by the tension between strategy and tactics made explicit by the labyrinthine dynamics between meanings and uses, as will be elaborated next.

3.1.6 Strategy and tactics in the borderlands

On one of my first nights in Chuy, Mr Darwin, the owner of the hotel where I was staying, became interested in my research. He asked what it was that I wanted to study about the borderlands. I gave him the best explanation that I could elaborate at 10pm and, when I had finished, all that he could say was a deep 'hmm' followed by an awkward silence. Before I could rehearse my emergency exit, he pulled a piece of paper from the A3 business pad kept on the reception desk and ordered without an imperative: "the thing about the *frontera* is that…", as he began sketching his diagram of Chuy. It looked something like this.

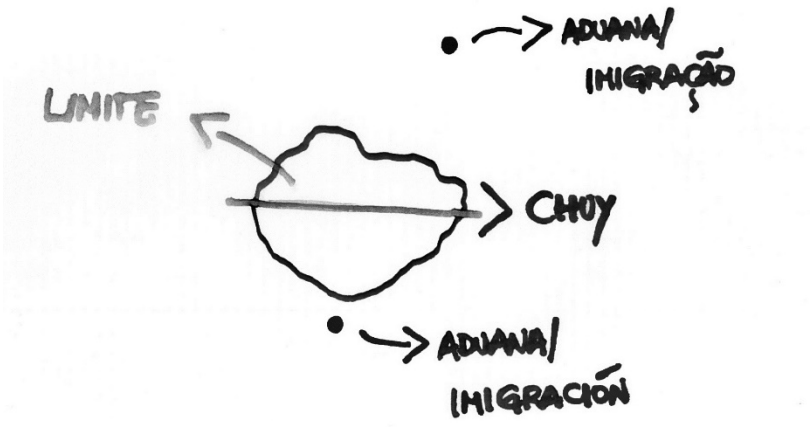


Figure 13: Position of customs and immigration in relation to Chuy.

Mr Darwin's serviette doodle was haphazardly executed, but it conveyed an important fact about Chuy: the line yields. Which does not mean, however, that it is not powerful or that it has somehow become irrelevant. It *yields*, but it does not break. What his drawing shows is that Chuy is a contiguous anthropological space that is geometrically cut across by the international boundary between Brazil and Uruguay. As customs and immigration of both

countries are located at diametrically opposite extremes of Chuy, it results in the space of the city being one that unfolds between the checkpoints. In a way, Chuy is the continuation of the Neutral Fields but, instead of being either designed or experienced as an empty set, it exists as a saturated space.

Why? Because, again, the line yields but does not break. The boundary between Brazil and Uruguay is not supposed to be a mere suggestion; it is intended to mark jurisdiction and, therefore, delimit the horizon of legality and imputability for practices and institutions that have been established by the state. The side of the border on which one is born could ultimately determine an incommensurable series of variables in one's life, something to which Velasco has poignantly referred as "*el azar de las fronteras*", which could be translated as the 'chance of borders', where 'chance' stands for randomness, luck, or lack thereof. His argument is direct:

> National origin – or, more concretely, the possession of a given administrative documentation – often works as a qualified predictor of the possibilities to access decisive advantages for the development of personal capacities (Velasco, 2016).

In other words, the border is a mechanism that brands bodies before subjectivities to the point of near total control over who that individual might become or even conceive of becoming. Whichever category that might be invoked here, be it nationality, citizenship, legality, what his discussion tackles is an overall idea of belonging to the inside that is outlined by the border. Being counted as part of the interior translates into disparate opportunities and a different permission to exist and circulate in space. That is, it limits the horizon of one's everyday.

In turn, Chuy stretches across two different countries and, even though the state emerges in several instances in the everyday

of the city, the line that effectively filters individuals is located outside the everyday space of Chuy. This leads to an extremely ambiguous entity that flourishes, at the same time, *because* and *despite* its interstitial condition (see Chapter 5). Is someone who is born in Chuy Brazilian or Uruguayan? It could be argued that it would depend on which side of the Binational Avenue they were born, but that argument would require a certain classification that is only technically applicable as of the checkpoints – i.e., outside the proverbial walls of the city.

The fact that Chuy is still bisected into two different territories would not suffice either because, in practice, control of the state over movement and occupation of points of its territory that make up the space of Chuy only emerge when summoned. Therefore, that someone might be either Brazilian or Uruguayan at the moment of birth in Chuy might actually come down to individuals: a baby might be born on land that is technically Brazilian, which means that they could registered as Brazilian citizens. Nonetheless, there is very little, if any, impediment to their parents simply crossing the road and registering their baby as a Uruguayan citizen as well. Obviously, this only applies to people who are born in Chuy, but it is an illuminating example of the ways in which the city's position complicates things, the ways in which the line is not fixed, in which it accommodates some malleability.

It yields, but it does not break. The line is still there, an imposition of state power, with all the consequences of being counted as part of the interior of one or the other. It is resilient only to some extent. A Uruguayan citizen would still need a special permit to work on the Brazilian side regardless of how their everyday life might be integrally lived across the border.

All that to finally say that the founding ambiguity of Chuy produces a clear tension between two levels of the border. On the one hand, the line is still a *strategy* of division and control whereby, in the eye of state affairs, there is no ambiguity as to what portions of Chuy belong to which country. On the other hand, the everyday around the line is permeated with *tactics* that Chuienses have been developing for generations, which allow them to test the malleability of the line without necessarily jeopardising their gains. Or, as Colebrook puts it, these are "unintended dilations" (2002, p.699), fairly uncontrolled circumstantial responses to the degree of profitability that individuals calculate within the scope of what is deemed proper without, however, dismantling the determinants of that propriety.

In Certeau's words:

> I call a *strategy* the calculus (or manipulation) of force-relationships which become possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. A strategy assumes *a place* that can be circumscribed as *a proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with *an exterior* of targets and threats (1990, p.59).

The border, as strategy, highlights the ability of the state to determine, in opposition to another state's force, the extension of the territory within which the exercise of power over land, resources, and people is legitimised. In Chuy, quite clearly, the strategic function of the border is to mark where Brazil and Uruguay are and, by extension, the physical extent along which not only certain laws are applicable but also where people's allegiance and identification is supposed to lie.

Certeau argues that strategies work across three types of place: power, theory, and materiality. They grant themselves the

power to elaborate "totalising systems and discourses" (1990, p.62) that inscribe the distribution of geometrical space. In other words, the strategic aspect of the border is to prompt a material break in the physical world though the creation of a theoretical framework that allows for the conception of legitimacy.

This understanding of the border as a strategic mechanism of division goes rather unquestioned if it refers to uninhabited areas. However, it is far from the reality of Chuy, where the border does not simply mark the extension of a realm of appropriate ways of being and of allowed practices in relation to the country within which these are counted. Here, the border is likewise what enables certain practices that subvert its original function.

The border, as *tactics*, that is, is a decisive perspective on the everyday of Chuy, one that cannot be dissociated from the presence of the line, but one that is just as defined by the possibilities to jump the line, to resignify, to reject it. According to Certeau:

> I call *tactics* a calculus which cannot count on a proper. So, no delimitation of the exterior offers the condition for its autonomy. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. Likewise, it must play with the terrain that is imposed in the way it organises the law of a foreign force (1990, p.60).

The everyday in the borderlands is, without a doubt, traversed by tactical appraisals and practices that gravitate around the border. Their objective is not to destroy either the sides that are created by the border or the very structures of power that have put it and that keep it there. Tactics are immediate responses to reality.

There are two words that Certeau uses to elaborate on the idea that are equally important. He argues that tactics are fundamentally everyday practices that only exist during their enacting. The strategy, on the contrary, imposes itself as something that will

last through time and space. Therefore, tactics are everyday, momentary *procedures* (1990, p.71) that attempt to take advantage of what he calls *occasions* (1990, p.61), that is, opportune moments that show themselves as potentially rewarding. Certeau qualifies these occasions by alluding to the Ancient Greek meaning of the word καιρός (*kairós*): "the ability to seize an opportunity" (Detienne and Vernant, 1978, p.27).

In this sense, Chuienses do not merely accept the strategic function of the border to divide and control. Their immediate reality is marked by the knowledge that there is, in fact, a dividing line symbolically, as well as more or less physically, inscribed in their space. The very existence of Chuy as a binational space where the sides of the border, oppositional by definition, are actually experienced as if one meets the equally true fact that, regardless of how open and fluid Chuy might be, there is still a border.

People will play with it in their everyday in accordance to their calculus of convenience without necessarily aiming to annihilate it. These everyday procedures, writes Certeau, "imply a logic of the operation of actions relative to types of situations" (1990, p.40), which are not necessarily radical. What is more, it is interesting to note that everyday procedures do not forcibly imply a rejection of the original strategy. They are part of "a never complete process of b/ordering space along state-centred lines, whose success in containing and moulding the spatial properties of events needs to be verified, as it unfolds in it actuality" (Novak, 2011, p.745). Sometimes, that is, given that Chuienses are embedded in a web of conflicting meanings to the border, tactical responses might actually result in compliance with the strategic function of the border. If, on

the one hand, people resignify the border to use it in their own favour in terms of accessing the other side of the line and, by extension, its products and services, for example, they will just as often re-erect the border when they feel threatened by someone else's use of it.

As Gardiner summarises it, "public assent to the legitimacy of power on the part of the disposed social group is matched by a 'hidden transcript' of popular resistance, which relies on stealth, guile, and anonymity" (2000, p.172). This does not seem applicable only in cases of utter disenfranchisement, but it works in reference to the very inception of the idea of tactics, that by which everyday users, in other words, never have the same level of power to thoroughly redistribute the balance of forces. Ultimately, whatever meanings and uses that Chuienses might have of the border do not actually displace the position or length of the boundary or the very fact that there is one. They consume it, transform it when convenient without radically altering the structures that sustain what ultimately offers the very same 'abilities to seize an opportunity'.

These procedures and occasions that stress the tension between the border as strategy and the everyday in the borderlands as tactical come through in Chuienses' discourse of local reality as well as in how they act on such utterances. This is why I will follow the analytical path from surveys to interviews (see Chapters 4 and 5, respectively), mediated by my own observation in the field, in order to highlight the patterns and contradictions in what meanings are assigned to the border and how they seem to be invoked in this ambiguous space where the border exists as both an archaeological artefact and an erratic topography.

3.2 IN THE FIELD: TOOLS AND METHODS

This section will parse out the methodological framework and the tools used for data collection during the fieldwork, between the months of June and September 2016, in Chuy. It starts with a brief description of the path that led to the topic of choice of this thesis and then elicits its unfolding attempt at a semiotic approach of the everyday. A brief description of the secondary tools, which are not considered for this current analysis, is presented before the section delves into the three tools proper, namely: surveys, interviews, and field notes.

Drawing on Mack, Woodsong *et al.* (2005), surveys were chosen as a means to collect punctual contributions from local residents in order to sketch a semantic map of the general tendencies in how the border is perceived. Likewise, in-depth interviews, arranged with notable local Chuienses, constituted what I came to call formalised acts of conversations during which a more nuanced insight into people's relationships with and across the border emerged. Finally, field notes were taken as an inventory of events and remarks observed during my time in the field and are used as a means to balance the analysis between what is said with surveys and interviews and what is observable on the streets of Chuy.

It is this combined effort to gauge and understand life in the borderlands, then, that brings about the issue of how to study the everyday, which involves two main challenges. First, it is a particularly, if not intrinsically, difficult topic because it "refers to a wide range of practices undertaken by ordinary people" (Moran, 2005, p.9). It is, in other words, a fuzzy concept precisely because it is entrenched in everything that we do or, as Highmore suggests, "eve-

ryday life might be the name for the desire of totality in postmodern times" (2002, p.25). Secondly, when we set ourselves to study something that is marked by its triviality, the danger is always impending: the more we study the everyday, the less it is so: "how often is the particularity of the everyday lost as it is transformed in the process of description and interpretation"? (Highmore, 2002, p.20).

The decisions to study specifically the uses and meanings of the border in the everyday life of the borderlands of Chuy, in that sense, originated from a very personal trajectory with the original question that prompted this research in the first place: that of perception. Born and raised in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, *fronteira* or *frontera* simply meant the name of a region, one you would visit when you wanted to buy wine and cheese or when you felt that importation taxes were too high in Brazil, forcing you to buy your luxury items in Uruguay, where Brazilians can shop duty free. It meant that space where Portuguese slowly fades into Spanish and, together, the two begin to sound even more alike. *Border*, on the other hand, as I came to learn in the UK, is always synonymised to danger, suspicion, and threat.

Basically, how is it that the 'same' word can have such disparate meanings? From that point onwards, I had laid out a more specific, more tangible aspect of everyday life: "the social meanings of boundaries as well as their functions and meanings in local daily life" (Paasi, 2005, p.28). However, that was not all there was to it as meanings, in and of themselves, do not necessarily *mean* much as, Lefebvre suggests, "no matter how simple the facts of the everyday may be, the investigator and the group he is investigating will *never*

use the same words in exactly the same way" (2008b, p.101). Having determined what the most common meanings of the border are, what do they say about everyday life itself? An answer to that question would not derive effortlessly from a taxonomic inventory. In order to understand not only what the border meant as a concept but also what it meant in practical terms, I would have to look at how people's understanding of the border can reflect and influence the ways in which they ordinarily act.

In that my intention has always been to speak with local people, a couple of options immediately came to forefront: interviews and surveys. Different ways of having a dialogue through which it would be possible to collect information about the interpretations of the border. Interviews allowed me to have a longer conversation with local residents and other experts, in which they had more time to elaborate on their ideas in order to "elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic" (Mack, Woodsong *et al.*, 2005, p.29). Surveys, on the other hand, were a quick and straightforward method to collect punctual information "that allows for meaningful comparison of responses across participants and study sites" (ibid., p.3). They provided material that could more easily be turned into data points.

It is fair to say that, whereas surveys were fundamental for creating a list of meanings and associations that people use to refer to the border, interviews gave a clearer insight into individuals' relation to it as well as into what they thought of the border. Together, however, surveys and interviews generated data that were neither too generic nor too specific as, I fear, would have been the case had they been used respectively on their own.

Equally, I needed an element that would bring some kind of

impromptu remarks to guide my data analysis. That, I found in the field notes, "records of what you experienced, what you learned through interaction with other people, and what you observed" (Mack, Woodsong *et al.*, 2005, p.21). They are full of brief insights, of quick reminders of how I felt, what I saw, of the landscape around me and of episodes that might have either developed into more elaborate ideas or simply sunk to the background of my sub-conscious. Either way, the field notes provide a sense of continuity given that they were written in chronological order, painting an evolving picture of the experience in the field.

Field notes, surveys and interviews are, therefore, my three tools of choice for collecting data. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that they were not the only tools that I used in the field. In fact, there were eight tools which were used to varying degrees of success. On top of the three already listed, there were map-making, soundscape recordings, photography and videos, archival research, and public meetings. A brief account of those seems appropriate.

Let us start with the one that did not go as planned: public meetings. My original idea was that my project would build a sort of monthly public platform for people to discuss their experience of living in the borderlands, evidently inspired by the idea of focus groups (see Bernard, 2006; Mack, Woodsong *et al.*, 2005). As I wrote in my fieldwork plan, I wanted to research *with* people rather than research people themselves. Public meetings seemed like the obvious choice then.

The City Council in Chuí Brazil offered me their council chamber for the first meeting. I printed out posters and flyers, both in Portuguese and Spanish, which I handed out to people on streets and asked shopkeepers to hang in their windows. There was even a little poem — *quelle surprise* — on the poster. Here it is:



Figure 14: Flyer/poster announcing the Binational Public Meeting.

The 13th of July arrived and off I went to the City Council. Armed with hundreds of blank sheets of paper for the maps (which I will explain later), dozens of pens, and countless copies of the surveys, I set myself in the slightly makeshift chamber. It was a cold, damp winter evening, as most days were in the field. I organised everything. Six o'clock and the chairs remain empty, welded side by side to a metallic beam. Two minutes, fifteen minutes past the hour. Come on in, please!

Two people showed up. Madruga, the radio host who had interviewed me the day before the meeting and, later, one of my interviewees. There was also Tereza, president of the Chamber of

Commerce in the city, whose handbag looked slightly out of place in that environment, marked by an overarching aesthetic of unintentional Soviet brutalism with a touch of underfunding.

Her take on the border did not differ from other people's: it was based on her own experience. As a businesswoman, she spoke of the difficulties in trade in the region due to the fluctuation in number of customers and volume of sales throughout the year. She told me that, in general, people in Chuy are not interested in participating in anything at all: not just events like mine, but anything that required, in a way, extra time. It turns out that I hold absolutely nothing against the local population though. First, there is the issue that no one really knows me. Secondly, most people here work in shops either by or adjacent to the Avenue. Shops which are infamous for having ridiculously long hours. In sum, who would take the time to attend a meeting that would shorten their free time at no obvious return? Why should I count on people's nobility towards something that, for them, was an unclear project too distant from their immediate needs and routine? This was, accordingly, my first and final attempted public meeting.

Following the public meetings was archival research, which, I quickly learnt, was a bit of an overstatement. There was one formal archive in the whole city, that of the city library of Chuy Uruguay. However, to only slightly contradict my placing archival research at the bottom of the list, most of what I had expected to collect from institutional archives was obtained through local residents' private collections.

Next to the headquarters of municipal government, as an extension to the building, lies the library. Its position and its windows

are not very well planned. It is dark inside, granting it an unnecessarily eerie vibe. This is the only library that I found in the city apart from the schools' libraries, none of which I ever entered — they were either closed or were effectively hidden away. In fact, it is quite difficult to even call this a library given that it comprises no more than two small rooms with improvised shelves signalled with handwritten paper labels and a small kitchen in the back. There were people working in the kitchen when I visited for the first time, which is maybe why it took some time for the librarian to notice that there was someone else there. Cristina is an older lady, with long curly hair. She inspires trust on the spot but is fairly neutral in her reaction to me; I could not tell if she was surprised that there was anyone there at all, if she was annoyed that someone was disturbing her, or if she was just carrying out her duty as perhaps the only librarian in the city, waiting for me to ask her for what I needed.

I explained what I was doing there and her mien changed from indifference to mild amusement. When I mentioned that I would like to go through the library's archives in search for documents that could help me to understand its history, she got that as a sign that I wanted to do that *right now*. She was definitely willing to help — and so began the avalanche. I took a quick look at some of it and was initially happy with the prospect if only underwhelmed with the structure of the library itself.

On later visits to the library, it became clear that the archive had no underlying system. Things were just brought there and, hopefully, they would find a corner to stand on until someone had to move them again. No one ever came in whilst I was there. And this is not to blame them anyway. All the books and magazines

looked ragged and outdated. Cristina did her best, I am sure, but I am all too used to how official cultural institutions are treated in small towns. In my hometown, for example, the library was haphazardly put together in a room inside the building where the rural support agency was based. I survived, I can still read.

In terms of material, the library had no more than old magazines and books, sometimes homemade textbooks about the city. None of it was catalogued or organised any more than by availability of space. Going through all the material that Cristina kindly put in front of me as soon as she seemed to have first discovered it herself as well would have required a monumental effort for which I was neither prepared nor available. In general, those defunct regional newspapers, magazines and other zine-like publications only seemed to have so much to say about the city's history and people's changing opinion about everyday life in the borderlands throughout the years. I am sure, however, that a closer look could potentially bring out some interesting conclusions about these two topics. The material collected in the library consists mostly of photos of old newspapers and magazines with news on the following weekend's football matches or an invitation to someone's birthday or to this or that club's anniversary.

That is not to say that my archival research was not lucrative at all. I received a couple of gigabytes' worth of photos and some videos from Maria Cecilia Deambrosio and Félix Ruben Flügel González, a Geography teacher/radio station owner and a retired school teacher respectively. Their material spanned decades of history in Chuy. I have always found it incredibly fascinating, this phenomenon of ordinary people who, along with their other responsibilities,

dedicate their time to gathering and, at times, even producing material on their communities' history. The most riveting file that they shared with me was a duplicate video dating back to the 1930s entitled '*O Município de Santa Vitória do Palmar*'[38] ('The Municipality of Santa Vitória do Palmar'), the city from which Chuí Brazil became independent in 1997. The video does not show a lot of credits, which makes it difficult to ascertain its year of production. It only shows the name of the company that made it, '*Nacional Sonofilms*', a production company only mentioned in two obscure blogs after a quick online search. [39] The reason why this film is so fascinating is because it is probably one of the oldest registers of life in the region and it points to the fact that, no more than some 90 years ago, the only way to get to Chuy was hopping on a biweekly coach that ran along the beach.

[38] Spelling at the time, as shown in the video, was 'O Municipio de Santa Victoria do Palmar'.

[39] One of these blogs says that the company was created 'around 1930' whereas the other pins it down to 1937, thus complicating any exact dates to when the film in question was actually made. As far as it is possible to conclude anything, however, I would say the film could have been made anytime between 1930 and 1940. Link 1: <https://goo.gl/u1R37R>. Link 2: <https://goo.gl/6ELGKw> [Accessed 12 Mar 2018].

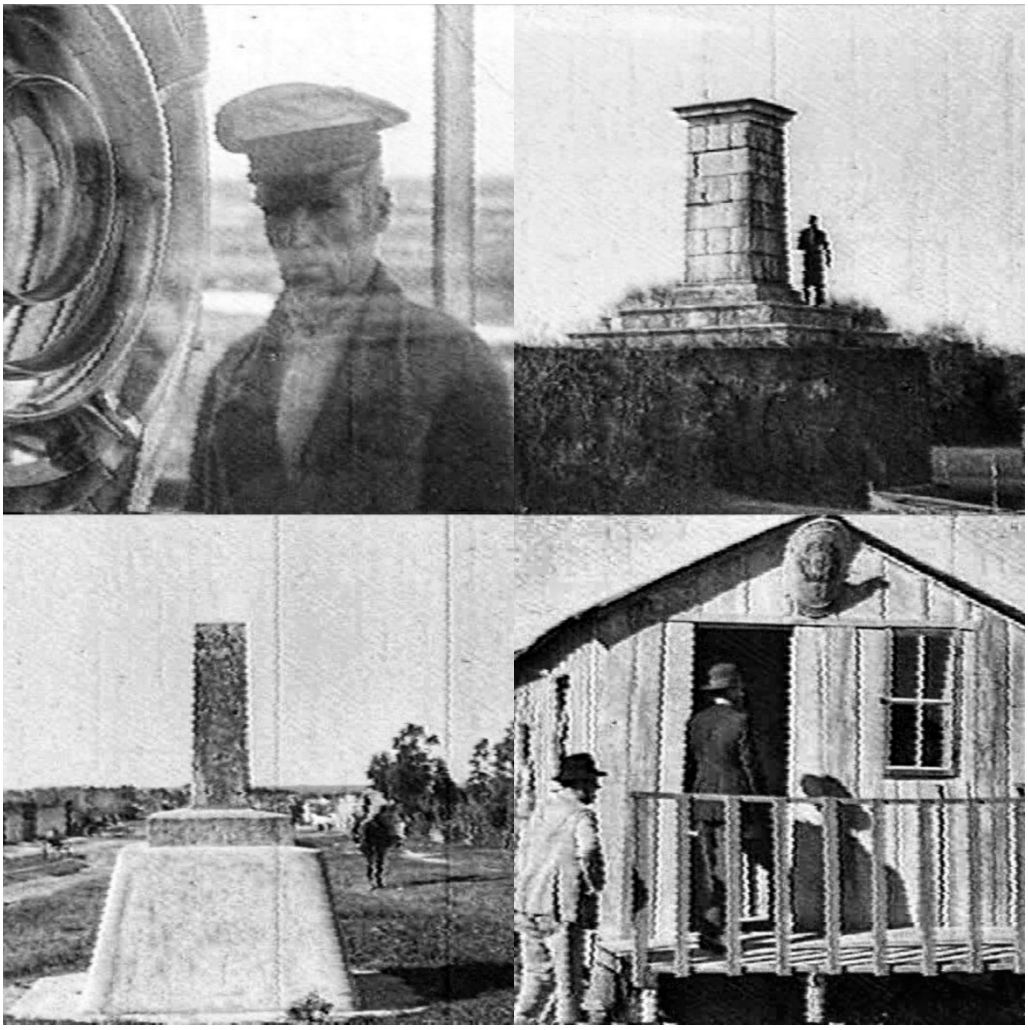


Figure 15: Montage with stills from *'O Município de Santa Vitória do Palmar'*. **Top left:** keeper of the Chuí Lighthouse. **Top right:** the first boundary marker between Brazil and Uruguay westwards, adjacent to the Chuy Brook. **Bottom left:** boundary marker on the binational Avenue. **Bottom right:** Brazil's Customs Office.

Next, photography and video. One aspect of this tool that I did not anticipate was the apprehension and overall anxiety about what and when to register. Should I take a photo of this? How long should this video be? Having to decide the value of something in terms of documentation actually led to a relative lack of photographs and videos at the beginning of the fieldwork, a certain type of 'photographer's block' which, later, prompted me to react with a period of intense, yet disorganised, audiovisual effort. I ended up keeping 1,208 of my own photos in total, covering topics that go from the city's landscape, the boundary markers along the line, to

quirky restaurants signs, and the overflowing bins (see Figure 16) on every corner where there was a shop. In addition, I gathered some 1,113 photos from local residents' personal archives. These images are more personal: birthday parties, local festivities, the façade of some shop.



Figure 16: Montage with some photographs taken on the field.

In terms of videos, I recorded around 30 of them that come up to some 95 minutes of footage. In comparison, only two videos were shared with me by other people. The one that I already mentioned above, from the 1930s, and a 2006 15-minute documentary short entitled '*Chuy Chuí, A Babel na América Latina*' ('Chuy Chuí, Latin America's Babel), made as part of a national programme to foster audiovisual production in municipalities with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants in Brazil.[40]

Going through such material with the intention to analyse it for the thesis would deserve its own solo career. Simply put, there are just too many photos and too many videos to be analysed had I decided to include them in the corpus. Accordingly, as my focus is on those data that could be potentially extracted from other tools, I decided not to use the audiovisual content for analytical purposes.

The same can be said of soundscape recording. Having come across the concept of soundscapes during my time as an exchange student on the module of Cultures of Everyday Life at the University of Nottingham in 2011, I was overwhelmed by this novelty. Sound had, for the most part, escaped my analytical attention as we hear things but do not necessarily pay attention to sounds themselves (see Ingold, 2000). Consciously, it had been either a matter of amusement, as in music, or annoyance, as in noise.

I simply did not really know what it was exactly that those three hours of sound recordings could tell about everyday life in Chuy. That, however, is not to say that it *cannot* say anything, but it is merely an appreciation that this is a current limitation of mine, perhaps a result of the difficulty in categorising sound and soundscapes epistemologically (see Butler, 2006). What they did was

[40] Available at: <https://goo.gl/NH7H2P> [Accessed 7 Sep 2016].

shift my attention to those elements of sound, which would have otherwise been fully overlooked, thus pushing for a change in the perception of the field itself.

In fact, it is fair to say that, ultimately, archival research, photography and video as well as soundscape recording form a sort of multimedia, multisensory set of attachments to the field notes. They guide recollections of the time in the field, allowing this to be a piece of work that, as a whole, is neither too tightly attached to an idea that life in the borderlands can be objectively and unquestionably described and catalogued nor a mere issue of my own feelings in the period.

Before I describe the last of the secondary tools for data collection in the field, that of map-making, however, it is important to highlight that map-making and surveys were tied in the collection process, which will be expanded on later. I asked people to draw a map of Chuy as they remembered it. The objective was to highlight people's symbolic interaction with space by looking into their mental map of the city, which

> […] is the outcome of interaction between the environment and the individual […] not simply a matter of mechanical observation of physical attributes […] but also of motivational significance, functional or social, to the observer (Pocock, 2008, p.115).

Each respondent drew a completely different map of the city, some took it quite literally and made an effort into a traditional cartographic representation of space and others took it more figuratively, drawing either portions of the city that were important for them or symbolic representations of the city – that is, instead of a map per se, they offered a 'portrait' of the city by drawing a border mark, an abstract representation of the city, or even just a tree. This exercise can provide a rich insight into people's relation to space

not only because it shows how their idea of it is never one of the actual totality of the city but of hotspots that compose their "action space", which "covers an area sufficient to facilitate conducting the daily and weekly living pattern" (ibid., p.116). Furthermore, and perhaps more telling in relation to life in the borderlands, those interactions could be narrowed down to the line itself and the instances in which it is explicitly represented or subsumed into the landscape. Out of curiosity, here are some examples of maps that were drawn. They illustrate the breadth of interpretations that respondents had of both the activity of map-making itself but of space and of the city as well. Due to time and focus constraints, all maps are kept safe for a future project in which they can get all the attention that they require.

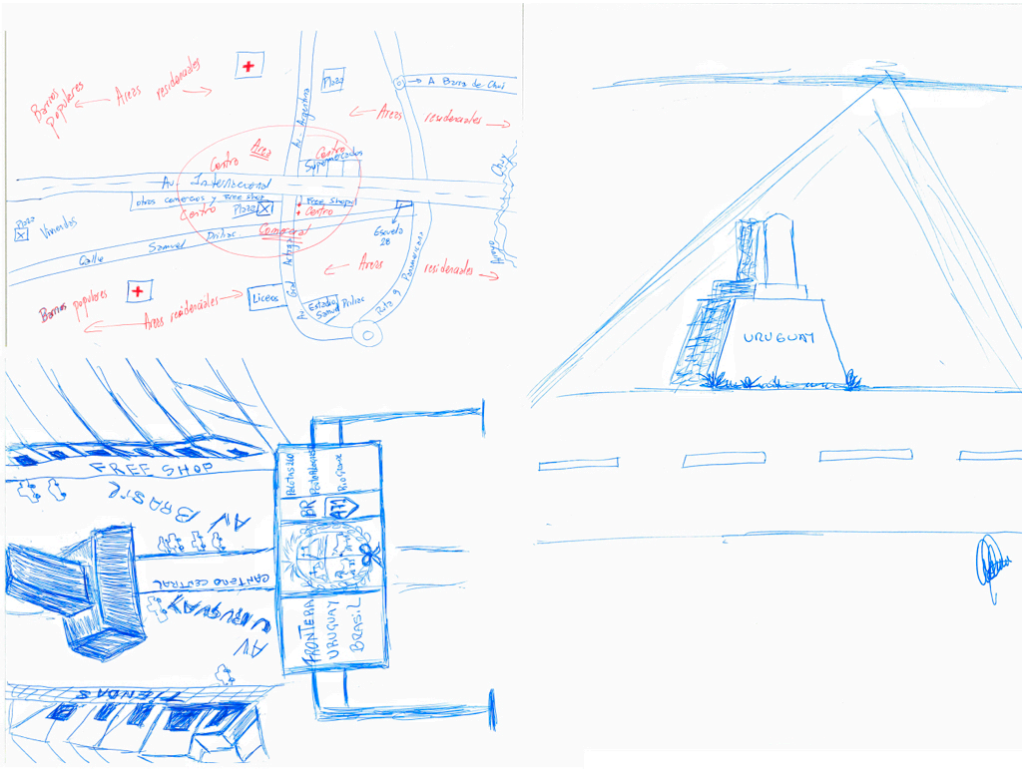


Figure 17: Montage with a few maps of Chuy drawn by respondents.

It is finally time to focus on the data collection methods that have made the cut. We will start by looking at the surveys, then move on to interviews, and finish with a brief account of the field notes. Let us keep in mind, however, that the focus, in this section, is on the tools and the methods – that is, on the process of collecting data rather than on the results and conclusion thereon, which are addressed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.2.1 Surveys

This project has always been inclined to the analysis of the perception of the border and its uses in everyday life that privileged a qualitative approach, which is not, in turn, to say that it would have been satisfactory to have collected only a handful of surveys. It is to say that the balance has always tipped in favour of a careful approach to meaning and sense-making based on the perspectives of the population involved (Mack, Woodsong *et al.*, 2005). That is, in favour of a qualitative approach, in which research is understood as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.3 cited in Brinkmann, 2012, p.20).

In designing the survey, there were two main points of concern which needed to be addressed. First, it was imperative that the survey was designed and distributed in such a way as to allow for easy participation. Secondly, the questions themselves had to obey an appropriate balance between generality and specificity so that responses would add to the comprehension of everyday life in the borderlands without generating data that would be too vague or

too peculiar. Consequently, I made the two following decisions regarding the surveys.

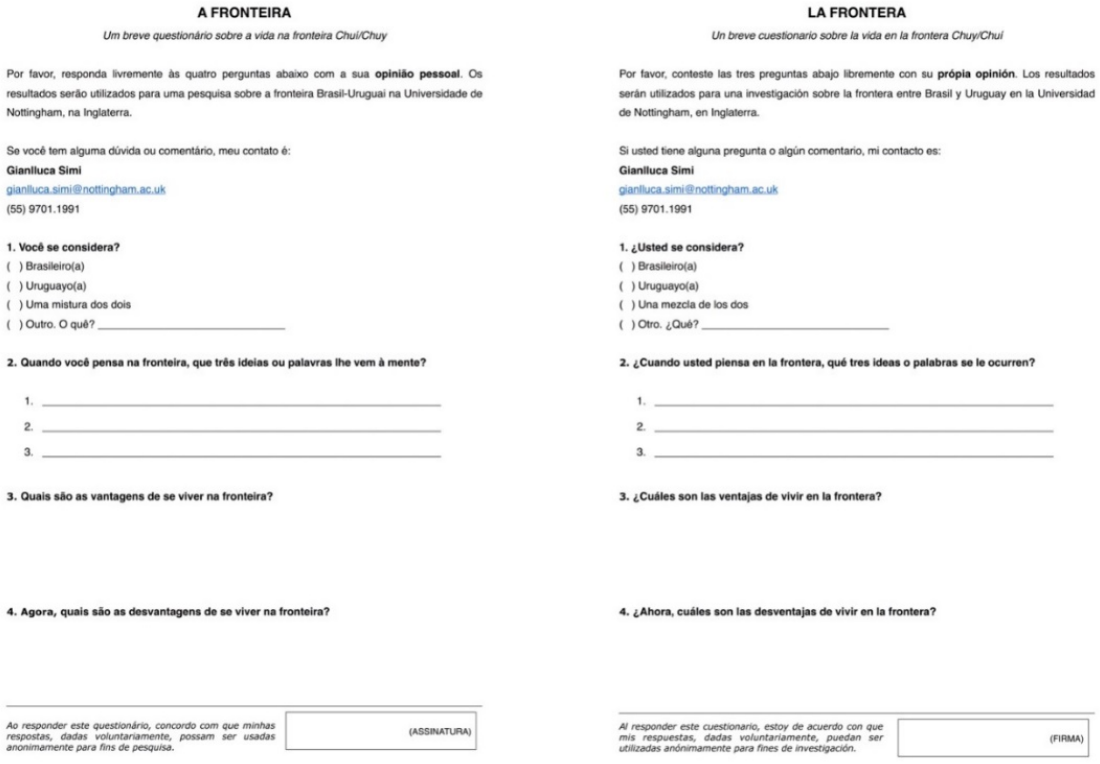
Surveys had to be short and direct. Short because people would be proportionally less inclined to participate the longer it was. Direct as in neither too generic nor too specific, so that respondents could easily understand to what the question was referring and, at the same time, had some space in the elaboration of their own answers. That translated into the survey having four questions, three of which were open-ended.

In terms of what to ask, it seemed unreasonable to arrive in the field with a readymade survey whose questions might not effectively address issues specific to that reality. In other words, some basic experience in the city was needed in order to lay out what specific aspects about those borderlands might be most important in relation to the topic. That does not mean, however, that there had been no previous attempts at sketching potential surveys. In fact, the four questions eventually chosen came from a list of dozens of questions surrounding everyday life in the borderlands.

The most trivial of details, in my head, could, one day, turn into a ground-breaking realisation about life in the borderlands. On the one hand, there was the fear that a fundamental aspect of everyday life would be missed. On the other, consequently, there was the danger to err on the side of some kind of intellectual micromanagement, a kind of overzealousness that would not forcibly lead to strong conclusions. Pragmatically, that is, I needed to focus on what it was that I had always been interested in learning about everyday life in the borderlands, which were those two main points of

perceptions and meanings of the border as well as the ways in which these are acted on, used on a daily basis.

The second decision thus ensued. The survey would ask people about what they thought of when they would think of the border and about those aspects that they found positive and negative about living in the borderlands. Finally, as I was initially interested in knowing more about what kinds of national identifications people there might claim, I added a question on nationality, but with a different turn of phrase. I shall explain. Let us look at the survey first.



A FRONTEIRA

Um breve questionário sobre a vida na fronteira Chuí/Chuy

Por favor, responda livremente às quatro perguntas abaixo com a sua **opinião pessoal**. Os resultados serão utilizados para uma pesquisa sobre a fronteira Brasil-Uruguai na Universidade de Nottingham, na Inglaterra.

Se você tem alguma dúvida ou comentário, meu contato é:
Gianlluca Simi
gianlluca.simi@nottingham.ac.uk
(55) 9701.1991

1. Você se considera?
( ) Brasileiro(a)
( ) Uruguayo(a)
( ) Uma mistura dos dois
( ) Outro. O quê? _____

2. Quando você pensa na fronteira, que três ideias ou palavras lhe vem à mente?
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3. Quais são as vantagens de se viver na fronteira?

4. Agora, quais são as desvantagens de se viver na fronteira?

Ao responder este questionário, concordo com que minhas respostas, dadas voluntariamente, possam ser usadas anonimamente para fins de pesquisa. (ASSINATURA)

LA FRONTERA

Un breve cuestionario sobre la vida en la frontera Chuy/Chuí

Por favor, conteste las tres preguntas abajo libremente con su **própia opinión**. Los resultados serán utilizados para una investigación sobre la frontera entre Brasil y Uruguay en la Universidad de Nottingham, en Inglaterra.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta o algún comentario, mi contacto es:
Gianlluca Simi
gianlluca.simi@nottingham.ac.uk
(55) 9701.1991

1. ¿Usted se considera?
( ) Brasileiro(a)
( ) Uruguayo(a)
( ) Una mezcla de los dos
( ) Otro. ¿Qué? _____

2. ¿Cuando usted piensa en la frontera, qué tres ideas o palabras se le ocurren?
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas de vivir en la frontera?

4. ¿Ahora, cuáles son las desventajas de vivir en la frontera?

Al responder este cuestionario, estoy de acuerdo con que mis respuestas, dadas voluntariamente, puedan ser utilizadas anónimamente para fines de investigación. (FIRMA)

Figure 18: Facsimile of surveys distributed in the field.

It is important to remind the reader, here, that, despite playing an important role in everyday life in such a region, nationality, nationalism, and the nation itself are not the focus of this study. In

asking 'What do you consider yourself to be', in the first question, I did not ask about any legal status. I asked precisely about how one felt in terms of national identity without the need to provide any reason for that choice. Again, I am not so much interested in the degree of accuracy that people's claim might bear; I am interested in what they think and how they act on it (see 3.1.1).

Question 2 asked people to create a list of words or expressions that they associated with the very idea of 'border'. It is of the utmost importance here to highlight that the word for 'border' both in Spanish and in Portuguese – *frontera* and *fronteira*, respectively, though locally pronounced the same – refer not only to the boundary itself, but also to the region, to the border itself as it has been previously elaborated in Chapter 1. In practice, that list was thus an exercise in free association to the idea of 'fronte(i)ra', providing an inventory of the meanings associated both to the geopolitical line and to the lived reality of the region that are not necessarily consciously acknowledged.

What I likewise hoped with that question was to ignite a semiotic process whereby respondents' attention was sequestered for the two following, and final, questions. In that they had already scanned for and verbalised their answers for Question 2, they were led to classifying those meanings as either positive or negative aspects of life in the region by being directly asked to list the advantages and disadvantages of living in the borderlands. Again, it is important to note here that both in Question 2 (free association) as well as in the pair composed of Question 3 (advantages) and Question 4 (disadvantages), the order was delivered in reference to the 'fronte(i)ra'. This reminder is especially important at this point because, as I describe Question 2 as being about 'the border' and

Questions 3 and 4 about 'the borderlands', in Portuguese and Spanish, however, 'border' and 'borderlands' are the same word.

The questions about advantages and disadvantages point to a more nuanced view of meanings inasmuch as they effectively rank them into either positive or negative aspects of life in the region. Responses to Q3 and Q4 resorted to the same ideas as responses to Q1, which ultimately generated a total of 60 codes. That, however, is not to say that things can be easily categorised in such a clear-cut fashion. The intention was to create a general sense of tension between the two questions. In asking people what is good and what is bad about life in the borderlands, not only did they draw on the ideas, images, meanings, associations already listed in Question 2, but their answers to Question 3 and 4 indicated the ways in which the border is used, rather than simply described, by cataloguing potential instances in which the line, as a strategy of division, is either respected or resisted.

Surveys ready, it was time to distribute them. For weeks, I would hand out surveys to individuals as I randomly interacted with them. The receptionist and other staff at the hotel where I stayed, the cashier at the supermarket, the city council employee. That method, however, turned a frustratingly low yield: no more than a dozen had been collected to that point.

The final blow against my collection method came with my failed public meeting. It had become clear that this one-on-one approach would not be productive even if quantity in and of itself had never been at the core of the fieldwork. If the element of suspicion towards a random person distributing forms on the street were not

crippling enough, add to that the fact the people in Chuy work extremely long hours, leaving them very little if any time or energy to take part in my experiments.

Obviously, that realisation did not translate into an inevitable collapse of the data collection process. The difference was that the question on how and where surveys would be distributed entered the equation. I needed to find a place that concomitantly served that original purpose of the public meeting and acted as a distribution centre of sorts; one that had wide reach within the community and that was recognised as legitimate by locals.

A posteriori, it is hardly surprising that the answer was schools. Schools in Chuy were the most suitable option for a number of reasons. First, they amplified collection as, in one visit, the number of surveys distributed could be easily dozens of times larger than if I had pursued the original distribution method. Secondly, schools are only separated by levels of education, either primary or secondary, but there are no further subdivisions as in schools for boys or for girls, private and public, thus not risking too stark a demographic segmentation.

Thirdly, local population is, on average, quite young. Data from Uruguay's National Statistics Office (INE), though not being municipality-specific, show that, in 2011, 51.2% of the country's population is still under 35 despite a tendency towards ageing[41], which is later reinforced by official projections in 2013.[42] Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) from the country's last census, in 2010, confirm the trend by showing

[41] INE (2011). Resultados del Censo de Población 2011: población, crecimiento y estructura por sexo y edad. Montevideo: INE. Available at: <https://goo.gl/W8G4W2> [Accessed 21 May 2015].
[42] INE (2014). Estimaciones y proyecciones de la población de Uruguay: metodología y resultados. Revisión 2013. Montevideo: INE. Available at <https://goo.gl/tF6KVL> [Accessed 21 May 2015].

that, in Chuí Brazil, 55% of the population are under 35.[43] Though it cannot be said that these data are recent per se, they reflect my perception in the field, where it is possible to note a prevalence of a younger population, which was also informally confirmed in conversations with many locals. Data on age groups are accordingly important because there are quite simply more people in whose families someone potentially attended any of the schools, either because they were the parents or siblings/cousins of children at school-age. Or, if we follow the reverse track, there were more chances of school pupils taking surveys home to a greater portion of the population.

Finally, schools also addressed the issue of legitimacy. It was much more likely for people to take the survey seriously if they had been presented to it via the schools. Ultimately, schools were great ports of entry into the community and they granted the project a higher level of legitimacy with participants.

The process was not free from challenges nonetheless. For every school visited, the procedure was as follows. First, I would visit the school to speak with the headmaster or headmistress in order to explain my project and ask for permission to distribute the surveys. Then, depending on their answer, I would return with copies of the surveys and distribute them in every classroom. Finally, I would return within the next few days to collect them. That procedure ran relatively smoothly in only two of the four schools visited.

Four schools took part in the process: two in Chuí Brazil and two in Chuy Uruguay. On the Brazilian side, I visited *Escola Municipal de Ensino Fundamental General Artigas* and *Escola Estadual de*

[43] Retrieved from IBGE's Cities Portal. Available at: <https://goo.gl/YA1aNv> [Accessed 23 May 2015].

Ensino Médio Marechal Soares de Andrea.[44] On the Uruguayan side, I visited *Liceo Nº1 de Chuy Dr. Eladio Aristimuño* and *Liceo Nº2 de Chuy Jorge Calvete Ayestarán.*[45] Visits to schools on the Brazilian side were, in general, less productive in that their yield was significantly lower than that of schools on the Uruguayan side.

The first two schools visited were *Marechal*, on the Brazilian side, and *Liceo Nº1*, on the Uruguayan side. As I visited both on the same day, comparing them was inevitable. Differences aside, all schools had a general aesthetic of resilience, which is another way of saying that they might have to make do with however much little money they receive.

Liceo Nº 1 looks like a building that was intentionally conceived to be majestic, which always leaves behind a sense of unachieved pretension. It might have looked impressive at first, but now it looked like a forgotten monument, massively disparate to its surroundings. Next to the motorway that crosses the border into Uruguay, *Liceo Nº1* sits in front of *Liceo Nº2*. They have very similar styles, but *Nº1* lives up to its name, with exposed columns that stand phallically at the entrance and around a circular hall

[44] The names of both schools on the Brazilian side are quite telling of the city's overall border condition. General Artigas (José Gervasio Artigas) is Uruguay's national hero par excellence. He fought in the wars of independence against Spain in the region, known as the May Revolution, which culminated with Argentina's declaration of independence in 1816. Later, Artigas' plans for Uruguayan independence were caught between Argentina and Brazil, for which he fled Uruguay. He was exiled in Paraguay until his death, in 1850. Marechal Soares de Andrea was, in turn, a Brazilian hero, although his influence was less widespread if compared to that of Artigas. Francisco José de Sousa Soares de Andrea, later made the Baron of Caçapava, was a Portuguese-born Brazilian army marshal who acted as governor of the *Província de São Pedro do Rio Grande do Sul* [Province of Saint Peter of Rio Grande do Sul], the former denomination of the current state of Rio Grande do Sul. During a visit to the Taim region as governor, he founded what would become the municipality of Santa Vitória do Palmar, from which Chuí Brazil became independent in 1997. At the time, the new town was named *Povoação de Andrea* [Andrea's Village].

[45] In contrast, I only learnt that the *Liceos* were named after public figures a year after the fieldwork had finished. No one ever referred to either school by their official name, saying only '*Liceo 1*' or '*Liceo 2*'. I have not been able to verify who Dr Eladio Aristimuño or Jorge Calvete Ayestarán were.

from where classrooms and offices spread. The building looks dark from the outside but is extremely well lit on the inside, with big windows and skylights through which the sunlight bathes the Romanesque hall, which, combined with the terracotta bricks, gives the school a 70s deep-orange hue.

To the left, there is an office whose walls are half brick, half glass. It does nothing to attenuate the stereotype of bureaucratic precincts of Latin tradition. One of the windows has been turned into a sliding door, from which a desk stands out: that is the school's front desk, which you know because a sign has been printed in some funky office font.

I approach the window, shivering with the fear of having to speak Spanish. As a native Portuguese speaker, especially one from Southern Brazil, Rioplatense[46] Spanish has never been extremely challenging. Far from it, I have always used Spanish dexterously despite the fact that I have never formally studied the language. Maybe that is why I was much more nervous than I had anticipated one should be in a situation like that; it was a big test for me. I rehearsed what I was going to say in my head on my way to the desk. '*Buenos días*', I say, barely opening my mouth. A suspicious 50-something-year-old gentleman mumbles '*buerrodías*' back at me. Now even more nervous than before, I stutter my way into the request to speak with the head of the school.

I meet her in her office. Our interaction was so short lived that I do not even remember the headmistress' name – nor is it available anywhere to be checked either. She looks at me suspiciously over her glasses, as if she knew of the secret plans behind

[46] In reference to the cultural region that spreads over the River Plate basin.

my surveys, of which I myself was not even yet aware. That was the *mergulhão* look (see 2.2).

I explain the project and what I intend to do at the school. Having listened to my convoluted presentation and having seen the surveys, she seemed to have let her guard down a bit. Just a little bit though: I would not be able to make my way from class to class to explain the activity myself. Nor could students under 18 years of age participate, not even as vectors of distribution, which had always been the plan. *"Pues que mi universidad solo exige que ellos tengan 16 años"*[47], I object. She is not particularly interested in what my university thinks; this is her jurisdiction. *"Bueno, pero en Uruguay las leyes son distintas, ¿viste?"*[48], she says, settling the case.

She would give copies to the teachers, who would then hand them out to students aged 18 or older. I could come back in a couple of days to collect the copies. The meeting was so serious and tense that I even forgot to leave the sheets of paper for the maps. In the end, even though I lost track of how many copies I had left at this particular school, I remember being surprised, in counting those that had been returned, by how close the yield was to 100%.

Marechal, on the Brazilian side, is somewhat hidden in Chuí Brazil. The school is situated along *Rua Samuel Priliac*, named after one of the city's own heroes (see 2.2). The street runs between the two sides of the bifurcation where BR-471, the motorway, and *Rua Argentina* break ways. The school's position goes against the flow of movement in the city, always oriented to crossing the line. You have to be heading for the school; you will not just stumble upon it.

[47] "But my university only requires them to be 16".
[48] "Well, you see, laws are different in Uruguay".

From afar, it does not help that the school is even more hidden away, to the back of an oblong lot whose walls are neighbours to empty plots of land where horses graze freely. The driveway to the building itself must be as long as 100m. It is bumpy and full of potholes. There is no pavement, which makes me wonder how teachers and pupils go from gate to door when it is raining. Chuy is very humid, which makes it constantly look and feel like the rain has only stopped five minutes before.

The building is lifeless, cold, and clearly not technically planned so to speak. Its various wings were added throughout the years by inconsistent waves of funds. The best way to describe its aesthetic is by thinking of low-profile beach houses: haphazardly assembled for minimal functionality.

After asking around, I meet the headmistress, Vivi da Fonseca, in the corridor. She walks me back to her office, in a different wing of the building, detached from its main body. Once we are sat on opposite sides of her desk, I explain my project and ask her if I could visit each class to distribute the surveys. She agrees to it and tells me to go meet the staff in the teachers' room so I could explain to them what I was going to do. Vivi is much more laid-back than the headmistress at *Liceo Nº1*. That might have come at a cost.

The number of surveys returned at *Marechal* was saddeningly low. The result of miscommunication, forgetfulness, and the general strike that was taking place across the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Secondary schools are the state's responsibility in Brazil and Rio Grande do Sul was/is close to bankruptcy. The current government made the decision to pay all state employees' salaries in instalments. Well, not all of them; members of the Chamber of Deputies and high-ranking government officials had fortunately not

been touched by austerity. In practice, that meant that teachers at *Marechal* were making no more than a couple of hundred reals a month rather than the already-low yet usual couple thousand.

Unsurprisingly, morale was visibly low at the school, which was operating on reduced hours. Teachers looked tired and disappointed, like they had been scammed by the gods. They slithered morosely in the corridors, like overweight ghosts, whose vitality they emulated inside the classrooms, where teenagers still behaved like teenagers.

I must have visited *Marechal* some three or four times until, presumably, all surveys available made their way back to me. The *Marechal* marathon would have exhausted even the most tenacious of Greek soldiers. It included a visit to the school after recess, as I had arranged the day before, to find nobody left because of an impromptu decision to dismiss everyone after 10am. Somewhere along the race, one of the teachers found, by chance, an envelope with a dozen or so surveys that another teacher had left in the room. And to top things off, it also included me mildly stalking the school's headmistress on Facebook, where she told me that she had forgotten to remind the teachers to collect the surveys.

However, it would be at least ungrateful and, at most, self-entitled of me to hold too much resentment against *Marechal* and its staff. The truth is that they had no obligation of helping me and, yet, amid a strike, they had taken time away from their work to help me with the surveys. Let us just say, though, that that is not how I felt immediately after counting the disappointing number of copies that had been in fact collected at the school – fewer than 50.

Conversations with the headmistress and other *Marechal*'s teachers went back and forth until the point came when I had to

simply accept that there would not be any more copies coming from this school. So, I decided to visit Chuí Brazil's second school: *Escola Municipal de Ensino Fundamental General Artigas*.

Unlike their secondary counterparts, primary schools are the responsibility of municipal governments. This is to say that there was no strike taking place at *Artigas*. I arrived on a Wednesday morning, spoke briefly to the head of the school who immediately allowed me to visit all classrooms and distribute the surveys.

Artigas looks like it was built out of repurposed containers. It is small and does not look too different to the other schools. It is located in a poorer area of the city, where horses graze even more freely, roads are not paved and you can see sewage gushing out of people's houses right onto the street.

Pupils there are generally younger given that it is a primary school, so my morning trotting around its grounds was remarkably noisy and overwhelming. Kids would shout, fool around, try to speak over each other – nothing unexpected, really. Teachers, on the other hand, were very welcoming and many of them tried to help me in making my point come across to the kids. Next morning, I went back to *Artigas* to find that many of the copies had been returned. The yield was not as impressive as the one from *Liceo Nº2* alone, on which I elaborate next, but *Nº2* set the bar too high anyway.

I still could not shake off that feeling of disappointment with the number of surveys that were collected on the Brazilian side. Perhaps it was the result of the fact that, during the time it took for the whole process to be completed at *Marechal* and at *Artigas*, I had already visited *Liceo Nº1* and *Liceo Nº2* to find all of my wildest estimates to be wrong. At first, I imagined that aiming for 100 surveys

would have been extremely ambitious, but the decision to ask pupils to act as vectors of distribution, thus amplifying the reach of collection, proved exhilaratingly successful. To those hundred that I had imagined as too many, compare the total of 445 copies of the survey that were ultimately collected on both sides of the line, out of which 426 were valid.[49]

No other school was as welcoming and as productive as *Liceo Nº2*. On my first visit, it just seemed like the smaller version of *Liceo Nº1*, looking down from atop its columns. The building is definitely smaller, yes, but it also lacks the overall pomposity of its twin. Fear not, though, for the sliding-door-style front desk is here too.

Feeling more confident in my Spanish, I ask to speak with the head of the school. As I am waiting, I look around the hall, inspecting students' work hanging on the walls. I step outside onto an outdoors sitting area. There are some toys to the back of the plot. They look like their use has been subverted long ago. Shiny new toys may be good for mayors' PR, but they make for great hanging-out spots.

[49] Nineteen copies were invalidated because they had not been signed by respondents.

I decided to test my fisheye lenses for my phone. I walk backwards inside, trying to get a better shot. As the angle widens, I realise that I had been standing under words of biblical proportions. Between two rows of high windows, it reads: "*Sean los Orientales tan ilustrados como valientes*".



Figure 19: Artigas' motto painted on a wall at *Liceo Nº2*.

These words are credited to none other than General Artigas – no, not the school on the Brazilian side but Uruguay's national hero. In 1815, when the country broke apart from Buenos Aires' government, Artigas was declared Uruguay's first governor and allegedly uttered the motto that now watched over me: 'May the Orientals be as enlightened as they are brave'.

This banner is illustrative of a wider conclusion that can be drawn from the experience with the schools. Chuy, as a city, is an integral space which is lived as if there were no line of division despite the fact that the existence of such division is anything but unnoticeable. Often, you might find yourself not knowing on which side of the line you are. The longer you stay in Chuy, the more the line is incorporated into the city's landscape. The longer you are here, the less visible divisions become. And, with that, the very

ideas of the countries to which these two nominally different sides belong start to fade. Brazil and Uruguay become more of concepts that might originate or finish in Chuy. You see the occasional flag, usually followed by its neighbour's flag. You hear Spanish if you are Brazilian, but you understand it. You hear Portuguese if you are Uruguayan, but you get it. You shop at supermarkets in pesos, reals, or even US dollars. Chuy is lived as one. Everywhere. All the time.

Except at schools. Even in a city like this, schools are the national spaces par excellence (see Gellner, 2006). Even more so, I wold argue, than government cabinets. On my visit to Chuí Brazil's mayor's office, there was a little banner on the wall, praising the city's border condition. It read: '*A Fronteira da Paz*' [the border of peace]. During my interview with Chuy Uruguay's mayor (see 5.1), she spoke at length of how the two municipalities are lived and sometimes managed as a contiguous space. Except at schools.

True, I might be overemphasising the role of the school as opposed to that of the municipal government. In fact, it would seem that both are essentially national places. Their role stems precisely from the project to maintain the nation alive (see Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 2006). Especially in a region like this, where the imminent contact with the other side of the border might be seen as a potential threat to people's allegiance even if, in common parlance, opinions are generally that conviviality overshadows any differences. Yet, schools still seem to be the stronger agents here. The difference, perhaps, is in the fact that, at the city councils, at hospitals, or any other state-based institution except for schools, this intrinsically *inter*-national position is institutionally acknowledged.

Conversely, schools' role is to form the nation, shape its pupils into citizens. And, here, the border position is strategically left

out. All teachers with whom I spoke, from both sides of the line, told me that there is no plan for anything resembling a binational education. This means that, in opposition, what schools teach is dictated by regional and national policies. Their curricula are not inclusive of this reality (see 5.4 and 5.5).

Looking at that pile of 400-plus surveys was daunting. Where to begin? What will they tell me about life in the borderlands? My fear, before analysing responses, was that they would only offer the vagueness and apparent lack of elaboration that my talks with people on the streets of Chuy seemed to offer. That, in itself, points to an important conclusion of the fieldwork: when asked about their everyday, we do not necessarily have an elaborate discourse on the aspects that make it what it is. Thus, having a chat with people on the street would always leave me with a sense of confusion because navigating every individual arsenal of references, even with regard to the same topic, offers very little, if any, stability or predictability when considered separately.

I read these hundreds of copies over and over again. Alone, each copy said very little. It was nothing more than anecdotal. In order to have any general understanding of people's perception of everyday life in the borderlands and of the border itself, it would be fundamental to, instead, look at tendencies and patterns.

All copies of the survey were logged onto a spreadsheet, where each response became a data point. When tabling them, I looked at nine elements. The first of them was whether the copy was signed because, if it was not, it would not even be considered for analysis. Then, it followed: language of the survey copy, language in which responses had been written, declared nationality,

meanings of the border (all three instances thereof), as well as advantages and disadvantages. Although all 445 copies were tabled, I only considered data points from the 426 valid copies, i.e. those that had been signed. Ultimately, I was left with 5,834 data points. In other words, 5,834 pieces of information that could be analysed.

In doing so, three general questions emerged. They are not ranked in order of importance but merely follow the same order in which the questions to which they refer appear in the survey:

(a) What the most frequent declarations of nationality are and how they relate to both the language in which the survey was written as well as to the language of choice in answering questions;

(b) What the major ideas associated to the border are and how they relate to each other;

(c) What people perceive as the main advantages and disadvantages of living in the borderlands and how they differ to one another.

To answer the first question, the number of occurrences for each given nationality option was calculated, including those added under the option 'Other'. With regard to the second question, three aspects of responses were taken into account: what the main ideas were, at what position they were mainly mentioned (the free-association list was ranked from first to third), and how those main ideas would interrelate. Lastly, when looking at the third question, I calculated the occurrences of main ideas categorised as either advantages or disadvantages, how they related internally with other positive or negative aspects of life in the borderlands, and, finally,

how they differed externally – in other words, the rate at which those main ideas would be classified more often as either advantageous or disadvantageous.

Despite the fact that analysis is unpacked in the next chapters, it is helpful to know in advance what the main codes that guided the search for answers for the second and third questions are. Apart from the first question, which had predetermined options, the question about ideas associated to the border and the questions about advantages and disadvantages were open-ended.

The main ideas were identified with the use of *in-vivo* coding, a method in which codes with which answers are analysed are drawn from the very answers (see Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1999). That is, I did not have any specific themes that I would like to find; I worked with the answers given by respondents. In the end, some 233 keywords were identified, first by a simple count of the most frequent words used and, secondly, by identifying the most common words, phrases, and expressions.

These codes are not organised in any particular order. To avoid any precipitations or misnomers, they were assigned a number from 1 to 60, where codes 4 and 56 were later merged with other ones. If codes were named by me, keywords are literal reproductions of words, phrases, and expressions as they were used in surveys. The following table is a complete list of codes and keywords:

ID	CODES	KEYWORDS
1	**Bureaucracy**	Administration, government, laws, rules, politics, customs (incl. taxes), political and social issues, bureaucracy
2	**Negative attributes**	*Aburrida* (boring), mediocre, hypocrisy, envy, discrimination, inequality, poverty

3	**Positive attributes**	Tolerance, harmony, hospitality, equality, friendship, peace, tranquillity, freedom
5	**Leisure activities**	*Balada* (clubs), having fun, *passear* (go for a walk), parties, leisure, activities
6	**Cheap**	Cheap, cheaper products, lower costs, prices
7	**Workload**	Workload, labour rights, exploitation, class
8	**Shopping**	Commerce, shops, duty-free shops, shopping, businesses, *camelôs* (street/informal vendors)
9	**Learning**	Meeting people, getting to know places, knowledge, learning
10	**Traditions**	Customs, traditions, religions, faith, lifestyles, ways of thinking, opinions, identity, values
11	**Threat**	*Cuidado* (warning), threat, danger
12	**Food**	Cooking, cuisine, food
13	**Culture**	Culture, cultural
14	**Loss of identity**	*Desarraigo* (uprooting), loss of identity, confusion, dispute
15	**Development**	Development
16	**Diversity**	Difference, diversity, variety, plurality
17	**Money**	Money, currencies, change
18	**Isolation**	Distance, isolation, abandonment
19	**The line**	*Divisas* (boundary), *linhas divisórias* (boundary lines), limit, border (border condition)
20	***Doble chapa***	'Dual papers', dual nationality (read: citizenship)
21	**Economy**	Economy, inflation, financial
22	**Unity**	*Encontros/encuentros* (meeting together), sharing, socialisation, integration, interaction, *confraternização* (fraternising), conviviality, community, unity, *uma coisa só* (one and the same)
23	**Scarcity**	Lack of services, scarcity, lack
24	**Being in two countries**	Being in two countries at the same time, on both sides, in/from both countries, binational
25	**Patriotism**	Expressions of patriotism
26	**Foreigners**	Foreigners, *desconocidos/desconhecidos* (strangers), outsiders, from other places, immigrants
27	**Chaos**	Lack of control, disorder, chaos, lack of inspection, impunity, *tierra de nadie* (no-man's land), corruption
28	**Fluidity**	Flow, access, pass, cross (the line), movement
29	**People**	*Gente*, people, *pueblo/povo*

30	**Specific demographic groups**	Children, youth, the elderly
31	**Ethnicity**	Ethnic and/or racial or racialised groups, *gaúcho*, race
32	**History**	History, *recuerdos* (memories, souvenirs), memory
33	**Language**	Language, *lenguaje*, *portuñol*, accent
34	**Hybridity**	Exchange, mixture, *mezcla*, change, miscegenation
35	**Education**	*Liceo* (college), schools, education
36	**Cleanliness**	Clean, cleanliness, basic sanitation
37	**Monuments**	Specific places, sites, monuments (boundary marker)
38	**Opportunity**	*Malandragem* (street wisdom), taking advantage, *jeitinho*, alternatives, *picaretagem* (trickster), scam, profit, ease, opportunity, resources
39	**Nature**	Nature, natural resources and beauty, beaches, environment
40	**Internationality**	Specific countries or nationalities, international
41	**Shibboleths**	Words/expressions in the neighbouring language
42	**Products**	Products, objects, specific merchandise
43	**Vicinity**	Proximity, vicinity
44	**Well-being**	Quality of life, well-being
45	**Family**	Roots, origins, family, where I live, friends
46	**Sports**	Rugby, skate park, football, sports
47	**Healthcare**	Healthcare, hospital, physicians, specialists
48	**Security**	Security, insecurity, thefts, delinquency, *lunfardo* (similar to 'chav'), crimes, violence, terrorism, offence
49	**Resilience**	Survive, adapt
50	**Dirtiness**	Filth, contamination, *mugre* (dirty)
51	**Small town**	Size, *pueblo chico*, small town
52	**Seasonality**	Season, seasonal
53	**Work**	Work, jobs
54	**Smuggling**	Trafficking, smuggling, *bagayo*, informal trade
55	**Tourism**	Tourism, tourists, travelling
57	**Urban planning**	Urban planning, improvements in the city, potholes, overpopulation, traffic
58	**Here**	Chuy, Chuí, here, local, a place where
59	***'Nada'***	Nothing, none

60	**Regional integration**	Mercosur, binational agreements, relations between countries

Table 1: List of codes and keywords from survey responses.

Having finished coding, it was clear that each entry did not necessarily equate to one data point only. That is, not only one code applied to that entry. Therefore, the number of code labels was superior to the number of entries themselves in that, in the same answer, respondents could mention different ideas.

That led to the realisation that, if there could be several codes applicable to a single entry, there was also the potential for establishing connections between those codes within any given entry. Identifying these connections – that is, categories – was thus key for identifying the main themes related to the border and the borderlands. There were, however, two possibilities for these categorisations. First, they could be the result of the way in which the answer was phrased – that is, if someone wrote 'cultural diversity', that meant that two codes, Culture (13) and Diversity (16), thus applied. Secondly, when two ideas are mentioned in the same place despite not being part of the same expression, they have still been put in relation to one another. In other words, if someone decides to write, in the first slot of Question 2 (the free-association list), ideas related to culture and food, such categories of Culture (13) and Food (12) are still combined in the elaboration of the answer. Otherwise, why not mention them in a separate slot?

It is important to mention that another aspect of responses to Question 2 that was analysed, as indicated earlier, was the position of each category. Given that slots were organised hierarchically, it is fair to conclude that the more certain keywords appear

closer to the top, the more prominent the codes under which they have been placed might be in everyday Chuy. That is, it is fair to say that the closer to the top of the list, the more easily or more often that idea is associated with the border.

The same reasoning applied to the coding process of answers to Questions 3 and 4, those on the advantages and disadvantages. The difference here is that, in the absence of separate slots, I chose to deem all ideas mentioned – i.e., all codes applicable – as being in relation to one another. Categories were identified by deduction in the case of Question 2 and by induction in the case of Questions 3 and 4. In other words, the ways in which codes related to each other, in Question 2, was more stated; it was the evident result of respondents' decisions. On the other hand, relations between codes in Question 3 and 4 were inferred due to the fact that, in the tension between advantages and disadvantages, I assumed that all ideas mentioned within either one would be virtually connected.

Ultimately, the coding process of all 426 surveys resulted in four sections of data sets, one for each question featured in the survey. All of these are unpacked extensively in Chapter 4. For Q1, on declarations of nationality, I look at what the main declarations were and how they relate to both the original language of the survey as well as the language in which responses were written. For Q2, the free-association list, there are data on the main codes and categories, the latter of which indicate the main themes associated to the idea of 'border', as well as the position of each of the main codes in reference to the order in which answers were placed by respondents. Finally, for Q3 and Q4, on the advantages and disadvantages of living in the borderlands, I look at the main codes and

categories for each individual question as well as at a contrast between sets of responses for each one of them, outlining a hierarchy between ideas that tend to be seen as either positive or negative.

3.2.2 Interviews

In the field, I tried to arrange meetings with people from Chuy who were willing to talk about the region, to give an insight into how they lived. Those were, however, formal instances of conversation that somewhat fail to represent the incredible diversity of people with whom I had all sorts of conversations about the border, the city, its problems and challenges, and its opportunities. My approach to interviews as conversations, therefore, sees them as "not only a specific empirical method in the form of research interviews; [but] also involves a view of the self and the human world" (Brinkmann, 2012, p.85).

This is to say that, yes, there are official interviews on which I draw some conclusions, but these are only the formal situations that do not account for everyone with whom I spoke or the chaotic rhythm with which we changed topics in everyday chats in what could be described as a web of informal interviews (Bernard, 2006, p.211). Interviews are, indeed, very rich material for analysis, but they are always institutionalised to a certain degree, which makes me wonder how much my interviewees 'actually told me'. In other words, the very categorisation as 'interviews' does raise questions on how much is potentially detracted from conversations, especially due to the response effect adopted by participants who were deeply aware of the interview as a formal situation, thus maybe leading them to tell me only what they supposed that I expected them to say (ibid., pp.239-242). And this is a concern that is not

simple dabbling with academic jargon. If formality, in this situation, makes interviews produce official material that can be cited and scrutinised word by word, informality, that is, the most unpretentious of chats on the street, the meeting on the corner that turns into a 10-min evaluation of life in the city, the casual introduction to someone who feels particularly talkative that day – all of this 'intimacy' that only informality allows is partially lost in the interview as a methodological category.

Interviews are negotiated, arranged, programmed. And this is not a peculiarity of a certain type of interview. The very distinction that the name itself brings about is telling of how much this is a question that cannot be overlooked when analysing the material because it reminds us of all that escapes our descriptive and analytical efforts. For everything that has been said in the interviews and on which analysis draws, there is an even greater, even more shambolic history of casual chatter that was not or could not be recorded and might have simply entered the construction of the general understanding and perception of the field. In that I was present in the field because of my intention to study everyday life, it is fair to say that all conversations were indeed meaningful. In every conversation, formal or informal, I tried to actively listen beyond what was being said.

Hopefully, this establishes some of the limitations of the interviews. They are dense, rich, long, and convey a prismatic view of life in the borderlands, but they were not, by any means, the only conversations held. They are the formalised acts of conversation and, as such, need to be taken with a grain of scepticism in the elaboration of grand narratives about what is, as very well proven by

these same interviews, a plethora of variable stances that influence the ways in which residents perceive and interact with their space.

The interviews can be unequivocally classified as in-depth, semistructured interviews. It is important to establish the interviews as semistructured because they were loosely constructed around one main topic, equal to all participants: *what is life in the borderlands like?*[50] Their development, in turn, depended on what the interviewee declared. I had lists of potential questions for each interviewee, but, for the most part, the next question would derive from the answer to the previous one in one of two ways: the next question drew either on a specific point raised by the interviewee that needed unpacking or clarification or on one that stood out as a relevant point on its own, which might or might not mirror some of the questions planned in advance (Brinkmann, 2006, p.85).

Accordingly, there was always an underlying concern with interviewees feeling comfortable enough to speak. What I quickly learnt in Chuy is that, most of the time, my credentials as a researcher from the University of Nottingham could manufacture an atmosphere of undeserved awe or even intimidation between myself and the interviewee. People in general were naturally interested in knowing who I was, what I was doing, and how I was going to use what they said. Inevitably, then, in explaining my project, we would get to the topic of my university, which was pragmatically a reference to *Inglaterra.*[51] Often, I would assume a convenient position to that reference. At times, knowing that the name and loca-

[50] This question lands more heavily in Spanish and Portuguese – respectively: *'¿Cómo es la vida en la frontera?'* and *'Como é a vida na fronteira?'*

[51] References to 'the UK' are very uncommon despite there being words for it in both Portuguese and Spanish. People usually know of and refer to England alone even though they might mean what, here, we would overall describe as the UK.

tion of my institution led to privileged attention and solicitude before Chuienses, I would gladly let people describe me as *"viene de Inglaterra"*[52] as Pedro Rodríguez, the headmaster of *Liceo Nº2* and later one of my interviewees, would introduce me to everyone at the school. Otherwise, I would relentlessly dodge any association between me and the image of England, one of whose episodes was particularly notable.

On a Saturday afternoon, I went out to distribute some flyers for the infamous one-off public meeting. One of the people who actually refused even taking a copy was an old gentleman with whom I ended up spending half an hour talking about the project and about life in Chuy. To give a sample of the overall tone of our conversation, when I asked him about life in the borderlands, he said: "*¿Cómo se vive? ¡De joder a la gente y de contrabando"!*[53]

At one point, amid his very convoluted theorisation about what was wrong with the world and why, his friend, who had, up until that point, only been following our chat like a tennis match, asked me from where I was. 'I am from Brazil, but I live in England', I replied casually. *"¡¿INGLATERRA?!",* the old man shouted scornfully, completely ignoring the rest of my answer. What ensued was a manifesto of accusations against 'all of us', people from the UK, France, and the US, for 'we' have sacked and destroyed half of the world. Slightly offended, I made sure to reinstate my position as a Brazilian, as his brother in misery — after all "*eu sou apenas um rapaz latino-americano sem dinheiro no banco";*[54] a true *compañero*,

[52] 'He comes from England', an ambiguous though not untrue statement of which I took advantage inasmuch as I had in fact arrived from England despite not being originally from here.
[53] 'Life here? Life here is about screwing people over and smuggling'.
[54] This is a verse from 1976's song *Apenas Um Rapaz Latino-Americano* (I'm Just a Latin-American Lad), by Belchior. Released during the height of Brazil's civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985), the song became a youth anthem against the regime. Nowadays, it is roared in sympathy to ideas of a Latin-American fraternity. The verse reads: "I'm just a Latin-American lad with no money in

my dear sir. He left, unconvinced of my *latinidad/e* and our paths never crossed again.

A later episode took place as I read responses to the survey and one of them read that the advantage of living in the borderlands was "the cultural mixture that exists in Latin America and the respect for diversity, something that you will never understand!!!"[55] (R203). I have the impression that the 'you' to whom they referred was not the same 'Latin American lad' that I had to reclaim on that Sunday.

From experiences like these, there emerged the need to redress that somewhat intimidating atmosphere that my presence and my current home address could generate. One solution was to make the invitation as open and undemanding as I could: prospective interviewees could choose the time and place of the interviews and, in addition to that, its democratic structure – given that there was very little that had been predetermined – were all helpful in creating, to a certain extent, an environment in which interviewees could speak freely, not feel as if they were supposed to give certain answers, and, most of all, overlook the location of my institution.

If, as I have written earlier, there were moments of paralysis by the spectre of choice, you can imagine how terrifying it was to choose whom to interview. Reality, though, kicked in pretty quickly. And the reality was that, just like with surveys, people are, at first, understandably suspicious when someone asks them for an interview. In this sense, there was an element of casualness to those who accepted my invitation as some people simply did not wish to

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the bank". Curiously, in 2012, Belchior went missing for a couple of years in Artigas, a Uruguayan city on the border with Brazil of all things. Source: <https://goo.gl/SuxqGJ> [Accessed 19 May 2018].

[55] "La mezcla cultural que existe en Latinoamérica y el respecto por la diversidad que ustedes nunca comprenderán!!!".

participate and thousands of other Chuienses could have been equally interviewed. One of them, Júlio Dornel, for example, vehemently declined the invitation by saying "*No, no tengo nada de relevante a decir*".[56] I insisted because Mr Dornel had been suggested by many people as a savant of Chuy after decades working as a journalist. Still, he simply did not give me an interview. In fact, *he* ended up interviewing me and posting it on his personal Facebook profile, which he uses as a local news blog of sorts, with the title 'From Nottinghan [sic] to Chuy-Chuí'. He had recorded my declarations and yet, in his text, they read more as his own interpretation of what I might have actually said.

How I came to decide whom to interview is thus marked by a degree of chance. In studying everyday life, everyone who experiences that everyday from the inside might have something to say about it. Invitations were, therefore, circumstantial in that they originated either from suggestions by other people or from new acquaintances. In other words, even though I had a few ideas of what kind of people whom it could be interesting to interview, the final decision as to who was in fact invited came down to coincidence or chance.

Amongst those who did in fact sit to talk to me about life in the borderlands, each person carried their own variables and references. And that is part of what is interesting about them, no doubt, but it also unveiled a hard truth. Something that I had already superficially noticed in previous talks with non-interviewees was that, despite the fact that our chats would always inevitably revolve around the topic of study, they would also end up being defined by people's own experience. It even feels silly to be writing

[56] "No, I do not have anything relevant to say".

this now, but I have to admit that I expected people to have, if not unanimous, at least a grand common narrative of life in the borderlands. This does not mean that there are no shared opinions and views – surveys are here to prove that. What interviews mirrored from those informal talks was the fact that there is no other position from which anyone who lives in Chuy could speak apart from their own. As Yuval-Davis argues:

> Borders acquire double meaning as state boundaries and as symbolic social and cultural lines of inclusion and difference, material and imagined, physical and cultural. They are based both on collective historical narratives and individual identity construction of self in which difference is related, but not reducible to space (2013, p.14).

That they live in the borderlands, therefore, does not forcibly make them a homogenous representative of the totality of experiences and histories that take place and meet in that shared space. Expecting otherwise would be reductionist and prescriptive.

Thus, every conversation would commence with a general question about life in the borderlands but would inevitably evolve into a conversation about life in the borderlands *in reference to* those elements that make up each individual's experience thereof. Mary Urse, the mayor of Chuy Uruguay, for example, spoke of the challenges of running a border city; Mohamed Kassem Jomaa, a businessman and the first mayor of independent Chuí Brasil, spoke of his administration and of initiatives to boost trade in the city; and Virginia Rocha Galeano, a dance teacher and social worker, spoke of how difficult it is to teach Afro-Latin dance in Chuy, of the peculiarities of being the daughter of a Brazilian and a Uruguayan, and of how she wants to move further into Brazil to avoid that her

son is exposed to drugs.[57] Each interviewee has their own view of life in the region, but, likewise, that does not mean that they do not share certain takes on it.

In summary, interviews were formal instances of conversation in which it was clear that, in addition to certain local tendencies in how Chuienses see the borderlands, each individual adds their own layer of interpretations and uses, the result of their own experience and everyday lives. The analysis of these interviews, therefore, looks for (a) instances in which general tendencies (categories) identified in the analysis of the surveys emerge in interviewees' statements and (b) how these instances relate to the different positions in relation to the everyday in the borderlands. Effectively, the analysis of the interviews hints at a semantic map of the borderlands, one on which individuals can make their own trajectory by blending acts of compliance to the border strategy with acts of tactical resistance, which ultimately point to a diffuse and circumstantial approach to the border.

In total, 11 people were interviewed. Nine of whom spend most of their time in Chuy and one of whom is an expert on border studies in the region. In chronological order, I interviewed: Mary Urse, the mayor of Chuy Uruguay; Mohamed Kassem Jomaa, businessman and former mayor of Chuí Brasil, and his son, Anuar Mohamad Jomaa; Virginia Rocha Galeano, a dance teacher and social worker; Maria Cecilia Deambrosio, a Maths teacher at *Liceo Nº2*; Maria Gabriela Oliveira, a Geography teacher at the same school and the owner of *FM Coronilla* station in Chuy Uruguay; Pedro Rodríguez, headmaster of *Liceo Nº2*; Félix Ruben Flügel González, a

[57] Recreational cannabis has been legal in Uruguay since 2013, making it the first country to fully legalise the plant.

retired school teacher and a dilettante of all things Chuy; Dr Luiz Carlos Tau Golin, History professor at the University of Passo Fundo, with an extensive body of work on borders in the region; Antonio Madruga, journalist and radio host at *Chuí FM* station in Chuí Brazil; and Letícia Ribeiro Martins, psychologist with Social Services in Chuí Brazil. These interviews yielded just over 800 minutes of recording and 277 pages of transcriptions.

3.2.3 Field notes

It was never an option to rely on my memory alone to remember all details of the field. Nor is it fair to say that the field notes did, in fact, encompass all details. Yet, they are a rich depository of impressions, emotions, and developing questions in which I "observe indiscriminately in an attempt to get an overall image" (Blommaert and Jie, 2010, p.29). Field notes themselves have not been coded or analysed on their own, but, with each read, there seems to be some detail that had been previously overlooked or whose writing, a couple of years ago, now reads as the evident origin of a new approach or an established notion within the project. Despite not having been turned into data, therefore, field notes are a document of my own presence and limitations.

Two types of field notes were used: jottings and a diary (see Bernard, 2006). On my computer, I kept the diary, usually typing the notes at the end of the day, to register thoughts and observations. These are longer notes, in which there is a clear attempt at creating a narrative, a sequence of facts and episodes that could later present Chuy as a somewhat cohesive experience. In them, I often played with the text and made interventions about it in the text itself, indicating that these were also notes of self-reflection on

my standpoint (Denzin, 1997, pp.220-221). After attending to the urge of explaining a Brazilian idiom to myself (who else was there?), I duly noted on the 18th of August 2016: 'Funny how I seem to have been writing to my anglophone self all along. Is my lusophone personality mocking him'? Writing the notes mostly in English, only using Portuguese and Spanish in italics as if they were foreign to he who wrote them still baffles me. This was a rather unconscious decision and it seems less influenced by the fact that thesis is itself written in this language than by some kind of virtual reader of my work whom I unhesitatingly took to be an English-speaking individual. Inasmuch as this project is deeply connected to my personal history with these borderlands (see Chapter 2), I seem to have ended up exoticising myself in trying not to depict Chuy and Chuienses as the native other.

These computer notes, just as the ones taken on paper, were dated, but they differed in character. Between the two notebooks, the big one, a black leather Moleskine bought because it made me look like a 'serious scientist', which was effectively an extension of the diary, was not very practical on the go, so I reserved it for moments when I did not feel like typing or when the notes required some conceptual sketching. The pocket notebook, in turn, was the one carried around nonstop. It provided the freedom not only to jot down quick remarks or memos but also to pursue an initial exploration of different ways to write field notes. Those conceptual sketches that were taken more elaborately in the big notebook began as scribbles in the small one.

Overall, however, field notes are important due to three aspects. They served as an inventory of indexes, i.e. a registry of the most noteworthy episodes during the time in the field. Secondly,

they paint an evolving picture of the field, one in which episodes progress chronologically, marking shifts in perception and observation as time passes. And thirdly, field notes are an obvious marker of my own bias, highlighting possible ways in which my own perceptions and feelings towards Chuy might have limited the approach and substance of this thesis.

Arguably, the field notes as an inventory of indexes is the most prominent aspect. They document the points of observation as well as major descriptions and minor details of daily activities. They indicate peaks in the relief of everyday life in Chuy in a dual exercise: on the one hand, as an attempt to gauge and compile the *faits divers* of the very everyday under investigation and, on the other, as an undeliberate register of my own being-in-the-field.

Next, the notes can also be seen as a sort of diary in terms of entries having been added chronologically. Once they are finished, skipping from one day to the next emulates the passage of time itself, slowly leaving behind a sense of dread or accomplishment, unearthing mood swings, and assembling a loose mosaic of seemingly disconnected factoids. However, at a closer look, they thread all remarks into a potential narrative whose value for investigation lies precisely in the threshold between one day, the previous and the next. It is only with the passing of time that one can become aware of any meaning(s) to their own life, even if it means nothing other than a vexatious sense that time has gone by to no avail. No life blooms to completion in the passing of a single day, so, by definition, there is no everyday life that can be appraised by ignoring the vacillating, yes, but still undeniably sequential nature of life as a series of knots in spacetime. It is rhythm, not incidence that makes the everyday. In between these levels of everydayness for which

only continuous notes can account, hide the timely opportunities for unpacking the frantic meanings of life's meaningless follies.

Thirdly and lastly, field notes were written by one individual who, like the interviewees mentioned in the previous subsection, bears his own history of referents and his own ways of seeing the world. I am not neutral nor am I a passive observer who impartially describes what he sees. My experience in the field was just that: *mine*, in the sense that other people would have noticed different aspects of life in the borderlands. Thus, instead of advocating for any intended objectivity of my notes from the field, I shall bare their limitations. How much of what was noticed is due to my skewed view of the field? How much have my feelings of frustration, isolation, and desperation determined what I saw and what I overlooked? How true can my account of everyday life in Chuy be if I do not consider the ways in which my personal biases moulded the very image of the city that I might try to convey here?

These questions are neither made to invalidate my work on the ground of pure subjectivity nor to qualify it because of any proximity or any sense of attachment or identity that I might have with the Brazil-Uruguay borderlands. They outline the limits of my method and of my approach within the scope of what can be concluded not only because of what I observed but also in spite of what I overlooked. This final aspect is one that punctuates any infallible generalisations about the everyday in Chuy and that prepares any future replication of this study to keep in mind the variability intrinsic to both those who live in the borderlands and those who might undertake the study thereof.

Hopefully, this has been enough a comprehensive description of the tools and approaches to method that were used in the field and in the later analysis of the data collected during that time. Alongside any intention to be descriptive, I also hope that some of the main limitations of this project have been highlighted, not so as to undermine it but to keep it within the frame of the possible and realistic – especially for any work that might unfold hereafter.

Surveys, interviews and, to a lesser degree, field notes make up the data sets on which analyses draw next. In Chapter 4, I share the results of survey analysis as well as some partial findings on the bumpy terrain of names and meanings given to the border. In Chapter 5, I explore instances of compliance and tactical resistance to the border as a strategy, comparing and contrasting interviewees' declarations to the results of survey analysis and to my own observations in the field.

4. THE NAME OF THE LINE

In this chapter, I present the results of the surveys used in the field to collect Chuienses' perception as well as implied uses of the border. Each of the fours questions is unpacked in its own section, finally pointing to a general topography of meanings that circulate in the everyday of these borderlands. The effort to build an semantic and pragmatic inventory of the concept of '*frontera/fronteira*', the very name of the region in question, indicates a series of frictions between declarations and subsequent uses of the concept, thus calling for a nuanced analysis of three major themes, namely: *shopping*, *culture*, and *diversity*, all of which are filtered, under particular circumstances and according to various intentions, by the notional category of fluidity.

4.1 NATIONALITY

The first question asked in the survey is that on nationality and its wording is indicative of its intention. The goal was not to classify respondents but, rather, to allow respondents to declare themselves. I argue that the way in which the question is phrased might show a different perspective to the issue of nationality by including the individual's own decision as to how they perceive themselves as opposed to whatever legal or political categories that might technically apply to them. The goal, therefore, was to set aside documents and birth determinism by allowing the respondent to decide what category in which to place themselves.

This was also the only question that offered any options. Whereas all three other questions were open-ended, self-declarations of nationality, as I will henceforth refer to responses to this

question, showed four options: Brazilian, Uruguayan, Mixed[58], and Other. Ideally, this would have been an open-ended question as well. However, considering the way in which it was presented, it would have been confusing if all that respondents encountered was the order 'what do you consider yourself to be' without any hint at what kind of categorisation to which it might refer. These four options seemed to address the need to retain the question's elaboration and, at the same time, avoid a potential lack of clarity.

There are three important aspects to the results on self-declarations of nationality. First, the frequency with which each option was chosen, indicating general tendencies. Secondly, the correlation between declarations of nationality and the language in which the survey was answered. Soon after collection, however, it became evident that there was a third, complicating factor: the language in which the survey itself had been written.

The top nationalities were, by far, those three offered as options, featuring in roughly 97% of responses. Amongst these, the most prominent overall were, respectively, Uruguayan (~58.7%), Mixed (~22.3%), and Brazilian (~16%). Those 3% of responses under the 'Other' category included 13 entries featuring 12 different alternatives, which are not considered for analytical purposes.

4.1.1 Declared nationality and chosen language

The first aspect to be analysed in the responses to this question is an interrogation of the correlation between what respondents declared themselves to be and the language in which they chose to answer the survey. Out of 68 respondents who declared themselves Brazilian, 61 of them answered in Portuguese (89.7%)

[58] The actual phrasing was 'a mix of both'.

and seven in Spanish (10.3%). However, out of a staggering 250 respondents who declared themselves Uruguayan, 242 answered in Spanish (96.8%) and eight in Portuguese (3.2%). Finally, amongst those 95 respondents who declared themselves Mixed, 66 answered in Spanish (69.5%) and 29 in Portuguese (30.5%). This points to a possible direct correlation between declared nationality and chosen language. Considering only the top three nationalities, there were, in total, 315 responses in Spanish and 98 in Portuguese, at a ratio of 3.21:1, indicating a general preference for the former.

I was equally interested in knowing how that preference ratio would distribute across declared nationalities. First, when considering only self-declared Uruguayans, there were 30 times more chances of answers being in Spanish rather than in Portuguese. Secondly, when considering self-declared Brazilians, there were eight times more chances for someone in this category to respond in Portuguese. Comparatively, that is, the use of Spanish by self-declared Uruguayans is much more likely than the use of Portuguese by self-declared Brazilians. Conversely, if we consider those who declared themselves Mixed, there were slightly over twice as many chances for self-declared Mixed to answer in Spanish rather than in Portuguese. In any case, a general preference for Spanish holds both in terms of absolute number of responses as well as in terms of self-declarations of nationality.

My hypothesis thus far is that, in light of the fact that there is a preference for Spanish in all scenarios, Spanish is the predominant language *in addition to* the greater absolute number of respondents who declared themselves Uruguayan. In other words,

there does not seem to be, at first, a straightforward correlation between how people feel in terms of nationality and the language in which they chose to answer the survey.

4.1.2 Language of survey and chosen language

However, a further layer of complexity is added when considering that the copies of the survey themselves were distributed in different languages. Here, I have to admit to having fallen victim to the very preconceptions that I had hoped to tangentially challenge with this item on nationality. Instead of creating a unified bilingual version of the survey, I made two different version: one in a Portuguese and one in Spanish. So, *mea culpa* aside, the question is urgent: did the original language of the survey influence the language in which answers were written?

In my notes, the answer to this question is a bold *definitely.* In total, 97 surveys that had been distributed in Portuguese were returned against 316 that had been distributed in Spanish. Amongst the former, 96 copies were answered in Portuguese and only one in Spanish. That is, 98.97% of copies whose original language was Portuguese were returned containing answers in the same language. Amongst the latter, 314 copies were answered in Spanish and only two in Portuguese. In other words, 99.37% of copies whose original language was Spanish were returned containing answers in the same language. It is thus undeniable that the language of the majority of responses simply followed that in which the survey itself had been offered.

4.1.3 Declared nationality and language of survey

At this point, a third element has to be taken into account: the influence that the language in which the survey was distributed might have had in the declarations of nationality. Amongst those 97 copies returned that had been originally distributed in Portuguese, 60 of the respondents declared themselves Brazilian (62.5%), followed by 29 Mixed (29.17%), and 8 Uruguayan (8.33%). This is a relatively strong correlation between the language of the survey and the declared nationality (Portuguese → Brazilian). Amongst those 316 copies returned that had been originally distributed in Spanish, 242 of the respondents declared themselves Uruguayan (76.6%), followed by 66 Mixed (20.9%), and 8 Brazilian (2.5%). This shows a stronger correlation between the language of the survey being Spanish and the declared nationality being Uruguayan (Spanish → Uruguayan).

4.1.4 Determining factor

By this stage, it had become clear that both the chosen language and the language of the survey had to be considered. The goal in looking into the dynamics between these three factors – declared nationality, chosen language, and language of the survey – is, most of all, to discard any external influence that my decision not to print bilingual copies of the survey might have had in the language in which respondents chose to answer. Furthermore, as my initial question was to establish any potential causation between what people declared themselves to be and their language of choice, said goal is thus central to my analysis of Question 1.

Upon reflection on the results, the appropriate order of questions to be asked is:

(a) What is the correlation between nationality and chosen language?

(b) What is the correlation between the language of the survey and the chosen language?

Following the initial question as to whether there was a causation between declarations of nationality and the chosen language, there are two possible scenarios from the data. In the first scenario, the correlation between declarations of nationality and chosen language is greater than the correlation between the language of the survey and chosen language – i.e., **(a) > (b).** On the second scenario, the correlation between declarations of nationality and chosen language is lower than the correlation between the language of the survey and chosen language – i.e., **(a) < (b).**

If **(a) > (b)**, it can be inferred that declarations of nationality exert more influence on respondents' language of choice, or vice versa, than the latter could have somehow been predetermined by the original language in which the survey was distributed. Conversely, if **(a) < (b)**, the opposite holds, that is, no causation might be established between declarations of nationality and chosen language, as it is more likely that people were prone to using either language due to the survey's format.

Let us visualise these sets for better contrast.

NATIONALITY	CHOSEN LANGUAGE	
	Portuguese	Spanish
Brazilian	89.7%	10.3%
Mixed	30.5%	69.5%
Uruguayan	3.2%	96.8%

Table 2: (a) Correlation between declarations of nationality and chosen language

LANGUAGE OF SURVEY	CHOSEN LANGUAGE	
	Portuguese	**Spanish**
Portuguese	98.97%	1.03%
Spanish	0.63%	99.37%

Table 3: (b) Correlation between language of survey and chosen language.

At first, by looking at the rate of respondents who declared themselves Brazilian and answered in Portuguese as well as of those who declared themselves Uruguayan and answered in Spanish, it is easy to draw a parallel between language and nationality. However, in comparing these numbers to the correlation between the language in which responses were given and the original language of the survey, it becomes more difficult to reach any conclusions in that sense.

Whereas 89.7% of self-declared Brazilians answered in Portuguese, 98.97% of survey copies that had been originally distributed in Portuguese were answered in said language. Where (a) < (b) by 9.27%, it is safe to say that the language of the survey itself was a stronger determinant in the language chosen by respondents in filling out the survey. Likewise, 96.8% of self-declared Uruguayans answered in Spanish whereas 99.37% of surveys in Spanish were filled in the same language. In this case, despite (a) < (b), the difference of 2.57% is significantly lower than in the previous case. Therefore, the only conclusion to be drawn from these numbers is that neither hypothesis is substantially evidenced despite the slight tendency of opting to respond in the same language in which the survey was distributed.

What is more, the case for self-declared Mixed must be scrutinised on its own. If there should be anything resembling '100%

Brazilian' or '100% Uruguayan', the category Mixed would, therefore, indicate a 50-50 distribution. Transposing that assumption to the question of language, for every two respondents, one would have used Portuguese and the other, Spanish. That is, the distribution of language use amongst self-declared Mixed would be similar between the two languages.

Where would it thus be possible to see any repercussions or indications of declarations as Mixed? To answer that question, we need to take a step back and look at another question: **(c)** what is the relation between nationality and the original language of the survey?

LANGUAGE OF SURVEY	NATIONALITY		
	Brazilian	**Mixed**	**Uruguayan**
Portuguese	61.85%	29.9%	8.25%
Spanish	2.5%	20.9%	76.6%

Table 4: (c) Correlation between language of survey and declarations of nationality.

What this table shows is that, first, there were more than twice as many self-declared Mixed who answered in Spanish than in Portuguese (69.5% against 30.5%). There was a higher percentage of surveys whose original language was Portuguese and whose respondents declared themselves Mixed (29.9%) than was the case amongst surveys originally in Spanish (20.9%). Here, conclusions become even more difficult and I want to avoid falling prey to statistical determinism, but, having now established that the original language of the survey influenced the language in which responses were given more than the latter influenced declarations of nation-

ality, I wonder why there were twice as many chances of self-declared Mixed using Spanish despite the lower chances of surveys originally in Spanish featuring declarations as Mixed.

When I began looking into data from this first question, the fact that surveys were distributed in different languages forced me to reconsider my original plan to draw a straight parallel between declarations of nationality and the language in which people chose to answer. At this point, nonetheless, the inclusion of that third element into the equation, that of the original language of the survey, emulates an aspect of reality that I had observed in Chuy: circumstance. This aspect is helpful in understanding the relations between what people might consider themselves to be and the language that they use more promptly.

So, it has already been determined that the language of the survey probably had a stronger influence in the language in which responses were given as opposed to this having been determined by declarations of nationality. Equally, my assumption that, given the imminent and inalienable contact to the point of fusion between the two nominally different sides of the boundary line, responses would mostly feature declarations as Mixed has been overturned.

Analysing responses to the question 'what do you consider yourself to be' in light of those two aspects of language therefore hints at a different perspective. As the borderlands, reality in Chuy has not so much to do with a sense of an even distribution of belonging to the two countries whose dividing line runs through the city. Nor is it so strictly marked by indexes of people's identity being attached to one or the other country as in drawing a direct path between using/speaking Spanish and feeling/being Uruguayan, for

example. In fact, the way in which Chuienses will define themselves, the way in which they will declare a state of allegiance is determined by a combination of factors at the time of asking. In that sense, let us explore a few real-life scenes from the field.

Scene 1. A street in Chuy. Any day in the field.

Whenever my conversations with Chuienses was based on a somewhat belligerent approach to life in the borderlands, that is, whenever I asked them about possible animosities between Chuienses from Brazil and Chuienses from Uruguay, they were unanimous. And I am not taking this word lightly: they were actually unanimous in saying that there was absolutely no enmity between people there because, as Selene Marquez, interim mayor of Chuy Uruguay, said during my first visit to the *Junta Local*: *"no se vive como una frontera"*.[59] In other words, it is easy to overlook how intrinsic the border is in Chuy by, in turn, exoticising it – after all, this kind of question already started with the assumption that there could or should be conflicts just because Chuienses live adjacent to one another. The question itself, with its focus on conflict rather than conviviality, reinstated the line at the time of asking and it did so in a negative way, i.e. by assigning a bellicose nature to the border. Accordingly, it would be unusual for people to generically claim distance from those who are effectively their neighbours. No one will fathom the idea of animosity unless there is already some kind of gap created at the very conception of two separate referents ('us' versus 'them'). In other words, for there to be a sense of conflict between two sides, first there has to be a founding schism (see 1.3). In this scenario, therefore, the incision that my question made in

[59] "We do not live it as a border".

reality by assigning an essentially negative character to the utter proximity between the two Chuys – which, lest we forget, is lived as one – was rejected by a totalising conception, in which nationalities or any sense of belonging to one side and not the other is supplanted by a collective imaginary made up of both sides as inseparable and substantiated by an everyday experience of which the line is *sine qua non*. Rather than separate, that is, the boundary line actually makes Chuy in the everyday.

Scene 2. Hairdresser, *Rua Venezuela, 295*. Damp afternoon.

At *MS Cabeleireiros,* a friend of the owner is sat to my left and is responsible for topping up the *mate* as the three of us chat over freshly cut hair. She says that she was born in Chuí Brazil but feels more confident using Spanish because she spent most of her school years in Chuy Uruguay. She was, therefore, educated within the national curriculum of that country, which explains her preference for the respective language in unfamiliar situations, such as that of meeting a new person, but does not, however, supress the fact that she is still technically Brazilian and might spend her days going back and forth between the two countries.

Scene 3. *Plaza General Artigas*. Cold Sunday afternoon.

As Virginia took me on a tour of the city on the 10th of July 2016, she would speak Portuguese to me and, concomitantly, switch to Spanish as an acquaintance greeted her on our way. Now, I am not an expert on the accents of Uruguayan Spanish, but, to me, she sounded distinctively Uruguayan when speaking Spanish and slightly foreign when speaking Portuguese despite being a citizen

of both countries, having a Brazilian mother and a Uruguayan father, and living and working in Chuí Brazil.

In these last three scenes, any direct association between the pair feeling/being from a certain country and speaking its official language, as an example of a materialised pattern or indication thereof, falls through. Mastery of a language, in Chuy, seems to be determined by the education that one has had rather than by any *a priori* national-ness or by any sense of identity or belonging to either Brazil or Uruguay. The use of languages also implies mutual intelligibility and a circumstantial selection of either – or, say, linguistic duality: at equal or disparate knowledge of the two languages, either can be used, actively or passively, depending on the interlocutor and on the situation. I doubt, for example, that a lusophone-only Chuiense feels the need to try to speak Spanish to a hispanophone-only Chuiense, but I am certain that both can have a conversation in which each speaks their own language. In turn, if a Chuiense speaks both languages, they will be so used to switching between them that they might sound Uruguayan to other Brazilians and Brazilian to other Uruguayans.

At this point, my conclusions on responses given to this first question are perfectly illustrated by an episode in the field that began with bottled water and chocolate and ended with casual xenophobia.

4.1.5 My 'BRA-xit' Moment

The 11th and 12th of July 2016 were probably my two worst days in the field. Feelings of frustration and desperation were far from uncommon during my time in Chuy, but these two days made

it to the top because they not only questioned my work for this project but also my own self-perception as an open-minded person, somewhat free from the vices of nationalistic subterfuge. In these 48 hours, I had to juggle the already constant negative feelings towards my work alongside feelings of shame of my explosive xenophobia, which created a safe space from where I could blame any outsiders for whatever it was that I had felt those past two days.

It all began on the morning of the 11th when I went online to find a video made by the BBC to announce its coverage of the upcoming Rio Olympics.[60] The video is beautifully made, no doubt about that, but it showed a group of wild animals, many of which live nowhere near Rio, morphing into Olympians. As a Brazilian, I am somewhat used to this exotic gaze, these naturalist lenses that filter out what is commonly known as civilisation by favouring a view of Brazil as a wild kingdom of natural beauty and diversity. My umbrage with this portrayal is not that Brazil is *not* an extremely rich and diverse country in its nature, but that it is equally so in its people and culture.

I published the video on a social media account only to find myself in a debate with a friend, who happens to be British, trying to convince me that maybe the BBC had made that video as an homage to Brazil and I was the one making a big deal out of it. Now, I was not sure where my work was going *and* I felt like a hysterical snowflake.

So, I went to *Makro Chuí*, the largest supermarket in the city, owned by Mohamed Kassem Jomaa, one of my interviewees and former mayor of Chuí Brazil. I got to the till armed with my binge-worthy snacks of choice. Change due: R$0.18 (some 5p at the time).

[60] Available at: <https://goo.gl/6LSjyi> [Accessed 11 Jul 2016].

There are no 1-cent coins in Brazil anymore, so I knew that the cashier would give me 15 cents in change. She opens the register and collects my receipt as I pack my groceries. She reaches out her hand and, in meeting mine, holds back for a millisecond, finally dropping a 10-cent coin in my hand. We are usually under pressure to have everything packed so that the next one in queue is not kept waiting unnecessarily, usually just glancing over our change to try and move out of people's way. This time, though, I looked at my change and there were no complicated maths involved: there is no 15-cent coin and I only had one in my hand. '*Excuse me…*' and, holding her hand mid-air as I made my case, the cashier just reopened it and dropped the second coin. Why she tried to keep a 5-cent coin from me, I will never know.

Next morning, I woke up in my hospitalesque room at *Hotel Rivero* and decided that, for that day to be better than the last, I should skip breakfast and just go for a chocolate bar. I made my way to *Londres Macro Atacado*, the closest supermarket to my hotel. A bottle of water and a chocolate bar – my shopping list was as short as it was infallible. '*Do you know where I could find a 2-liter bottle of water?*', I asked one of the staff at *Londres*. On what was clearly the best day of his life, he mumbled: '*nuhdea*'. I stood there for a second or three, trying to process his reply as he literally restocked the shelves with bottles of soda. He was probably having a worse day than I after all, so I left, dehydrated, licking my wounds, and underdramatic if anything. I did, however, find my chocolate, to which I held on firmly as I marched towards the till.

There were only a couple in front of me. They offered a real note to the cashier, who gave them the thick of their change in the same currency. She asked them if she could give them a few coins in pesos. They agreed. Shops in Chuy accept Uruguayan pesos, Brazilian reals and, sometimes, US dollars regardless of the side of the line. And this versatility is not exclusive to big duty-free shops; you can buy a sandwich on the streets of Chuí Brazil and pay in pesos. Because most customers of supermarkets on the Brazilian side are Uruguayans looking for cheaper groceries due to Brazil's stronger industry, price tags are usually divided into two sections: the top half where the price is shown in pesos in font 36 and the bottom half where the conversion into reals is shown in font 12. Not even *Café Pelé*, whose most famous ambassador is none other than, well, Pelé himself, the ultimate Brazilian, is free from being sold first in Uruguayan money in Chuy.



Figure 20: Price tags at supermarket in Chuí Brazil.

'*Bom dia*'[61], I say to the cashier. I pay with a twenty-real note and my change included some 80 cents. When you greet a cashier or clerk in Portuguese here, they will ask you at payment: '*Pesos o reales*'?[62] If you greet them in Spanish, no such question is asked. So, my cashier gives me most of my change in reals, whose value I do not actually remember. I do, however, remember the 80 cents: '*te puedo dar 8 pesos?*'[63], she asks me.

I was triggered. The whole thing did not take more than one, maybe two seconds, but that was long enough for me to summon all the misery that I had been feeling those past days. The supermarket scenario, the rudeness of that other member of staff, my own perception that absolutely everyone at *Londres* was speaking Spanish. It all came together and I snapped at her: '*NÃO*', I screeched, '*reais*'.[64] She looks confused. The rest of the queue that had grown behind me by then were slightly shocked. Why did I react so violently to a question that is anything but out of the ordinary here? The cashier looks at her boss, who had watched the scene and looked just as baffled as everyone else. 'Just give him a one-real coin', he replies. I grab my money and my chocolate and run out of *Londres*. As I walked out of the door, I was hit by the shame and confusion for what I had just done. Why though? I prided myself on being a bit of a 'cosmopolitan soul', so why did I suddenly erect a border wall in the city whose everyday was interesting mostly for rejecting the border? I rushed back to my hotel and the chocolate bar barely made it alive.

[61] "Good morning".
[62] "Uruguayan pesos or Brazilian reals"?
[63] "Can I give you 8 pesos"? The rough equivalent, at the time, to 80 Brazilian cents.
[64] "No, Brazilians reals".

4.1.6 Conclusions on nationality and self-identification

What is explicit from my 'BRA-xit' episode described above is that someone who had never consciously imagined himself as a fierce guardian of his country suddenly resorted to nationalism and xenophobia, triggered by circumstances that shared only formal resemblance to previous negative experiences. I had gone to Chuy because of the immanent proximity between the two sides of the border and, all at once, under stress, I subverted what was most peculiar about the city into its very unbearability. In other words, what had previously been the point of attraction to Chuy became the reason of its rejection. I reclaimed the border. I briefly restored separation, division, distance and the proper that should lie within. In tandem with those three previous scenes, this episode unveils the vulnerability of identification. Its ceaselessness, its ephemeral yet undeniable fluidity. One never fully *é* but only *está.*[65]

Nationality in the borderlands is, therefore, a fluid concept, a quantum state that changes in accordance with the relation between individual and situation (Dorfman, 2009, p.71). This first question showed that a direct correlation between the language that Chuienses chose to use in the survey and what they consider themselves to be can be deceiving. Speaking one or the other language is not a direct result of being Uruguayan as opposed to Brazilian, or vice versa, but depends mostly, I argue, on the individual's school background and the situational demand.

The fact that the use of one language over the other seems to have been determined more by my decision to distribute surveys in

[65] Conjugations of the verb *ser* and *estar* respectively, both of which mean 'to be'. However, *ser* indicates a continual state, a characteristic that is timeless. *Estar*, on the other hand, indicates a momentary state, limited to a finite period.

different languages is a kind of situational demand which was imposed on participants. They did not choose the language in which the survey was given to them, but they reacted to it, abiding by the unconscious suggestion made by the survey that they responded in the same language. Likewise, my observation in the field suggests that people are capable of both actively using at least one of the languages as well as passively understanding the other. The dexterity with which one can actively use both languages seems to be influenced by family structure, where one of the parents is a hispanophone-only Uruguayan and the other a lusophone-only Brazilian, for example. In turn, in the case of those who, despite understanding the second language, can only actively use one of them, formal education seems to be the determining factor as curricula in Chuy's schools are still determined by the capitals, which are relatively oblivious to the reality of the borderlands.

Finally, it is fair to claim that the ways in which Chuienses identify or classify themselves might still bear some connection to place of birth and family history but is especially determined by individuals' positions in relation to what the question on self-determination apparently implies. In asking them to claim an identity, Chuienses are prone to looking for indications as to that on which such claim is based or that for which it might be used.

Someone who was born on the Brazilian side of Chuy, who went to a Brazilian school and who maybe can only actively speak Portuguese might find themselves 'feeling more Uruguayan' the deeper they travel into Brazil's heartland. That is to say that they might find more direct connections with what the idea of Uruguay represents both at large but in the everyday of Chuy as well rather than with whatever any local reality elsewhere in Brazil might offer

them. The same goes for someone who was born on the Uruguayan side of the city, went to a Uruguayan school and can only speak Spanish but might feel oddly 'more Brazilian' or 'less Uruguayan' when visiting Montevideo.

The surprising fact that Mixed was not the top choice shows that ideas related to a 'multicultural society' as the assemblage of neatly distinguishable units overlooks the totalising manner in which we always live our daily lives. The everyday might as well be constituted of an array of different elements but it is undeniably lived as one – rhythmically, not episodically. What is more, the fact that self-declarations as Brazilian came in second to declarations as Mixed points to a potentially deeper influence of cultural elements that are usually associated with Uruguay. This is not only because the nominal population of Chuy Uruguay is significantly larger than that of Chuí Brazil, but also because the generalised view of people from the Brazilian side often seems to antagonise the presence of 'Uruguayan culture' over a 'Brazilian culture' that is immediately described in reference to stereotypical symbols and practices, such as samba and Carnaval, that are not usually associated with this region of the country anyway. Chuí Brazil is located in a state that builds itself on the proximity to Rioplatense culture, the pampas, and the archetype of the *gaucho* (see Chapter 2). Conversely, Chuy Uruguay is seen as distant to the core of Uruguay, not completely unrelated to the fact that half of the country's population reside in the capital, painting it as a portion of an imagined Brazil to a metropolitan compatriot.

Therefore, declaring a nationality in this context turns not into a declaration of place of birth, documents, or even of sentiment, I would argue, but into a declaration of valued distance to the

symbolic layer of the boundary, which ignites a semiotic process in which opposing representations of Brazil and Uruguay are concomitantly built. There does not seem to be, however, any fixed criteria for people's declaration that supersedes the referents that are evoked in the very act of asking them to identify themselves. In Chuy, any putative causation between whatever symbol, practice, or characteristic and a specific nationality might be as often proven as it can be disproven. In general, Chuienses will identify themselves according to their own perception of the content, intention, and implications of the order.

4.2 WHAT DO YOU CALL THE LINE?

The second question in the survey offered respondents a free-association exercise in which to list 'three main ideas or words' related to the border. The goal was to incite a process whereby the zero-sign *[froN 'te ra]* could be signified in relation to both its constitutive role of the everyday in Chuy and to how individuals perceive such an immanent element of the social space. In that the boundary line marking Brazil and Uruguay is more than a peculiar aspect of the city due to its centrality in the urban space, it moves away from its geopolitical role to develop into the very founding of Chuy itself. In other words, there is no Chuy without the lived reality of the border nor without the line itself and, so, asking people to define the border is effectively a request for them to define much of their lives by assigning meanings to the city's strongest aspect.

Here too, the way in which the question is phrased points to its intentions. 'When you think of the border, what main ideas or words come to mind' brings out two facets of the question. In saying *ideas*, it evokes generalised intellectual tendencies to associate

the border to particular notions. With *words*, the order introduces a verbal effort to describe and define the border. In allying a more generic notion of 'ideas' to the materiality of 'words', it is possible to assemble a semantic map that formalises mental concepts, allowing for common patterns to be identified.

That is to say that, instead of looking for any obscure meaning to the border based solely on my observation, I asked people to tell me what it means *for them*. Thus, I potentially dodge the traps of observational bias leading to interpretations of *this* border in accordance with my own established views or expectations. It is not, however, free from its limitations as, precisely in comparing responses to observation, it is evident that Chuienses themselves resorted, on the one hand, to their own views as well as, on the other, to a series of expected interpretations of and positions in relation to the border, which constitute, in this region of South America, a normative border subjectivity (see 4.3). Though it seems futile to try to establish a clear division between authentic and non-authentic views of the border, as if individuals could only truly form their own opinions in seclusion from social space, it is sensible to consider the possible response effects that influence the mapping of meanings, which might actually differ to those that are invoked on the spot on a daily basis.

The first step in analysing responses to this second question, however, is to create such a map. Doing so provides an inventory of meanings along whose potential interpretation the everyday in the borderlands takes a shape that is at least accessible for investigation. Amongst all 426 valid surveys analysed, 59 codes were identified[66] and later arranged into 275 categories, which is how I call the

[66] Code #60 was added during analysis of the third and fourth questions (see Table 1).

emergent main themes. The higher number of categories will be explained in the next section.

Codes were mentioned to a total of 1,909 times. Out of those, the eleven most common codes represent 59.4% of those occurrences. They did not always intersect with each other, in what constitutes a category, but, from those instances in which they did, there was a total of 843 occurrences. After the main codes were identified, I moved on to consider mainly the categories in which these featured, resulting in seven main categories, or themes, that account for approximately 24% of all occurrences. The difference here is that, whereas the eleven main codes represent more than half of the total mentions, there was a higher number of categories that were, in turn, mentioned fewer times. My interpretation of the data is, accordingly, anchored on the eleven main codes and the seven main categories that, overall, elucidate semantic tendencies to the border.

4.2.1 Keyword *[froN 'te ra]*: the main codes

Given the very elaboration of the question, the primary stage of coding involved heeding the most prominent keywords in responses. Nouns for the most part, followed by verbs and adjectives. The focus on nouns stems from the intention to map, at first, the very names of the border, i.e. the very substance that outlines, or even manufactures, its perception.[67] A quest for the many names of the line, therefore, demands a quest into how it takes shape *in* and *through* people's statements. These keywords pointed to elevations on the overall topography of answers, whose proximity to

[67] Compare, for example, how 'noun', as a syntactic category, is described as a 'substantive' in some Romance languages.

each other ultimately indicated the most appropriate codes. That is, the second step was to coin the labels that could synthesise the main ideas standing for 'the border'.

The extensive list of codes identified was already presented in Table 1. What is helpful, at this point, is a visual representation of the topography of meanings.

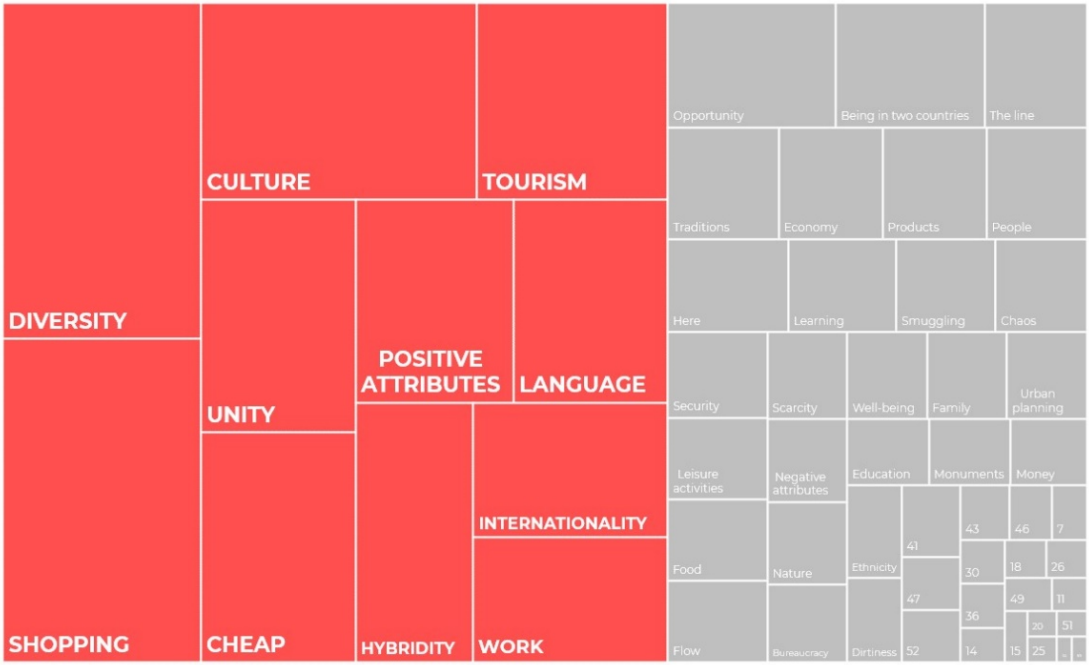

Figure 21: Treemap highlighting the eleven main codes (in red).

In the chart above, what is important to note is the area in red, containing the main codes under analysis. They undoubtedly represent a pattern in describing the border in terms of these ideas, but they especially point to three codes that were at the absolute top: ideas related to diversity, shopping, and culture feature, the three alone, in a quarter of responses.

Here is an analytical table of the main codes:

CODE	OCCUR-RENCES	% OF TO-TAL
	Absolute number	*All codes*
Diversity	172	9%
Shopping	166	8.7%
Culture	140	7.33%
Tourism	97	5.08%
Unity	93	4.87%
Cheap	92	4.82%
Positive attrib-utes	83	4.35%
Language	81	4.24%
Hybridity	79	4.14%
Internationality	68	3.56%
Work	63	3.3%
TOTAL	**1,134**	**~59.4%**

Table 5: (Q2) Analytics of main codes.

Another characteristic of this second question is that it offered three separate, numbered gaps to be filled with participants' answers. In practice, that implies an order in which ideas appear more intuitively. In general, that is, the more often an idea is mentioned first, the more imminent it is in the process of signification of the border. In this case, it would not be relevant to calculate some sort of average position, as I had originally thought, because there was no scrollable mechanism, in the likes of a Likert scale, to indicate a variable ranking of codes. Instead, it is better to consider how often codes would be placed first, second, or third on the list separately. Below, the main codes are ranked according to how often they appear at the top.

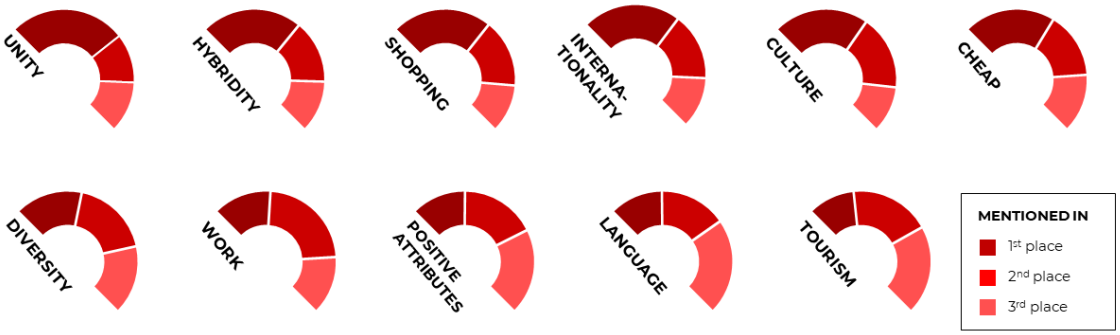

Figure 22: Position of main codes on free-association lists.

Looking at the frequency at which the main codes appeared in general as well as at how they were often placed on the list indicates not only the major ideas associated to the border but equally their disposition in the overall realm of signs most readily available in the everyday of Chuy. What is interesting, in crossing this information, is that ideas related to 'unity' made it the only main code to be mentioned first on the list in more than half of occurrences (53.76%). Five other main codes that featured most frequently at the top of the list were respectively: 'hybridity' (46.84%), 'shopping' (46.39%), 'internationality' (45.59%), 'culture' (44.29%), and 'cheap' (42.39%).

As I have stated before, another goal of Question 2 was to ignite a semiotic process that would bleed into Questions 3 and 4, where the main ideas herein mentioned would be categorised into an either positive or negative aspect of life in the borderlands. This means that the more often an idea is mentioned at the top, the higher the chances of that same idea potentially working as a sort of primary trigger of ideas to come, which might function as a milestone, indicating which semantic trajectories to prioritise.

Codes, nevertheless, are not informative in and of themselves considering that answers to Question 2, as the list that it was, featured mostly words and/or short phrases. Therefore, in order to have an overview of those semantic trajectories, analysis has to consider, all at once, data on codes as well as on categories, i.e. any meaning to be extracted from these answers is only possible in motion and in context: in motion, as it widens from the occurrence of individual codes and their overall position on the list towards how they relate to each other in forming categories, thus pointing to the main themes; and in context, because these codes, categories, main themes can only truly be understood within the context of the survey itself and, especially, in the context of the field.

4.2.2 On the topic of *[froN 'te ra]*: the main categories

The interpretation of data from coding is a progressive movement that follows a trajectory from the singularity of each answer in the survey, to how they group up, and finally to how they might relate to what has been observed in Chuy. Let us appropriately start by visualising how the codes interact. That is, how they arrange themselves into categories, which, alongside information on codes alone, will point to the main themes, the main narrative lines threading the idea of the border in Chuy.

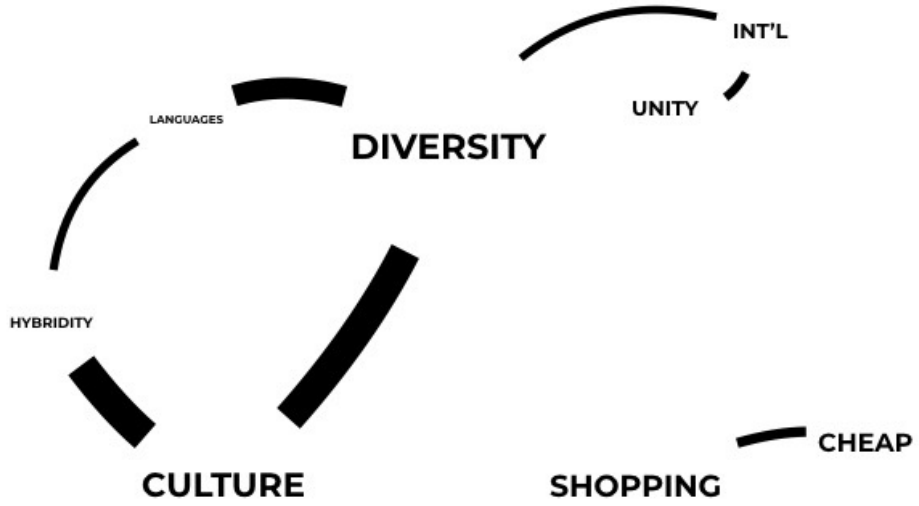

Figure 23: Overview of main categories.

In Figure 23, we can see how codes interacted in the formation of the main categories. The size of each node on the network represents the total number of occurrences of that code on its own. The weight of each connector represents the number of instances in which the two codes were linked. For example, code #13 (Culture) was associated to code #34 (Hybridity) 54 times, making it the most frequent category, represented by the heaviest line on the network. Also, three of the main codes are not displayed here, namely: 'Positive attributes' (#3), 'Work' (#53), and 'Tourism' (#55). Their absence is due to the fact that, comparatively, they interacted poorly with the other main codes.

Here is a comprehensive table with information on how connections between codes bundled up into categories.

CODES	CATEGORY	OCCURR.	% OF TOTAL
		Absolute number	*All codes*
13-34	**Cultural hybridity**	54	6.4%
13-16	**Cultural diversity**	52	6.17%
16-33	**Linguistic diversity**	36	4.27%
6-8	**Cheap shopping**	17	2%
22-40	**International unity**	15	1.78%
33-34	**Linguistic hybridity**	14	1.67%
16-40	**International diversity**	13	1.54%
	TOTAL	**201**	**~23.83%**

Table 6: (Q2) Analytics of main categories.

These numbers of occurrences are significant in light of the fact that codes were much more frequent than categories. In comparison, the 58 codes were mentioned 1,909 times whereas the 275 categories occurred 843 times. On average, each code was mentioned 32.9 times against a meagre 3.07 times for each category. Amongst category occurrences, then, any number above 0.36% of the total is already above average. And, given that the top 29 categories account, alone, for half of the total occurrences, figures in Table 6 finally appear as relevant as they in fact are.

At this point, I would dare sketch some kind of partial understanding of responses to the survey in the following terms. The generalised perception in Chuy seems to be that the border works as a pulling factor for people looking for job opportunities as well as cheaper products, the latter of which encompasses most touristic activity into the city. With the flow of people, there comes much diversity of origins and cultural heritage, converging into a mostly positive experience of space that is integrated across the boundary

line. In other words, the border is not merely *one of* the characteristics of Chuy – it is what makes it; an indissociable element of the city. The border founds Chuy.

4.3 NORMATIVE BORDER SUBJECTIVITY

Whilst perceptions have been stated somewhat formally, there is no guarantee that they should easily translate into a similar everyday experience of and in Chuy. I say that in reference to the response effects that might have influenced Chiuenses' participation in the survey and, especially here, to what I earlier called a normative border subjectivity, understood as "the symbolic meaning attributed to the appearance of the line" (Houtum, 2012, p.412). Given its history and the way in which it has come to play a central role in regional identity, it is expected that perception of the borderlands in this part of South America would be somewhat positive and romanticised (see Chapter 2).

This romanticisation is not entirely untrue as openness and an overall conviviality, laid in the foundation of this very thesis, have always been present at some level in the borderlands of the region. It is even more noticeable in the borderlands between Brazil and Uruguay, where geographical contiguity and cultural proximity complicate the efficacy and the very conception of antagonistic splits. Examples of this view of the borderlands as open and fluid abound in folk literature and music (see Dorfman, 2009; Masina, 1995), forming what Dorfman calls a "borderlands literature" (2009, pp.114-119), echoing the idea of a regional division based on common features in cultural products and symbols (see Rama, 1982). These are not, however, restricted to the past as there seems to be a strong interest in representations of these border dynamics

in the present, illustrated below by still frames from two recent documentaries on the borderlands.



Figure 24: Montage with stills from *A Linha Fria do Horizonte* (2014).

In *A Linha Fria do Horizonte*[68] (Figure 24), a 2014 documentary feature directed by Luciano Coelho, the reference to the horizon line is, in fact, a reference to the boundary lines between Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay as they meet in Brazil's southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul. The argument of the film is that there is a regional identity based on the biome of the *pampa* and on the image of the *gaucho*, which is, according to the film, particularly noticeable in folk music, especially in *milonga*, a genre known for its upbeat tempo but melancholic tone. The boundary line merges into the horizon, thus alluding to the border as an element of integration and commonality.

Amongst the musicians interviewed for the film are two leading names. Jorge Drexler, known for writing *Al Otro Lado del*

[68] The Cold Line in the Horizon.

Río[69] for the soundtrack of *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), which later in 2005 became the first song in Spanish to win the Academy Awards for Best Original Song. And Vitor Ramil, famous for revisiting *gaucho* folklore, whose latest album, *Campos Neutrais* (2017) is, interestingly enough, named after the very same Neutral Fields where Chuy is located (see Chapter 2). Ramil is also known for delivering an essay entitled *L'Esthétique du Froid*[70] at the *Porto Alegre, un autre Brésil*[71] conference in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2003, in which the author claims a regional identity resulting from the combination of Southern Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay by means of a metaphorical association to the cold weather – or, at least, cold-*er* than the average temperature elsewhere in South America. Ramil ends his essay with the following proclamation:

> We are at the confluence of three cultures, at the meeting point between coldness and tropicality. What else could the basis for our upbringing and identity be if not that? We are not on the margin but at the centre of another history (Ramil, 2004, p.54).

Furthermore, I find what three other musicians said particularly interesting (represented in the left column of Figure 24). Ana Prada (top left) describes Rio Grande do Sul as having always been a "*zona de pasaje*", which can be interpreted both as a zone of transition in terms of traffic flows as well as a zone of cultural transition, thus referring back to what Ramil had himself claimed – 'a meeting point'. Secondly, as he plays *Milonga de Los Morenos*[72] on his guitar,

[69] On the Other Side of the River.
[70] The Aesthetics of Cold.
[71] 'Porto Alegre, another Brazil', the capital of Rio Grande do Sul.
[72] This a poem by Jorge Luis Borges, made into song by Vitor Ramil. It could be translated as something like '*Milonga* of the Dark Skinned' as the word *'moreno'* literally means 'brown' or 'dark' and is historically associated to the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula. Though its usage has recently decreased, it is still used to refer to black or brown people when the speaker is actually afraid of calling them 'black', which nowadays usually grants the word a derogatory tone.

Carlos Moscardini (middle left) shares his view on the relation between culture and *milonga*:

> These are open harmonies, which allow us to enter an open universe and this openness that exists in music grants *milonga* its landscape. *Milonga* captures the landscape by means of its format [...] All this aesthetics within the music of Southern Brazil has much to do with our Argentine coast, with Uruguay, and with the pampa. So, the connection between this cultural essence is *milonga*, I believe.

Finally, Daniel Drexler (bottom left) tops it all off with what, according to him, is a common joke in the region: *"los uruguayos son argentinos que viven en territorio brasileño"*.[73] These statements substantiate the generalised view of this part of South America in reference to music and, by extension, to the arts and literature at large as a unifying factor that transcends borders but is, at the same time, inspired by their very existence.



Figure 25: Montage with stills from *A Linha Imaginária* (2014).

In *A Linha Imaginária*[74] (Figure 25), a documentary directed by Cíntia Langie and Rafael Andreazza in the same year, the focus is on the discrepancy between the line as a boundary of two countries and the everyday experience of the line. In its own right, therefore,

[73] "Uruguayans are Argentines who live in Brazilian territory".
[74] The Imaginary Line.

the film sits as close as possible to this thesis. Unsurprisingly, this is my favourite of the two films not only because of its Bergmanesquely sluggish shots of everyday scenes in the borderlands, but also because it offers, at the other extreme, unquestionable examples of the utter romanticism with which the border is treated.

Fabián Severo (top right, in brown coat), a poet and creative writing teacher, describes the border, at the beginning of the film, in terms of 'waters running together' in a tone that might certainly amuse but does not, at first look, go beyond the allegory itself. At the end of the film, Mr Severo concludes, to his scene partner's vigorous nodding, that *"la línea es imaginaria. Está en la imaginación, no está en la realidad"*.[75] The issue here is not that his statement is inaccurate; the very premise of my thesis is that there is a gap between the line as a strategy for marking separation and the line as it is experienced in the everyday of those whose social space is characterised by its presence. The issue is that it adds to what truly is a hegemonic trend, especially in Rio Grande do Sul, in perceiving the borderlands as somehow unequivocally permissive and non-segmentary regardless of the context.

Aldyr Garcia Schlee (bottom right), a highly published writer, known for no less than designing Brazil's official football jersey, affectionately called The Little Canary (*Camisa Canarinho*) in 1953, offers the ultimate illustration of this romanticised version of the borderlands. Mr Schlee plays with the words 'we' ('*nós*' in Portuguese and '*nosotros*' in Spanish) and 'other(s)' ('*outro*' in Portuguese and '*otro*' in Spanish) by saying: *"nós nos vemos nos outros. Nos outros, não; nosotros. Nós somos nosotros. Nós somos nós mesmos nos outros*". The impact of his statement relies on the ambivalence of the

[75] "The line is imaginary. It is in the imagination, not in reality itself".

Spanish word '*nosotros*', which means 'we' but also sounds like both 'in others' and 'we, others' in Portuguese. Thus, Mr Schlee claims all at once that in the borderlands:

PORTION	POSSIBLE TRANSLATIONS
Nós nos vemos nos outros.	We see ourselves in others. We ourselves see ourselves.
Nos outros, não; nosotros.	[Reinforcing ambivalence]
Nós somos nosotros.	We are ourselves. We are in others.
Nós somos nós mesmos nos outros.	We are ourselves in others.

Table 7: Breakdown of Mr Schlee's statement.

In 2015, already suspicious that there was a level of romanticism in how the border is perceived, especially in Rio Grande do Sul, I ran an online survey with 177 residents of the state in which 23 questions were asked, ranging from general meanings associated to the Brazil-Uruguay border to scales on how much the border influenced elements such as *gaúcho* culture. Results at the time, which I presented at a conference in Ciudad Juárez, in the US-Mexico borderlands, corroborate my interpretations of the documentary films mentioned above. They indicate an overlap between elements associated both to the border and to *gaúcho* culture, implying a deep-rooted connection between the two, as well as a mismatch between views on the porosity of the border against the imperviousness of the culture that is considered to derive from it. In other words, residents of Rio Grande do Sul seem to identify more strongly with whatever lies beyond the limits of Brazil in a clear exercise of "analytical perlaboration", as Ricœur writes, in which "a subject recognises themselves in the story that they tell themselves

about themselves" (1985, p.445). It symbolically displaces the boundary inwards, in a movement to mark a distinction between Rio Grande do Sul and an alleged ubiquitous Brazilianness.

Having said that, I do not mean to imply that responses to the surveys are unreliable. On the contrary, parsing out the possible response effects in light of a certain interpretive tradition of the border in the region cautions, in turn, against a potential romanticisation of these very responses. Likewise, at the conception of the survey, the knowledge of potential response effects steered the way towards formulating the two final questions, those on the advantages and disadvantages of living in the borderlands.

Caution, here, is thus of the utmost necessity in order not to draw hasty conclusions on the main categories related to cultural and international diversity, hybridity, and unity as being self-evident indicators of an everyday that is permeated by openness, tolerance, and acceptance. In addition to the possible effects that prompted answers in that direction, it is undeniable that such incisive references to diversity and hybridity, for example, imply the existence of mechanisms whereby differences are still made visible. How else can one argue in favour of these ideas if, at its very core, there is no underlying matrix of oneness, of homogeneity against which to measure difference? In that diversity is still susceptible to perception as such, it can be made into a matter of celebration or resentment alike. The key to understanding which perspective is at work, therefore, lies not in merely inferring a proclivity to multiculturalism from what is enunciated but in equally considering the dynamic character of instances in which diversity and hybridity might be rejected or downplayed.

Now that the main codes and categories have been identified and that the response effects have been highlighted, we can move on to looking into how these codes and categories appear in Question 3 and Question 4. These two final questions must be seen as an indissociable pair that expose the friction between the line as a strategy and as tactics. Together, they operate as a radar for those ideas mentioned in Question 2, particularly the emerging main themes that have been listed in Table 6. Finally, after that, it will be possible to thoroughly unpack the principal narrative lines that thread the everyday of the Chuy borderlands in relation both to what Chuienses have claimed and how they have put forth such claims as well as to what has been observed in the field.

4.4 THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE LINE

The two final items in the Chuy survey mirrored the same topic. In asking, first, what the advantages and, then, what the disadvantages of living in the borderlands were, the element of classification was introduced as, following up from the semiotic chain initiated by the previous item, ideas were classified as either a positive or a negative aspect of life in the city. Answers to Questions 3 and 4, therefore, provide a nuanced view of the topography of meanings associated to the border.

There are two reasons for that. The first reason has to do with positionality. In responding to these questions, Chuienses ultimately took a stance in relation to the border. As a consequence of classifying an aspect of life in the borderlands as positive rather than negative or vice versa, participants revealed their position to the border, that is, how they themselves interact with those meanings, ultimately avoiding idealistic interpretations.

The second reason is the generation of friction. Between the positive and the negative, by definition, there is friction. It is constitutive of this antagonistic relation as it would be impossible to define what is good without having the slightest notion of what the bad could be. There is, consequently, a layer of attrition between both levels from which emerge instances in which, on the one hand, the meaning of the border corresponds to a general strategy of lines and in which, on the other, it is tactically reappropriated.

I argue that answers to these two questions, which must be considered in relation to each other, offer a more realistic view of the everyday in the borderlands for, in this specific case, they highlight tendencies of interpretation that might be embedded in a idealised understanding of the Brazil-Uruguay borderlands as somehow morally superior than what is expected from other border regions. What is more, answers can here point to contradictory relations to the border, in which the same idea might change character depending on who speaks and under what circumstances.

The first step here is, fittingly, to visualise the main codes that were identified in responses. There are, though, two different data sets, so to speak, as these are two separate questions, there being a list of most often mentioned codes classified as advantageous and a list of those classified as disadvantageous. Finally, we will look at the contrast between main codes in a joint supergroup in order to visualise not only the number of occurrences but how they distribute on each side.

CODE	OCCURRENCES	% OF TOTAL
	Absolute number	*All codes*
Cheap	232	15.45%
Diversity	116	7.72%
Opportunity	107	7.12%
Culture	90	5.99%
Learning	88	5.86%
Shopping	79	5.26%
Internationality	73	4.86%
Being in two countries	70	4.66%
Work	70	4.66%
Language	69	4.59%
TOTAL	**994**	**~66.17%**

Table 8: (Q3) Analytics of main codes.

The most remarkable aspect, amongst the main codes of Question 3 (Table 8), is undoubtedly the prominence of references to 'cheap', pointing to a common topic of conversation in Chuy. Living costs are definitely lower than in other regions of both Brazil and Uruguay. This is, in part, due to the fact that this is, after all, a small town, where costs are usually lower anyway. However, another factor that brings most costs down is that the (open) border offers opportunities to take advantage of this crack between fiscal jurisdictions and national economies. This is connected, no doubt, to flows of shopping tourism to the city, in which middle-class Brazilians seek for duty-free luxury goods and working-class as well as middle-class Uruguayans shop for much cheaper groceries. However, what is interesting here is that this idea of 'being cheap' is not exclusively attractive to those who cross Chuy but, perhaps more significantly, to those who live here and who can, on daily basis,

profit from this imbalance between the two economies. As was often said by Chuienses, 'when one of the sides is doing badly, the other one is thriving'.

Perceptions of lower living costs and work prospects are ultimately associated to the idea of 'opportunity'. The borderlands are attractive to outsiders who, perhaps due to the volume of business during the summer months, might find that jobs abound all year round. Outside summer, work becomes more seasonal and less rewarding, so Chuienses by choice find other ways to make money, such as working as informal car guards on the streets of the city or with 'ID selling', where those who have Brazilian citizenship rent their national IDs so that Uruguayans can buy at the duty-free shops.[76] Despite the frequent references to opportunity in terms of jobs, prices, and shopping in general, associations between the same idea and a perception of learning about different cultures and learning other languages were likewise far from uncommon.

Nevertheless, I noticed what could be considered a mismatch between what is, in fact, declared and how it is enacted. Whenever people would touch on lower costs in Chuy, they would usually express it as if in compensation. For example, they could mention how dirty and badly planned the city is, but, at least, it was cheap. There is no real effort put into public security but, at least, it is cheap. There is barely anywhere to go out to, but, again, cheap. This calculation, which is, in fact, a dual reference to 'cheap' in that it is presented as an advantage but in a tone that implies compensation for other aspects, would be an interesting topic of research in its

[76] Only non-Uruguayan citizens can make purchases free of taxes at duty-free shops in Uruguay. As one quickly learns in Chuy, though, *not* being Uruguayan might just be a matter of which ID to show at the till.

own right. Especially because services that cater for tourists are nowhere cheap in comparison to everyday living costs and because I suspect that there might be a correlation, perhaps even a causation, between these perceived lower costs and the average salary paid to employees in the city, which might effectively make it cheaper for people to subsist in Chuy but, at the same time, might bind them here, thus hindering any chances of leaving.

What is remarkable amongst the main advantages as well is that, in total, seven of the main codes here mirror those main codes on the free-association lists. Ideas related to lower prices, diversity, culture, shopping, internationality, work, and language all feature both in the main codes of Question 2 and of Question 3, from which it can be initially speculated that there is a tendency of generically defining the border in positive terms.

Looking back on these two questions, when asked to associate the border to whatever ideas would come to mind, Chuienses seem to have preferred notions that overall grant the border a virtuous character. Or, on the contrary, the question still remains on whether that normative border subjectivity might have held into the question on advantages as well, thus adjusting responses to an expected idea not only of what the border means, but also of what is positive about it. I wonder, here, if this might superficially indicate a tendency to equate naming to praising, which would inevitably lead to a situation where any resistance, disruption, or disagreement would have to lurk in the shadows of *langue de bois* and insinuations but never in an openly confrontational tone. Basically, 'if you do not have anything nice to say, say nothing at all'. If this is the case at any level, by extension, critique and/or critical thinking at large are tainted with an apocryphal role whereby 'speaking

against' becomes the only possible intention of any statement that is not essentially celebratory of that to which it refers. As it turns out, we should keep these thoughts in mind for the analysis of the contrasts between ideas placed as either advantageous or disadvantageous.

CODE	OCCURRENCES	% OF TOTAL
	Absolute number	*All codes*
Security	123	10.73%
Scarcity	111	9.68%
Nada	56	4.89%
Smuggling	54	4.71%
Dirtiness	48	4.19%
Bureaucracy	47	4.10%
Leisure activities	45	3.93%
Urban planning	39	3.40%
Fluidity	38	3.32%
Internationality	35	3.05%
Chaos	34	2.97%
TOTAL	**630**	**~54.97%**

Table 9: (Q4) Analytics of main codes.

Amongst all disadvantages shown in Table 9, mentions of 'security' and 'scarcity' are, by far, the most noticeable. I would not, in any form, dare to relativise or disagree with people's perception about these two issues. On my very first day in the field, the 7th of June 2016, for instance, my notes read: 'I don't feel particularly safe here. So far, I haven't even touched my camera'. Also in that sense, I only saw a Brazilian police car once in four months, unlike the

Uruguayan police, which were, at least, more visibly present. A running gag in Chuí Brazil is that there are no police at night on this side of the border, which definitely seems accurate as the police station, underfunded and undermanned as everywhere else in the state, did not even keep a light on overnight to keep *los bad hombres* at bay. But, before this spirals down into the commonplace view of the borderlands as naturally unsafe, the notes added that 'this is probably due to the Facebook news page from Chuy that I follow, where there is nothing but news of crimes and mayhem', much of whose impact, I would now say, derives not from the incidence of crimes alone but mostly from the rhythm at which these news items are reproduced, thus inflaming any incident, more or less violent depending on the account, to doomsday proportions.

Likewise, the idea of 'scarcity' is completely understandable here as the lack of services and the poor general infrastructure of the city are painfully visible and have even been officially recognised by Brazil's government (MI, 2005, p.61). Chuy is surrounded by an aura of 'incomplete development'. Many buildings look as if they were initiated with one objective, which changed during the course of construction as, for example, the townhouse that must have belonged to a once rich family, served as the first independent Chuí's City Hall and is now a derelict alcove in the middle of the city centre. The streets are full of potholes, scant of proper signs, most of them are rough on tyre and foot alike, and there is little chance of the speed limit being met until you reach one of the four motorways serving Chuy. Pavements are narrow and overcrowded by hangers and mannequins from shops. There is litter on every corner as shoppers try to rid themselves of packaging, making it easier to go through customs, but, even if everyone looked for a bin, there

would not be nearly enough of them. Not to mention the most contemporary of horrors: poor internet connection as companies find little economic incentive to invest in coverage for such a small market.



Figure 26: Montage of images illustrating the concept of 'scarcity'.

Intriguing, however, is the fact that, amidst this always promising but unfulfilled modernity, there are sudden symbols of development that would almost certainly not be found in a non-border town of this size. There are daily coaches connecting Montevideo to São Paulo via Chuy and stopping at major Brazilian cities, such as Porto Alegre and Curitiba. And, according to Antonio

Madruga – one of my interviewees, a journalist with experience in Chuí Brazil and in Uruguaiana, in the triple borderlands of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay –, some of the largest TV networks in the country have placed towers in the borderlands because, I now suppose, it is in their interests to penetrate the neighbouring country not only with their own content and some sense of 'national culture' but, perhaps more importantly, with adverts of products that are easily accessible through open borders. Not to mention the Neutral Fields Wind Farm, the largest in Latin America, always dawning on the horizon between the city and the ocean.

Poor infrastructure is, in other words, what Chuienses touch on with ideas of 'dirtiness', 'urban planning', and, more broadly, 'chaos'. The high frequency of mentions of 'bureaucracy' also points to a potential connection between these poor aspects of infrastructure and the government, which does not, however, simply imply local government. In fact, despite a general tendency to complain about whatever mayor or party is or has been in power, Chuienses seem deeply aware of the fact that there is only so much local government can do if, at the other end, there is little support, both financially and politically, from regional and national governments. One of the likely causes of what effectively translates into a feeling of abandonment, which is only heightened by the city's geographical isolation, is the fact that Chuy is a small town, even when both sides of the boundary are considered. In other words, it might technically be a minor preoccupation for levels of government above, but this is still a binational city, thus posing challenges that must, given the political arrangement, be managed at the intersection between the local, the national, and the international levels. There is the complicating factor that almost everything –

and I am not being hyperbolic here – that should or could be done on either side of the line will inevitably affect the other, therefore adding extra layers of negotiation and paperwork that, in practice, require a much stronger effort and a much longer waiting time on the part of local government and of civil society to receive the necessary funds and political support.

The sort of issue that is hindered by this meshwork of bureaucratic strands ranges from major projects to everyday givens in any city. One of the former, for example, was described by the aforementioned interim mayor of Chuy Uruguay, Selene Marquez. According to her, there was, at some point, the possibility of building a dialysis centre in Chuy that would see patients from both sides of the border, who currently have to travel hundreds of kilometres inwards once or even several times a week, many for the rest of their lives. So, they had the demand, they had the lot where it could be built, they had popular support – but building a healthcare centre that would care for patients from both Brazil and Uruguay required a complicated system of international funds transfers, which ultimately brought the project to a halt.

The other aspect of scarcity which is impossible to deny has to do with leisure activities. Cultural activity, if I can synthesise it more generically, feels very dormant and there were only a few gigs announced during my time in the field. Whereas it is true that there are many restaurants, these cater mostly for shopping tourists, as is the case with most services and establishments in Chuy. There are no cinemas, no theatres, no bookshops or libraries (apart from schools' restricted collections), no proper nightclubs, or bars. The lack of leisure options in Chuy is effortlessly perceived all around

the city and across class, ethnic, and generational divides. This ultimately promotes a culture of 'loitering', especially on the part of younger Chuienses, creating the figure commonly known, in Uruguayan Spanish, as *terraja* according to Virginia Galeano, at the intersection of UK's 'chavs' and 'scallies'. Chuy's working-class youth seem always bored, endlessly loitering, almost as if any activity at all, as pointless as it might be, could help them to escape the impending paralysis of growing up here. Paired with what older Chuienses claim, especially parents and teachers, this culture of loitering seems to reflect an even deeper lack – a lack of direction or sense of opportunity for those who were born and/or grew up here and might now, at the gates of adulthood, find themselves stuck in the city in a mix of wishing for a better Chuy and an inability to leave.

What is clear from looking at the ways in which advantages and disadvantages are described separately is that, in addition to the fact that they help not to essentialise those ideas mentioned, they are, for the most part, polarised. Ideas mentioned as positive replicate those mentioned on the free-association lists, thus raising questions as to whether response effects in conjunction with a normative border subjectivity might actually be stronger than anticipated. That, of course, considering that I am not just being excessively cynical to believe that Chuienses do, in fact, think of the border as a place of diversity, hybridity, and overall conviviality. On the other hand, ideas mentioned as disadvantages do not seem to mirror any specificities that might be either expected or the very reality of any border region alone. The negative aspects of living in Chuy could be used to describe the everyday of countless other small towns in the two countries, to the exception of this borderline condition in which bureaucracy and government assume an even

more nefarious hue. Polarisation is, in a way, the rule between the main ideas mentioned as the advantages and the ones mentioned as the disadvantages of living in the borderlands. With the exception, however, of one code whose meaning cannot here be overlooked.

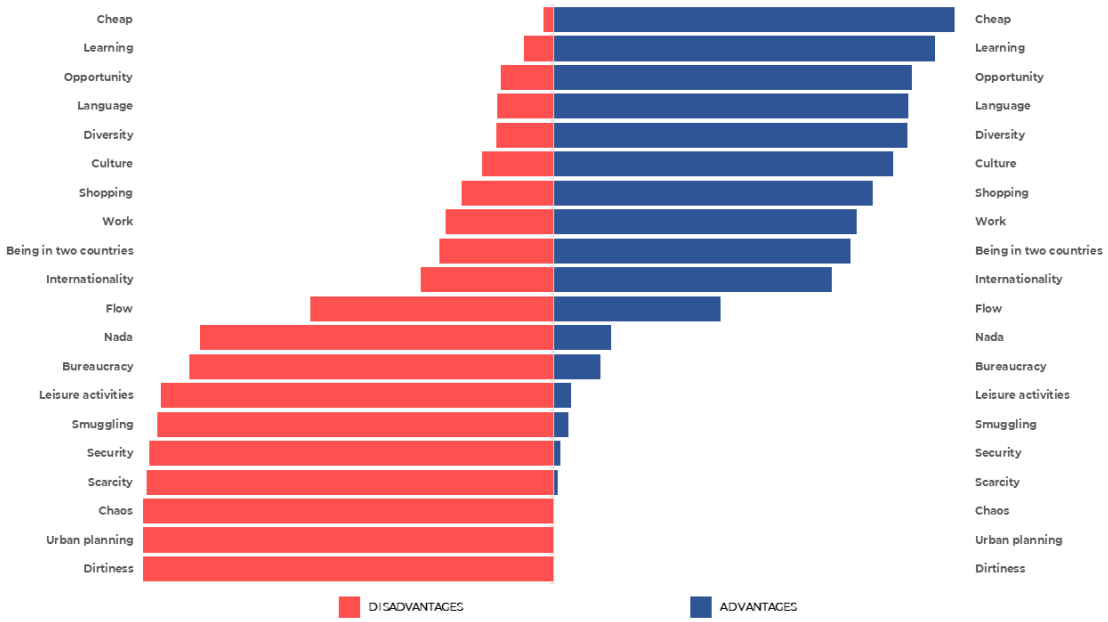

Figure 27: Contrast between Q3 and Q4.

Figure 27 displays, in blue at the top, codes that featured most prominently in responses to Question 3 (Advantages) and, in red at the bottom, those that featured most often in responses to Question 4 (Disadvantages). Taken together, these sets rendered a total proportion of each code, indicated here by the length of the bar, where the longer it is, the more concentrated each code was on that side. It offers, therefore, a visual contrast between the two questions, in which it is possible to see tendencies in classifying ideas that are generally associated to the border.

In addition to what I claimed earlier about the replication of codes that were most frequent on the free-association lists (Question 2) in responses to the question on the advantages of living in the borderlands (Question 3), one of the codes stands out for what it implies and how it distributes across the two sides. Bars mirror the sides, so to speak, in that those codes most concentrated on either side ranked at the extremes of the chart. This means that codes in the middle have lower differences, i.e. they tend to be more diffuse across advantages and disadvantages. At the very centre, the tenth row from the bottom up shows the code referring to ideas of 'fluidity', identified by other keywords such as 'flow', 'access', 'passing', 'crossing (the line)', and general references to ideas implying 'movement' and 'openness'. On the free-association lists, this code came only in 27th, with some thin 22 mentions in total. Already amongst responses to Question 3, however, it went up to 17th place only to feature amongst the main codes in responses to Question 4. 'Fluidity' should, therefore, be understood as a mostly negative aspect of life in the borderlands, indeed, but it is not in its prominence in one of the questions alone that it is interesting. What is intriguing about it is that, amongst all responses to both questions, 'fluidity' is the code with the lowest difference between positive mentions on the one hand and negative on the other, making it the most ambivalent of ideas associated with the border.

Whereas 'fluidity' is usually positively combined with ideas of diversity, shopping, culture, and the condition of 'being in two countries' at the same time, it is negatively associated, on the other hand, with ideas of danger and insecurity, chaos and impunity, as well as smuggling. In itself, 'fluidity' is quite a broad idea, certainly, but, at the same time, the way in which it combines with other

ideas is quite telling for these resulting categories ultimately lead to a major conclusion. The general notion of movement and openness is actually the most evident aspect of everyday life in Chuy precisely because it is so ambivalent. It has been associated with both positive and negative aspects alike, thus pervading all corners of life in the city. As a conspicuous aspect of everyday life in the borderlands, 'fluidity' and its related meanings are to be understood as the closest to an identity of Chuy that we might be able to reach here, replicating Coelho's claim that these borderlands "behave as a space of transitory characteristics" (2014, p.220).

All those ideas that featured most often on the free-association lists, and which found themselves replicated as the main advantages as well, require a level of fluidity, a level of openness. Cultural and linguistic diversity and hybridity, the ability to buy more affordable products regardless of the side of the boundary, the view of the city as a hub of opportunities, of possibilities for getting a job, buying cheaper, or finding lower living costs. These are all phenomena that demand openness, the possibility to move back and forth, the ability to cross over. On the other hand, disadvantages vary little from those that could be found in any other small town, leaving only ideas of 'fluidity', 'internationality', and 'chaos' as an interrelated set of main disadvantages that are, in this arrangement, specific to the borderlands. 'Fluidity' features, therefore, both as a prerequisite for the positive aspects and as the vector of the negative ones. The ambivalence attached to this idea will be central in the upcoming analysis of the main themes.

So, hitherto, we have established the main codes within responses to the free-association lists and to the advantages as well as disadvantages of living in the borderlands. Not only is it possible

to sketch a general map of meanings associated with the border, but also its topography, with its most relevant peaks. In other words, we can firmly set in motion discussions on the main categories and emergent themes towards some conclusions that have already been signalled throughout this chapter.

4.5 'LA FRONTERA, SOY YO'

Despite the heavy dependence on shopping tourism that pervades the Uruguayan borderlands, it is actually Paraguay that is most famously known in Brazil and overall in South America for being a tax-free paradise. This comes with its own perks, one of which originated a running gag amongst Brazilians. Say you are a Brazilian of decent means, nothing extravagant, with an almost clinical attraction to all that bling that is seen on every imaginable US TV programme that is broadcast back to back on Brazilian television. The route is certain: at some point in your life, you will find yourself travelling to Ciudad del Este, in the triple borderlands amongst Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.

Early that morning, you finally got to buy that preciousness of a watch that you had for long been eyeing in that business magazine to which you recently subscribed – because everyone is an entrepreneur or an investor these days. However, until your investments turn a profit, you had to settle for the second-best thing. Not just *that* watch yet, but a cheaper version sold in a shack directly next to the big shopping-centre-in-Texas-like building that makes 'the elephant in the room' seem like a factual description. Now, a few hours later, you are taking a selfie at, yes, the other reason why people visit this region: the Iguazu Falls. Very humid, is it not? Very

wet. Very…puff, there goes your watch. It stopped ticking, something is shaking loose. You are left with bits of time in your hand and the flashing image in your head of the person who sold you the watch assuring you of the product's warranty.

Hence the joke: *'la garantía, soy yo'*. I am your guarantee, your warranty, usually initiated as an interjection of disbelief that your customer would even suspect otherwise. The stereotype is that, when you buy a product in Paraguay, that is, there is nothing stronger than the seller's word – apart from, perhaps, humidity. An equivalent to this expression, in English, would be 'take my word for it'. So, when I call the section on the main themes *'la frontera, soy yo'*, I am doing just that: taking Chuienses' words for the border.

The meaning of the border, in Chuy, is therefore a variable which has to always be considered alongside the individual who is professing it and the use or stance that it potentially evokes. We know that the seller gives their word for that watch, but they do that to the customer interested in buying it. It is very unlikely that they would defend it so fiercely were no one there to be convinced. The same principle applies to the borderlands in Chuy: 'I am the border', an idea to which all the main themes emerging from the surveys point. And just as with the watch, the fact that the border is spoken, in whatever tone, does not necessarily translate seamlessly into the reality of practices.

The analysis of responses to Question 1, on nationality, already hinted at non-fixed identifications, at a potential vulnerability of what might be considered rigid, self-evident, or even antagonistic categories. In Question 2, the main ideas were already emergent as the most frequent codes were those touching on ideas of diversity, shopping, and culture. And, finally, from Questions 3 and

4 came the stark realisation that the meanings assigned to the border in Chuy are, similarly to how Chuienses might identify themselves, not a permanent declaration but one that is engrained in the moment of speaking (enunciation).

Meaning is fleeting but no less accurate or relevant because of that. Here, the ways in which meaning changes, acquiring different practical senses according to perspective, compose a complete topography of the everyday in Chuy. This map does more than offer an inventory of commonly used phrases or words to refer to the border. Most of all, it presents the patterns in navigations, how meanings are often arranged and rearranged, reappropriated, rejected, consented. For those whose lives are so unequivocally marked by the boundary line, the meaning that it assumes is contextual and circumstantial, but not fully unpredictable.

Starting with the holy trinity of the surveys. Diversity, shopping, and culture are undoubtedly the three main ideas arising from the survey data. They concentrate most of occurrences both as codes and as categories on the free-association lists, which are replicated for the most part in responses to the advantages of living in the borderlands. Finally, despite not being anywhere near the top in responses to the disadvantages, I argue that they are still present by extension of the one idea that seems to thoroughly define, in all its ambivalence, the everyday of the borderlands.

Considering the way in which the main ideas associate with each other and the hints of how they are perceived and used in the everyday, it is possible to claim that the main themes of everyday life in Chuy, in relation to the border, can be ultimately described in terms of Diversity, Shopping, and Culture. These, in turn, are filtered into the reality of practices by the concept of Fluidity, a sort

of bridge between statement and action, meaning and use, which pins word to speaker, and speaker to practice in what Krasteva calls "supermodern '*nonplaces*' in which social relations are based on mobility rather than fixity" (2015, p.20). The ways in which these themes take shape in relation to the bridge-concept of Fluidity in the everyday of Chuy are instances of enunciation (see 3.1.3). Given the central role of the concept of Fluidity, I henceforth call the themes Flows, inspired by Nail's understanding that:

> [...] there is never only one flow or any total of flows, but a continuous process, a multiplicity. A flow is by definition a nonunity and nontotality whose study can never be completed because it keeps moving along to infinity like a curved line. However, regional stabilities composed of a certain confluence or flowing together of two or more moving streams do exist. One flow does not totalise or control the other, but the two remain heterogeneous, like a mixture without unity (2016, p.26).

4.5.1 Flow I: Shopping, or The Coin

Route 1. Continue on BR-471 to your destination in *Fronteira*.

For those who live within the reach of the borderlands – a couple of hours' drive from the boundary line, in local conceptions –, the 'fronte(i)ra' has always been a synonym of shopping. Not only of shopping, but especially of shopping cheaply. Petrol is always cheaper on one of the sides. Medicine might be cheaper too. So are perfumes, label clothes, premium luggage, kitchen appliances and accessories, tubs of crisps, olive oil, Heinz ketchup (a bit of a luxury around here), and lots, lots of liquor. All these items have always been distant from the reality of most Brazilians, so we cross the border to shop. Shop mostly for what we see on television and magazines as part of the staple items of celebrities and the super-rich in the country and abroad. Crossing the line from Brazil into Uruguay,

for those who do not live by the line, means accessing a world of luxury at lower prices. It means having the possibility to, at least briefly, afford a middle-class lifestyle of indulging in mid-range to occasionally high-end products that are otherwise simply inaccessible in a country visibly marked by deep wealth concentration.

Free shops or *frichops*, as they are known here, are the pulse of these open borderlands between Brazil and Uruguay. They dictate the rhythm of life, services, and the landscape of Chuy. When shops are busy, so is the rest of the city, carrying along its restaurants, hotels, petrol stations, street vendors, and car guards. When the free shops are empty, the city hibernates. Summer is, without a doubt, the busiest of times. Everyone in Chuy says that the city becomes close to uninhabitable in the hotter months. Summer, on this side of the globe, merges Christmas, New Year's Eve, Carnaval, and the beginning of the school year into a stodgy yet highly profitable season. During the rest of the year, in turn, especially during the cold Southern winters – during which I was in Chuy, by the way –, weekends are the peak of business and agitation. Still nothing comparable to summer though, when figures as high as 50,000 are thrown around by Chuienses as the number of people who might visit this 15,000-person city in one and the same day.

It is perhaps more comprehensible now to think of the challenges of planning and maintaining an infrastructure that has to, at the same time, cater for the spatial dominance of duty-free shops and commerce in general and for an off-season everyday Chuy that shrinks and expands between one and four times its size every year and, to a lesser degree, every weekend and bank holiday. My limita-

tions here can only allow me to wonder why, after all, such a volatility in the size of the population translates into a general aesthetic of underdevelopment, stagnation, and abandonment.

The city's landscape is therefore dominated by shops of all kinds, selling everything from local cheese to high-tech gadgets that one would never expect to see in a city this size. Out of these, duty-free shops overshadow all else. There are duty-free shops of all sizes, hidden away in corners of office buildings, fit in between two houses, tucked in a former garage. But it is the big names, chains of duty-free shops all over the Americas, which stand out.

DFA, or Duty Free Americas, is the royalty of duty-free shops in Chuy and along the Brazil-Uruguay border, only finding competition in the long-established *Siñeriz*, in Rivera. The Florida-based chain of duty-free shops counts on some 135 locations in the US alone and on other 55 all across Latin America, as well as three other shops in Israel and China. There are seven DFAs in Uruguay, all of which are located in the borderlands with Brazil and one in the triple borderlands amongst Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay in Bella Unión.[77] In Chuy, DFA is a monstrous building, spreading over two blocks, and located closer to the motorway that crosses the border outside the urban area of the city, which can only be seen as a strategic move to escape the hustle and bustle of *Rua Argentina/Avenida General Artigas*, the main road that cuts Chuy crosswise. Amidst old cars, congested streets, and piles of rubbish, DFA stands out of place. It is too flashy, too regal, and too organised not to puncture the landscape. As soon as one enters the building, the Narnia of the Middle Class presents itself with posters of Julia Roberts selling perfume – which, for some reason, stuck to my memory

[77] Available at: <https://goo.gl/Povuxh>. [Accessed 05 Jun 2018].

–, piles of Toblerone slabs, and mountains of Samsonite bags that transport us into the ultimate phantasmagoria of a shopping centre supported by ideals of industrial and economic development, but set in the edgelands of partial and belated modernity.

Route 2. Merge onto *Avenida General Vargas* from *Ruta 9*.

For those who come in the other direction, nevertheless, the border is still synonymous with shopping, but it is so in reference to different patterns of consumption. Uruguay is a small country, quite a dwarf of three and half million people next to its giant neighbour of over 200. Brazil is the fifth largest country in area[78] and in population[79] and it is one of the ten most powerful economies in the world.[80] Uruguay is not even near these figures.

This incredibly disparate geopolitical and economic situation translates into Brazil having a much stronger and much more varied industry. In practice, that means lower prices, more variety of products available, and supposedly higher quality of essential household items for those who cross the border into the country. If we can see Brazilians driving back into the heartlands in possession of bottles of perfume and the newest camera, we will see, at the same time but in the opposite direction, shoppers driving back into Uruguay with heavy boots, full of boxes of cereal, bottles of soda, and tubes of toothpaste.

Chuy Uruguay is also relatively closer to Montevideo, undisputedly the country's most important city, in comparison to Chuí Brazil, which is completely isolated from the rest of the country on this notch of land set between Lagoon Mirim and the Atlantic

[78] Available at: <https://goo.gl/aHuPch> [Accessed 05 Jun 2018].
[79] Available at: <https://goo.gl/ZbNPyr> [Accessed 05 Jun 2018].
[80] Available at: <https://goo.gl/HjkYiu> [Accessed 05 Jun 2018].

Ocean. For Brazilians, thus, travelling to Chuy acquires a more ritualistic tone given that it is a considerable journey, adding to the massive flow of shopping tourists in the summer months. For Uruguayans, on the other hand, Chuy is 'around the corner'; it is usually a weekend outing, comparable to those enormous wholesale complexes that are built on the outskirts of big cities.

The flows that merge in Chuy around shopping and cheaper prices erect a portal, a border gate that swings in many directions, depending on where one is financially based. For Brazilians and Uruguayans who do not live in the borderlands alike, Chuy is a bridge between two incomparable economies, whose gap offers benefits both for those who earn their money in reals and those who earn theirs in pesos. As one of the respondents put it, "[the exchange rate] always favours a side of the boundary. Thus, our community is always in *commercial motion*"[81] (R073, emphasis added).

Clearly, the rate between the two currencies determines how much one will be able to spend on the other side, but this is not exclusively an issue of conversion but also of availability. When Chuienses say, on the one hand, that one of the advantages of living in the borderlands is the "ability to access imported products" [82] (R021) and, on the other, "the possibility of accessing Brazilian products"[83] (R180), this is not just connected to the exchange rate, though this is, undoubtedly, a major factor. Shopping in Chuy is far more strongly related to the array of products that can be bought at different prices due to the fluctuation between the two currencies and the uneven economic conditions of each country, where small

[81] "[O câmbio] sempre favorece um lado da fronteira. Com isso, nossa comunidade está sempre em movimento comercial".
[82] "Facilidade de acesso a produtos importados".
[83] "La posibilidad del acceso a los productos brasileros [sic]".

Uruguay historically needs to import much more, meaning lower taxes (Franco, 2001, p.25), and giant Brazil yields many more industrialised products.

The evident negative aspect of the role of shopping here is that it is a reminder of the city's insufficient infrastructure. One of the most recurrent mentions of this is the association between shopping tourism and litter. "The amount of tourists, do not get me wrong", cautions one of the respondents, "is a good thing, but, in certain times of the year, the rubbish that is left in the city centre is agonising"[84] (R232). According to some Chuienses, littering is a national phenomenon that is more associated with the other side of the line to the one on which the speaker places themselves. According to others, this is purely an issue of tourists' dismissive behaviour as they are not the ones that will have to deal with all that waste. However, there is a more sensible explanation.

Littering is connected, as I see it, to the other major complaint about shopping: "you cannot go through customs with Brazilian products"[85] (R183). In other words, the disadvantage is the inability to buy more. Not necessarily because of money, but because it is downright illegal. Brazilian citizens can legally transport merchandise to a monthly total of US$300 per person back into the country free of tax.[86] For Uruguayans citizens, the limit is only half of that.[87] In attempts to bypass these restrictions, shoppers dispose of as much packaging as possible to make it easier to disguise their purchases. As a result, piles of cardboard boxes and plastic wrappers flood the city from every corner.

[84] "La cantidad de turistas, no me mal interpretes, es algo bueno, pero, en ciertas temporadas del año, es agobiante la basura que queda en el centro".
[85] "No se pueden pasar productos brasileros [sic] por la aduana".
[86] Available at: <https://goo.gl/jg5EnQ> [Accessed 18 Mar 2018].
[87] Available at: <https://goo.gl/hg4kMo> [Accessed 18 Mar 2018].

The peculiarity of Chuy is that both the customs agency of Brazil and of Uruguay lie effectively outside the urban space of the city, at the junction where roads turn into motorways (see 2.2). Inspection is random, so one can only hope that their stash has been concealed well enough not to raise any suspicious. Not too well though because that is perhaps even more suspicious. After all, inspectors actually know that everyone occasionally gives in to the temptation of a good bargain, so, if your car looks too clean, that can only mean that you are carrying something other than a new pair of trainers or a crate of beer.

Between the legal restrictions to shopping and the complex web of trivialised practices to technically smuggle products across the border emerges the mythical figure of the *bagayero* or the *chibeiro* – the smuggler (see Dorfman, 2009). In everyday Chuy, which is located between the two customs, there is a fully established culture of cross-border consumption that, at the end of the day, could be classified as illegal. That is the norm for everyone in the city. Even I caught myself involved in a dubious venture when I was asked by two potential interviewees, whose trust I wanted to gain, to bring some 30kg of sausages from Santa Maria, where I used to live. When I met with the maker of that criminally good-looking barbecue-to-be, he casually slid into the conversation that there was no receipt ('because of taxes, isn't it?'), at which my spine shivered, but quickly added that, 'according to the law, you can claim these many kilos of the product on personal consumption'. He knew that too well.

So, I smuggled. Just a little bit though. Some people, however, make a living out of the potential advantages of this gap between jurisdictions that offers economic benefits. The smuggler is not just

someone who buys their groceries on both sides of the line or who crosses the line with a day's worth of undeclared earnings. The smuggler, here, is someone who makes regular trips to and/or from the borderlands to buy pre-ordered products for their customers. This is, echoing Sánchez words (2002), an *inevitable* part of the everyday here and the calculation of benefits extractable from the reef between national economies can be almost expected due to its sheer pervasiveness. In Chuy, that is, we are all guilty of "small-scale smuggling"[88] (Grimson, 2003, p.229) at some point, but only a few *are* smugglers.

The coin is, finally, the perfect illustration of this first main flow of everyday life in Chuy. Money, making it and saving it, is a critical aspect of how the border is signified and used. Between everyday subversions of the legal restrictions to commercial activity on whose existence those same subversions categorically rely, Chuy cannot be better described than by the words of a respondent who said that the advantages here are: "Save money [full stop] Easy to find a job [full stop] There are duty-free shops"[89] (R363). On the flipping between the two sides of the border, one of them will *always* be beneficial. Full stop.

4.5.2 Flow II: Culture, or The Marker

Were everyday life, at the core of this thesis, not already difficult enough to gauge and describe, there emerges, from surveys and observation, the unfaltering theme of culture. It is difficult not because we do not understand it, but because it "is a term built around conflict and confusion. In itself, it is not an analytic term,

[88] His actual words are *"contrabando hormiga"*, which literally translates as 'ant smuggling' in reference to the continual yet negligible scale of everyday cross-border transactions.
[89] "Ahorrar económicamente. Facilidad de trabajo. Hay free shops".

or a particularly useful one" (Highmore, 2016, p.158). So, it turns out, it is quite unsurprising that references to culture make up such a substantial portion of views on the border. The concept of culture is one that is superficially applied, in responses, to generic, almost abstract ideas, which usually correspond to certain expectations from a *fronterizo*. On closer inspection, though, it unfolds into a mechanism that assists with the delegation of the proper side of the border applicable to something or someone. 'Culture' is a marker as conspicuous as the boundary markers adorning the line between Brazil and Uruguay.

Amongst all mentions of 'culture' and its derived terms in the surveys lie four clear collocations. First, culture is most often placed next to ideas of either 'diversity' or 'hybridity', under phrasings such as 'cultural diversity, cultural exchange, mix of cultures, variety or plurality of cultures'. This is a sign that culture tends to be understood in reference to something else, in a way similar to the very idea of the border, ultimately evoking an even more complicated terrain of symbols and uses that daunts, most of all, for the sheer banality with which they are used.

Secondly, almost as by default, mentions of shopping and lower costs. In bulk, these responses read as if, halfway through writing down that one of the major advantages of living in the borderlands is the access to cheaper and more varied products, the speaker was reminded of the expected mention of culture, diversity, and other ideas of the same ilk. This, obviously, raises enormous red flags as to the, say, credibility that can be assigned to such generic and quasi-obligatory references.

Thirdly, however, this placing of culture next to shopping points to what is perhaps the most sensible interpretation of these

mentions. Although 'cultural diversity' and the like, understood as this virtue that casts the shadows of bigotry as if by magic, cannot be fully discarded not only from Chuy but anywhere inhabited by humans really, the correlation between culture and shopping where only the latter is at all elaborated begs the consideration of whether there is, in fact, an overlap between the two, creating an amalgamation of *culture through consumption*.

The most straightforward mention of culture is, however, the fourth one, in which culture refers to high culture. That is, to established instances of cultural activity, such as concerts, museum exhibitions, and theatre plays. None of these mentions explicit any direct relation to high culture, actually, in that this is an interpretation of mine. The clear indication here is that there is a low offer of cultural activities, perhaps high and low alike, as the – pardon the cliché – 'cultural scene' in Chuy, at least during my time in the field, never even presented as much as a vignette. It is important to be reminded, nevertheless, that this is far from being a characteristic arising from the city's border condition but is, in turn, a common feature of life in any small town.

I would like to go back to the idea of culture through consumption for this seems to be the major conclusion. The fact that culture is usually placed alongside shopping, thus pointing to all issues already discussed in the previous subsection, does not merely imply a protocol of the reigning normative border subjectivity in the region. In fact, I argue that this proximity is due to a phenomenon that equates flows of people, who are looking to benefit financially from the borderlands, with flows of symbolic exchange. This is made evident by the frequent use of words such as 'learn', 'live with', 'interact', or even 'absorb' in reference to culture. "Feeling

close to customs and cultures of two nations, being able to absorb the best from each of them"[90] (R110), wrote one of the respondents. Thus, it is possible to visualise a correlation between the possibility of buying products that are available on only one of the sides and the overall 'culture' that these products not only seem to represent but to effectively constitute. Unfortunately, we will have to wait for discussions on the third flow, that on diversity, to be laid out before we can deepen our understanding of the way in which the border is associated with culture.

Before doing that, however, I should add that another interesting aspect of the way in which the concept of culture was also mentioned in the surveys, but mostly in everyday conversations, is its tripartite matrix. Chuy, according to many *fronterizos,* is composed of three cultures: Brazilian and Uruguayan, the first two; and an entanglement of allusions to 'the Arabs', 'the Muslims' or, as is commonly the trope in this region, *'os* or *los turco.'*[91] This segmentation is used despite the fact that the Arabs who live in Chuy have already been here for decades. That is, if a Brazilian of a different heritage from somewhere farther in the country, or the equivalent situation of a Uruguayan, moved to Chuy, they would probably still be labelled as representatives of Brazilian or Uruguayan culture against the Arab population that have resided here for generations.

There are conflicting views on the level of conviviality between the Arab population and all other Chuienses depending on

[90] "Sentirse cercano a las costumbres y culturas de dos naciones, poder absorber todo lo mejor de cada una".

[91] 'The Turk', without the –s to mark the plural, a common feature of the informal register of both Portuguese and, to a lesser degree, Spanish in the region. This characterisation of what is actually the Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese populations derives from a sustained inaccuracy that identified all groups as Turkish due to the fact that the first wave of migration to South America, post-World War I, took place when these countries were totally or partially under Ottoman control. Available at: <https://goo.gl/oqKGJP> [Accessed 29 Apr 2018].

the account. According to interviewees Mohamed Jomaa and Anuar Jomaa (see 5.2), there is absolutely no tension at all, whereas for other Chuienses, the Arabs tend to recluse amongst their own. Both claims seem inaccurate or, at least, partial. There is clearly a tendency to resent the economic success that many Arab families attained with their commercial establishments in Chuy, a professional pattern that sustains an image of the '*turco*' [sic] as ingenious tradespeople. This, I argue, is probably due to an extrapolation of what seems to be the result of an observational bias. If Chuienses of Arab descent are successful businesspeople, to the likes of other Brazilians or Uruguayans of Arab descent elsewhere, this does not necessarily translate into the totality of individuals who might share the same heritage. In other words, many Arab Chuienses are, indeed, businesspeople, but perhaps this perception is a mere result of not paying attention to those who pursued other paths. On the other hand, any considerations that I might add to corroborate the view that Arab Chuienses are, in fact, less active or less visible in the city's social life would equally fall in the trap just described.

What is intriguing, therefore, about this tripartite matrix is how ideas of Brazilianness and Uruguayanness, as diverse and as relatively recent as they might be, do not seem to have an agreed space for an Arab element, which stands on the outside of the notion of what makes up both countries despite the fact that the Arab population have long been established in the city and in both countries. It is important to note, in light of the realisation that the border is invoked in accordance to people's intention and position in relation to it, that references to Arab culture or to the Arabs at large as constitutive of Chuy's cultural diversity far outnumbered those in which they were described prejudicially, thus pointing to the

need for further consideration on why 'Arab' is still seen as a category apart. This would be an interesting study to look at contemporary dynamics between the construction of ethnicity in relation to conceptions of a national community since 9/11, when, not unlike elsewhere in the so-called Western world, 'Arab' became an intrinsically derogatory category. Ten days after the attack in New York, a major weekly magazine in Brazil published an article under the tasteless title of 'From Kabul to Chuí'[92] in which they reported on investigations made by the *Polícia Federal*[93] into an alleged friendship between Mr Jomaa Sr, then mayor of newly independent Chuí Brazil, and none other than Osama Bin Laden. Never to any avail, the very fact that this was even undertaken points to the reach that the early-2000s anti-Arab craze might have had even in remote areas like this.

Finally, I argue that the ways in which the idea of culture is mentioned in the surveys, along with the ways in which the expected perceptible consequences thereof have been observed in the everyday of Chuy, can be understood as forming a conception of *culture through consumption*. Given the centrality that the access to products and services across the border has in the city as well as the unwavering collocation of 'culture' next to these phenomena, consumption becomes culture itself rather than artefacts and products being tokens thereof. I draw here a parallel between the ways in which Chuienses spoke of access to products and the ability to acquire the most varied items in similar fashion to how they described being able to access other cultures, interact with them, or even absorb them. Because these two flows run closely together, it

[92] Available at: https://goo.gl/5ooWYH [Accessed 00 Mon 2016].
[93] The rough equivalent to the MI5 in Brazil.

is safe to infer that there is more than a coincidental character to the way in which both are described in terms of allowing acquisition – both of things and culture. A clear example of this conception is found in a response that mentions, as an advantage, the fact that "by living in the borderlands, you have the opportunity to see the difference between the two countries and to compare them. Moreover, there is a broader *culturalisation*, with music, food, or clothing"[94] (R205, emphasis added). The emphasised word, 'culturalisation', being the keyword for its proximity to the concept of *transculturation*, i.e. the understanding that all groups have been and are still marked by the flow of different cultures (see Ortiz, 2002).

Culture is actively moulded in relation to the products that can be consumed, ultimately assigning a national character to them. That a specific product can only be bought on the Brazilian side turns not into merely a product that can only be bought on the Brazilian side but a representation of Brazil and Brazilian culture. *Bombons Garoto*, a brand of chocolate sold in Brazil, is an example of this phenomenon and was often mentioned as something that evokes an image of Brazil. The same goes for *dulce de leche* or *alfajores*, products that are usually associated with Uruguay and, therefore, become Uruguay as they are consumed despite the fact that all these products can be consumed in a space where the dividing line between the two countries poses no barrier between the two. Not just that, the border in Chuy is, on the contrary, a trigger of movement and interaction. What defines the city is not, after all,

[94] "Al vivir en la frontera, tienes la oportunidad de ver la diferencia entre los dos países y puedes comparar. Además, una culturalización más amplia, ya sea con la música, alimentos y vestimentas".

how isolated each side of the line is but the very opposite: how everyday life is lived as one between these two nominally different entities, joined by the boundary.

It is, perhaps, the absence of a traditional boundary of sorts, one that will dissuade rather than encourage flows, which ultimately pushes consumption (products and their side of origin and/or of association) to the level of a marker. Consumption marks the side on which the product was made as well as the supposedly corresponding national culture to which it is associated. It advertises a sense of diversity for:

> Buying strange goods or services is often the easiest way to experience difference, to encounter the exotic and begin to incorporate the 'others' who show up one day at the gate with products and performances that promise us the liberating force of variety (Abrahams, 2005, p.162).

In doing so, culture and consumption operate almost as synonyms in Chuy. Or, if this is going too far, at least as inalienable concepts deriving from the same element. What pushes them away, on the other hand, is the ways in which they have been negatively described. In relation to shopping, for example, the disadvantages of living in the borderlands is precisely that it is not possible to have more of it, to consume more. The negative aspect is, therefore, a reinforcement of its positivity. In turn, in relation to culture, the disadvantages have to do with aspects that eventually dismantle its positive character. Expressions such as "loss of cultural identity"[95]

[95] "Perda de identidade cultural".

(R019), "miscegenation of undesired cultures"[96] (R067), and "cultural loss" immediately followed by "foreign dangers" [97] (R192) stifle any essentially celebratory tone of culture. If shopping is somewhat 'free' to flow in either way given that the economy always thrives on this gap between the fiscal spaces, culture is the marker that can slip into the oblivion of repeatedly seen sights as much as it can cause a sudden rupture to befall as soon as the flow ensued is considered to jeopardise any need for fixity.

4.5.3 Flow III: Diversity, or The Stream

Ideas developed around the concept of diversity seem to finally bind the two previous flows in a coherent understanding of the meaning and the potential uses of the border in everyday Chuy. Diversity implies a mesh of differences. By definition, there can be no diversity unless there is difference, which, in itself, already requires more than one. Simply put, nothing is different to itself. I have found that, here, diversity is conceptualised as the assemblage of differences created in the process of assigning a position to symbols, practices, artefacts, and individuals in relation to the border. Claiming diversity is, therefore, a stance of admitting to the use of the dividing line as a circumstantial ballast with which to fix any sort of meaning and character amidst convolution.

That something is understood to belong to or originate from one side of the boundary is not self-evident or metaphysical in the sense that it only need be in order to be understood as itself. Difference can only be fathomed when at least two entities are juxta-

[96] "Miscigenação de culturas indesejadas".
[97] "Perdida cultural. Peligros extranjeros".

posed, compared, contrasted. And, following from previous discussions, for there to be anything, there has to be a schism in the virtual infinity of what has been, is or could ever be (see 1.3). That schism founds comprehensible reality by naming (see 3.1).

The name outlines reality by assigning meaning to things and to phenomena that would, otherwise, only exist by virtue of being-in-itself. There is no Brazil, no Uruguay – or any other country, for that matter – without its borders. The outline of the country allows not only for there to be a name but for there to be a name *for something*. Naming is making the one.

The one that is made, however, cannot but exist amidst other names, which have also been made. Thus, another way of saying that no name, regardless of what it might ultimately outline, can designate the stuff of itself without, at the same time, relating it to all the other names that are not applicable by effect of the one name that is. It is inconceivable to think of a single name that could identify everything. So, by definition, anything only comes into existence as something that can be described, pointed at, made to stand apart from what it is not. The name is the border of conception.

Conversely, as I have already argued, there is no total name that describes all. Therefore, in there being one that can be understood as itself, whatever it is, there have to be others. Difference is actually constitutive of the notion of the self. Likewise, just as there can be no Brazil without its limits, there can be no Uruguay without Brazil – and vice versa. Ultimately, the borders that mark the extension of any entity – though, here, we are mostly concerned with the extension of the two countries in question (see 1.1) – also mark, at the same time, the existence of multiple others – or are, at least, symptomatic thereof. In this sense, the opposite of difference

would perhaps be sameness. But of what is it the same if not the same of all that which it is not?

The very constitution of the word 'difference' is extremely elucidative.[98] 'Difference' is the gerund – otherwise known as the present participle, that is, the agent in the now – of the Latin verb *differre*, made up of two elements: the prefix *dis-* and the verb *ferre*. Whereas the latter means to bear, to carry, to deliver – i.e. to bring into existence, the former implies the duality of existence as a tearing apart, hence its connection to the word *bis-*, meaning 'twice, in twain', making *dis-* an action of 'setting apart, splitting into two'. Put them together and 'to differ' means precisely coming into being by setting itself apart. To *be* is thus literally to *differ*.

In comparison, 'diversity', which is, after all, the matter of this subsection, implies a state of relative difference, the quality of being different (always to something other), of being cut apart at the most basic level and, thus, inserted into reality. In light of the discussion above, 'diversity' can be understood as 'difference' in motion. Given that the origin of the word 'diversity' implies the act of 'diverting', of turning in another direction, the resulting notion adds a layer of intention to the notion of difference or of processuality, as argued by Bhabha: "a process of signification through which statements *of* culture and *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorise the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity" (1995, p.206). Diversity finally becomes an act that requires an effort to make the being of separate entities visible. Diversity is difference made visible.[99]

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[98] Word formation and etymology was consulted at: <https://goo.gl/K9wCTZ>; <https://goo.gl/Rk5KTN>; <https://goo.gl/82a3RP>; <https://goo.gl/qdgUGr> [All accessed 06 Jun 2018].

[99] A combined understanding derived from: <https://goo.gl/fLNHMm>; <https://goo.gl/MUJ1xt>; <https://goo.gl/ijuqg8>; <https://goo.gl/QChJaU>;

When a Chuiense mentions 'diversity' in reference to the border, they are effectively pointing at something that is not part of themselves. Therefore, in saying something as seemingly innocuous as "there is [in Chuy] a great diversity at the level of culture"[100] (R162), they are delimiting the perception of one and the other, in this case, 'culture', already implying that there has to be more than one. References to 'cultural diversity' are, as shown in Table 6, the second most frequent category in responses to the free-association lists and its presence is equally significant in describing the advantages and disadvantages of living in the borderlands.

Chuienses overall described their everyday as being positively marked by "the possibility of living with different cultures"[101] (R014) and as a place where "there is always movement of people, we are in contact with another language, another culture"[102] (R175). The 'other' culture or the 'other' element is accordingly what lies on the other side of a dividing line that is instituted both in the space of enunciation and in physical space. We cannot ignore that this line that separates these various cultures, or whatever it is, still refers to the boundary between the two countries.

In that there is no 'sameness' without 'difference', the diversity to which these responses point is the overlap between what the interstate boundary strategically tries, at least, to instate and the lived reality of an entity, Chuy, that is experienced across this boundary. So, it is not some kind of cosmopolitan vibe that these responses imply. The diversity of Chuy is the very foundation of the city, the very inextricable condition of what it is: a space that

<https://goo.gl/5ojiQL>; <https://goo.gl/kERKJ8>; <https://goo.gl/PZs7uA>; <https://goo.gl/564UrT>; <https://goo.gl/zeVQ6a>. [All accessed 06 Jun 2018].

[100] "Hay una gran diversidad a nivel de cultura".

[101] "A possibilidade de conviver com culturas diferentes".

[102] "Siempre hay movimiento de gente, estamos en contacto con otro idioma, con otra cultura".

stretches across a line, leading to a situation in which the very existence of Chuy as it is, open and connected, grinds against the very concept of the border. How can something be itself if it stretches across the line that is, at least by definition, supposed to create precisely by setting things on opposite sides of the line?

Two years ago, as I sat down to have lunch for the first time in Chuy, I could see a greengrocers across the glass door of the restaurant. The sign on the door had been flipped, so it said *cerrado*[103], in Spanish, to those who were already inside. The greengrocers had its façade work as its own billboard, announcing its products and services: a *fruteira*[104], in Portuguese, *hielo*[105] and *pescado*[106], in Spanish, as well as *bebidas*[107], in both languages. Chuy is as confusing as it can be fascinating, which proved that I was, in fact, right in noting that 'I had already moved to two countries, yes, but I had never moved to two countries at the same time' [07 Jun 2016].



Figure 28: 'Cerrado'.

[103] Closed.
[104] Fruit stand.
[105] Ice.
[106] Fish.
[107] Drinks.

How can one be oneself in being two? This is clearly a rhetorical question for it is actually my conclusion about the concept of 'diversity' in Chuy. Its very existence is conditioned by an ambivalent reality. Without this split that joins instead of separating, there would be no Chuy. The borderlands are, therefore, a space of diversity par excellence. As Lugo argues, "cultural borderlands should be understood, first of all, in relation to the previous dominant discourse about culture: cultural patterns" (1997, p.46). The borderlands are a space in which it becomes impossible to deny that there is no imaginable 'us' without 'them', finally holding in check any conceptions of purity that rely on utter isolation and an overall project of impossible conviviality.

In that sense, the idea of 'hybridity' and, by extension, of 'cultural hybridity' – or 'mix', *mezcla*, as it was usually worded –, the most frequent category within responses, is a direct consequence of any cross-border totality whose existence depends on this ambivalence between opposite sides and one and the same side, which has been long identified as a strong aspect of borderlands (see Strassoldo, 1982). This quantum vibration between being one, the other, and being two is fundamental in Chuy. It is, as I said, constitutive of the city. And, as such, it translates into what we might broadly call 'open borders'. This intrinsic openness of something that is, on the one hand, supposed to restrict but that is, on the other, experienced as lenient invites movement, crossing, and the piercing of the membrane.

In motion, there is flow. And there is no simpler or more poetic way of interpreting the collective perception that Chuienses

have of the border in terms of diversity and hybridity than by alluding to the very stream that names the city. I give in, Mr Severo, the borderlands really are 'waters running together' (see 4.3).

Notwithstanding, as has been conspicuous throughout the analysis of responses, we have to be cautious with seemingly virtuous conceptions of the border, for as much as the everyday in these lands might seem to reject a model of the line that is tyrannical and prohibitive. With ideas of diversity and hybridity, likewise, there is no reason for caution to relinquish altogether. The ambivalence that sets the ground for a flow of multiple beings together is capable of running in any direction, including against the very perviousness that we might have promptly indulged celebrating a few moments ago.

Amongst mentions of diversity and hybridity as positive aspects, there were some tangential and some other very straightforward reclamations of the border as a mechanism for separation. The most frequent occurrence was the association of the flow of people and especially of unknown people with a sense of danger, of imminent threat. In saying, for example, "greater insecurity due to the mixing of cultural diversity"[108] (R189) or "the insecurity generated by the 'free' flow from one side to the other"[109] (R202). My favourite, though, is R067. When asked about the ideas and/or words to which they associated the border, they said: fraternity, cultural knowledge, and tourism. Now, what are the advantages of living in the borderlands? "Knowledge of different cultures [and] cultural exchange"[110]. When it came to the disadvantages of living in the borderlands, it read: "the miscegenation of undesired cultures and

[108] "Mayor inseguridad por el hecho de las mezclas de diversidad cultural".
[109] "La inseguridad generada por el 'libre' paso de un lado a otro".
[110] "Conhecimento de culturas diferentes, intercâmbio de culturas".

the risks that badly-behaved, unknown people pose to those who live in the borderlands"[111].

The mocking tone here is not actually of R067's response. It is a joke with a perceived essential character of ideas such as diversity, hybridity, or even culture. This particular entry is illustrative of a parallel tendency amongst responses. If, on the one hand, they praise *la mezcla*, the confluence of different people, different cultures, and different traditions and customs, thus breaking asunder the strategic role of the border, people might just as well, on the other hand, reinstate the border, reclaim its division and impose a buffer zone between the 'us' and 'them' implied.

The question here is: why should the tactical experience of the border as generally open and fluid be always positive, progressive, the ultimate example of resistance? Reality is more complicated. We are not always 'good' people, doing 'good' deeds and spreading love and peace. Sometimes, we are grumpy, and reductive, and bigoted. A bit of both or all at once. Why should Chuienses be any different? Why should they be expected to seamlessly live by an image of unshakeable rejection of the border as separation?

The answer, as I have come to learn, is that they should not. And that they do not always reflect that image. Those who live in the borderlands can be, at the same time, marked by fluidity and hybridity and still experience moments of hatred and wish for separation. The important question to deepen our understanding of the everyday under these conditions should be as to what the circumstances are that define such a flip. How does a perception that generally seems to veer towards intrinsically positive notions that

[111] "Miscigenação de culturas indesejadas e riscos de pessoas desconhecidas e de má conduta colocando em risco as pessoas moradoras da fronteira".

do, in fact, mirror a lot of reality suddenly change into the very rejection of these aspects? Answers to these questions, however, will have to wait until Chapter 5.

Overall, the analysis of the surveys has shown that the border tends to be described in positive terms, thus pointing to the construction of a concept of boundary line that resists the divisor strategy of lines at large. Broader notions of diversity, unity, and hybridity were coupled with more site-specific aspects related to job offer, shopping tourism, and lower prices in Chuy. When asked to effectively categorise these notions as either positive or negative aspects of life in the borderlands, Chuienses provided a nuanced view of the everyday in which stand out, on the one hand, replications of the main names of the line as positive features as well as, on the other, issues of infrastructure and a lack of services that can be associated with small towns in general. The aspect of fluidity came out as a categorically ambivalent notion, thus pointing to ideas of movement and openness as a seminal starting point to analyse the positionality of responses. In doing so, the main themes, herein called the 'flows', of shopping, culture, and diversity were expanded as circumstantial acts of enunciation whose character defines the everyday in Chuy, but that can be, at the same time, mechanisms not only to subvert the strategic role of the border, but also to reclaim it when deemed convenient or necessary.

5. THE PRACTICE OF THE LINE

> *"They didn't care about Ukraine, Russia or the Luhansk National Republic. They cared about their villages, and their potatoes".*[112]

In this final chapter, analyses of the interviews that took place in the field are unpacked to allow for a detailed look into individuals' perception of the meanings of the border as well as into their uses thereof. In that a general inventory of meanings has already been identified, the effort here is to highlight where these might pierce through personal experience into narrative practices of reality, which brings forth issues of individuals' position in society and their very own opinions and views about Chuy.

Each interview is given its own section, coming to a total of eight analytical pieces. Two other were not included here for two separate reasons. The interview with Dr Luiz Carlos Tau Golin, History professor at the University of Passo Fundo, has been used in Chapter 2 as he is an expert on borders in the region but does not reside in Chuy or is, in any other evident way, connected to the city. In turn, the interview with Félix Ruben Flügel González, a retired school teacher and a connoisseur of Chuy, was likewise used in the aforementioned chapter due to the sheer vastness of Mr Flügel's knowledge of the history in the region, a topic that dominated our conversation over his personal experience of/in the city.

At the end of this chapter, a summary of conclusions is included to synthesise the main zones in the topography of meanings

[112] Pomeantsev, P. (2016). Propagandalands. Available: <https://granta.com/propagandalands> [Accessed 27 Nov 2017].

and uses that individual Chuienses hold of the border. In each of the sections, however, there feature expatiations on what interviewees stated, thus addressing specific issues in their own right within the overall semiosphere of everyday Chuy.

5.1 MARY URSE: "I LOVE MY URUGUAY, BUT I LOVE BRAZIL TOO"

The first time that I visited the *Junta Local* in Chuy Uruguay, the headquarters of local government, Mary Urse, *la alcaldesa* (the mayor) had come down with the flu. Selene Marquez, a member of the City Council, had stepped in as interim mayor whilst Ms Urse recovered. Mary Urse is one of those local mythical figures, whom everyone knows and about whom everyone seems to have an opinion. In her case, from all over Chuy, she has amassed an impressive reputation as a commendable politician. The more impressive, however, is that, in such a predominantly *macho* culture as is the case in Latin America, Ms Urse rose to recognition after moving to Chuy from Florida, a small town in Southern Uruguay, to work as a street vendor by the line as well as a sex worker and later owning a *whiskería* (an euphemism in Uruguay and Rio Grande do Sul for brothel). She makes no excuses and has no desire to hide her past[113]:

> There are things, of course, I would not do, but, as for that of working the night, having a *whiskería* and so on, if I have to go back to doing it, I will do it tomorrow again. I do not regret it at all because it was I who led my family forward[114] (Mary Urse, 2016[115]).

[113] Ms Urse often speaks of her history before becoming the mayor of Chuy Uruguay. See: https://goo.gl/QeZzTN; https://goo.gl/R91oM9; https://goo.gl/Nt4eMM [Accessed 24 Jul 2016].
[114] "Hay cosas que no las haría pero lo otro lo de trabajar en la noche, de tener una whiskería y todo eso, si lo tengo que volver a hacer, lo hago mañana de nuevo. De eso, no me arrepiento de nada porque yo fui quien llevé a mi familia adelante".
[115] Henceforth (Urse, 2016).

We sat down to talk on the 25th of July 2016 after a couple of weeks' wait for her to recover. Ms Urse still sounded a bit nasal and would often cough and wipe her nose; she is obviously not one to let herself be beaten down that easily. She welcomed me to a sort of meeting room, a glass cell within the big newsroom-style government office, where we proceeded with our interview as we sipped on *mate*.

I had decided that I would start all interviews with the same question and, then, work our way through the conversation. This way, it would be possible to determine the grand topic of the interview without favouring a script over the interviewee's responses. With her very first answer, Mr. Urse taught me what is, perhaps, the most valuable lesson in the field.

'What is life in the borderlands like?' – I asked. Ms Urse ponders, has a sip of her mate, looks at me, and repeats the question out loud to gain herself some time to think. She follows with the most anticlimactic answer that I could have ever expected: '*Normal*' – she says, aloof.

This literally translates as 'normal', no doubt, but the understanding behind it, in both Spanish and Portuguese, is that something is 'normal' when there is nothing special or extraordinary to it. In fact, the way in which it is used in these languages implies a nonchalant frivolity similar to the French *«c'est la vie»*, as in both reinstating the obvious and merely accepting things as they are. Compare it to how we describe our everyday errands as 'alright' or 'not too bad' in English and we finally have a fuller image of how underwhelmed I was – not particularly with her answer, which resonated in many of my conversations all over Chuy, but especially

with my expectations from the question. How else would one describe their own lives? How could I have expected for Chuienses to go about their everyday lives reciting long-haul manifestoes on their lives on the go?

The realisation that Ms Urse's response cemented was clearly important, but there is a further aspect to it that does not lie solely in the fact that 'normal' is a common filler of sorts. The very fact that 'normal' is precisely the word that we use to casually comment on our lives is quite telling. 'Normal' is, indeed, something that is not extraordinary, but it is, at its root, connected to normality – to the norm, the rule, the proper.

In the many instances when Chuienses used 'normal' to describe the everyday in the borderlands, there is an underlying tone of regularity which is indispensable for life. It so refers back to Lefebvre's ideas of eurhythmia (see Chapter 3). If our everyday is not, to some extent, characterised by a certain state of 'normality', of consonant rhythms, it would be constantly chaotic and helplessly pathological, ill, out of sync.

What Ms Urse's response sets forth is the realisation that everyday life can perhaps only be truly described on demand as something *that is*. The various ways in which we call our lives 'normal' are actually symptomatic of their everydayness. Adding any other labels to everyday life that do not reinforce precisely its recurrent commonality would have been minimally dishonest to Chuienses' lives in its attempt to 'describe the indescribable' of the lived experience. In positing their lives as anything outside the realm of repetition, regularity, or apparent propriety, the speaker would already inevitably be catering to some level of the normative border subjectivity. In other words, the very fact that the first answer of the first

interview was so underwhelming now reads as confirmation of the border as an indisputable element of the everyday landscape here.

When she stated "that it is normal, that it is a city like any other"[116] (Urse, 2016), what she meant was precisely that Chuy is just like any other city *for those who live (in) it.* Were Chuienses constantly aware of what is seen from afar as peculiar, Chuy would be a sort of show-and-tell space where the only recurrent aspect would be that of incessant self-awareness. There can be no everyday without a degree of forgetfulness, it could be argued.

Accordingly, there is no surprise in the fact that my conversation with Ms Urse followed the path of metadiscourse. The border is an inalienable element of everyday life in Chuy. In other words, a 'normal' element of life here and, as such, the only way to understand it is by means of one's subjective experience in relation to it. Not subjective as in unobjective, but as in *of the subject*. Ms Urse could not speak of life in the borderlands from the position of an abstract total subject because such person/position does not exist. She does not live her everyday – marked as it is by the boundary line and its implications *as well as* by an infinity of other elements – as a representative of the borderlands. She lives her everyday as herself and, therefore, it is impossible to extricate her from her spacetime, her history, her many identities, and her various roles in the expectation that she could present a sort of purely factual and total view of life in Chuy.

Right after she had said that life in the borderlands was 'normal', she added, however, that "the thing about the borderlands is that laws are different"[117] (Urse, 2016). The law is important for

[116] "Que es normal, que es una ciudad como cualquier otra".
[117] "Lo que pasa que el tema de la frontera más es que las leyes son distintas".

her and is pervasive in her everyday because she is, after all, the ultimate representative of the Uruguayan state here, she is a marker of the division between two cities, two countries, two different jurisdictional spaces. Therefore, her references to Chuy Uruguay and Chuí Brazil as separate entities were just as strong as her references to the borderlands as a contiguous social space.

As part of this community, though, Ms Urse joined the masses of responses to the survey in making the issues of security and urban planning two of the main characteristics of Chuy. As a political representative of only half of the city, however, she made sure to establish that these were problems arising from the other side. This can be noted in subtle enunciative disengagements as when she stated that security is a difficulty issue, indeed, "but on the other side", adding that:

> We, Uruguayans, are very careful. We always try to protect ourselves, don't we? On the contrary [to Brazilians?], we try to have more police officers and more police cars, more motorbikes. We have traffic inspectors. A lot of things that protect us and, now, we will have security cameras[118] (Urse, 2016).

The splitting of the city into two can be seen in more emphatic references to what she sees as her neighbours' flaws when, again in reference to security, she states that "the day Brazil brings the people, the police, the day it brings respect to traffic [laws], the day it comes a bit further, [our problems] will all be finished. We will live fully well"[119] (Urse, 2016).

[118] "Pero del otro lado […] los uruguayos […] nos cuidamos mucho. Siempre tratamos de protegernos, ¿verdad? Al contrario, nosotros tratamos de tener más policías y más camionetas, más motos. Tenemos inspectores de tránsito. Un montón de cosas que nos protegen y, ahora, vamos con las cámaras de seguridad".

[119] "El día que Brasil traiga la gente, la policía, que traiga el respeto del tránsito, que vengan un poco más, se termina todo. Vamos a vivir plenamente bien".

What is evident from these moments is that Ms Urse speaks not only from her position as a resident of Chuy but, particularly, from her position as the mayor of Chuy Uruguay. Nevertheless, her role as mayor is not enough of a justification for her setting apart the two 'sides' of the city given that her statement also implies that the other side of the city is not fully included in Brazil, as the other of the Uruguay that she represents, in saying that problems will be solved when 'it comes a bit further', thus implying the absence of the state in Chuí Brazil.

There is no doubt that security and urban planning are issues with which everyone struggles in Chuy, but, in such an interconnected space, it seems strategically calculated to separate or assign responsibility to one or the other side alone. I say strategically calculated because, ultimately, her declarations come across not only as her perspective on those issues but, perhaps more strongly, as a mechanism for self-preservation. Ms Urse knew that our interview was, to some extent, a public speech and that whatever she would say could be traced back to her as the mayor of Chuy Uruguay, which she is until 2020. Thus, again, reinforcing that her take on life in the borderlands is moulded not specifically by the border but, most of all, by what happens around it.

Another characteristic of Ms Urse's view of Chuy is the ambivalent take on the flow of people to and through the city, as was the case with the surveys. She confirms that living costs in Chuy are much lower but, on the other hand:

> The fact that all sorts of people come here also worries us sometimes. Good people get here, but, in summer, we are overcrowded with bad people [...] with people who say 'there is work in the borderlands',

> 'everything is cheaper in the borderlands', and so they come in packs[120] (Urse, 2016).

Likewise, she reinforces the tendencies identified with the survey of combining ideas of culture and, especially, cultural diversity to the possibility of buying products that are technically only available in Brazilian territory. When I asked her if there were any advantages of living so close to another country, she said that, indeed, there were as they shared many things, explaining that "Brazilian culture is beautiful too and very good – one has to note. Brazil has many good things", after which she immediately lists, in this order, "the supermarkets, the shops, the people"[121] (Urse, 2016).

What becomes clear from the interview is that Ms Urse tends to leap between two positions, one in which she is the head of local government in Chuy Uruguay and the other in which she is just another resident. Her references to differences always have to do with either legal or political issues on the one hand or, on the other, with the possibility of shopping to take advantage of the neighbouring country's economy.

Other than that, she sustains an opinion that the boundary line itself cannot be easily seen: "there is no such distinction. To me, it is as if we were straightforward siblings and we have no issues. I mean, no, quite the contrary"[122] (Urse, 2016). This fraternity, however, does not seem to prevent or even contradict her fierce passion for Uruguay. "I am Uruguayan until death […] I give everything for my flag", she says, adding that "when I went to school, I was taught

[120] "Eso también nos preocupa a veces que viene gente de todas clases. Viene gente muy bien, pero, en verano, se nos llena de gente muy mal […] de gente que dice 'en la frontera hay trabajo', 'en la frontera te sale todo más barato' y se vienen a trojas".
[121] "La cultura brasileña es linda también y muy buena – eso hay que destacarlo. Brasil tiene cosas muy buenas. Los supermercados, los comercios, la gente".
[122] "Esa distinción no hay. Para mí, es como que fuéramos hermanos directamente y no tenemos problemas. Digo, no, al contrario".

that my country comes before anything else and, then, my mother, and, well, my whole family, no? But my country is my country"[123] (Urse, 2016). This is not a sentiment that seems to make living so close to another country inconceivable as she adds that "we have to be proud of what we have and all, but it does not mean we have to fight at all", finally adding that:

> On the contrary, we love our country. I love my Uruguay, but I also love Brazil because my daughter is Brazilian […] and because, even if I did not have her, I live in the borderlands and I love Brazil[124] (Urse, 2016).

After her declarations of love for both countries, our conversation continued for a couple more minutes. During the whole time, there had been calls and assistants walking in to brief Ms Urse on the day's agenda. I apologised for taking so much of her time and she dismissed my worry by saying that it had not been a problem at all as the day was *tranqui*, very calm.

It was time to leave as humours around the city grew louder because of a bomb threat to Chuí Brazil's *Prefeitura* (City Hall). An anti-bomb squad were coming from Porto Alegre, if I remember correctly, which would take at least four to five hours. Our flask had run out of water as well and, as she held her *mate* between her hands, Ms Urse ended our conversation prophetically – if not equally ironically. Is there something that the borderlands can teach the world, I asked. "I would say so, yes", she begins, "we can

[123] "Soy uruguaya a muerte […] doy todo por mi bandera […] A mí, cuando fui a la escuela, al liceo, me enseñaron que, primero, es mi patria antes que nada y después mi madre y, bueno, y toda mi familia, ¿no? Pero creo que mi patria es mi patria".

[124] "Nos tenemos que sentir orgullosos de lo que tenemos y, este, y tal, pero eso no es para pelarnos ni para nada. Al contrario, amamos nuestro país. Yo amo a mi Uruguay, pero amo a Brasil también porque tengo mi hija que es brasileña […] y porque, aunque no tuviera a mi hija, vivo en la frontera y yo amo a Brasil".

teach that we can have a dialogue"[125] (Urse, 2016). Later that day, we learned that it had not been a real bomb after all. Someone wanted to maybe have a chat with Renato Hernandez Martins, then mayor of Chuí Brazil. Over two firework candles, in white paint, it read threateningly: "*Fora PP*" (PP[126] Out). As a result of the threat, as innocuous as it turned out to be, border control closed its gates: no one entered or left the city. For a couple of hours, Chuy had only themselves with whom to have a dialogue.

5.2 MOHAMED KASSEM JOMAA AND ANUAR MOHAMAD JOMAA: "CHUY IS THE BEST BORDER IN THE WORLD"

Mr Jomaa[127] is one of the most successful businesspeople in Chuy. He owns the monumental *Makro Chuí*, easily the city's largest supermarket, on *Avenida Uruguay* between *Rua Argentina* and *Rua Venezuela*. When we met, on the 27th of July 2016, I had recently arrived from a visit to my family in Santa Maria, in the Midwest of Rio Grande do Sul, from where I brought those 30kg of barely legal sausage (see 4.5.1). One of the employees at the supermarket led me through the back door of the shop onto a storage courtyard where Mr Jomaa was having barbecue for lunch, surrounded by a few of his men, which gave the whole scene a Vito-Corleone-from-the-*pampas* aura.

He introduced me to his son, Anuar, who was going to participate in the interview as well, by ordering me to speak in English to his son because he had studied in Switzerland. "It was Sweden",

[125] "Me parece que sí, que Podemos enseñar que Podemos dialogar".
[126] The *Partido Progressista* (PP) is a right-wing party in Brazil. It is historically linked to the civil-military dictatorship of 1964-1985, when it was called *Arena*.
[127] I will refer to Mohamed Kassem Jomaa as Mr Jomaa and to Anuar Mohamad Jomaa simply as Anuar.

Anuar corrected him as his father distributed orders like a 360° machine gun. We went upstairs to find his office hovering above the supermarket, giving him a bird's-eye view of his business.

The office looked improvised, neglected at worst in comparison to the rest of the supermarket, probably because it was more of a lounge, with family photos, portraits with politicians, and a quote from the Quran that read, according to Mr Jomaa, 'may Allah bless you'. We had to jump through a whole half the size of a regular door to enter the room, an endeavour that made me extremely nervous as the last thing that I could possibly need then was to trip and fall.

I did not trip and, safe in my chair, I started the interview with Mr Jomaa, who was sat across from me at his desk, and Anuar, who stood to his father's right, with the same question as usual: 'life in the borderlands, anyone'? I will give you one try to guess how he answered my question. Though, this time, I managed to ask him to expand on what he meant by 'normal'. "[It means] that there are no problems on one side or the other", decrees Mr Jomaa, "normally, we marry Brazilian to Uruguayan, Uruguayan to Brazilian. I myself am married to a Uruguayan" [128] (Mohamed Kassem Jomaa, 2016[129]).

Mr Jomaa was born in São Paulo to Lebanese parents and the family moved to Chuy sometime around 1968, during a period that many in the city see as the 'great wave' of Arab migration to these borderlands (see 2.2). As is usually the case here, the family worked as street vendors and, little by little, business grew into what it is today, which explains why, according to Mr Jomaa, many people might consider that there are three cultures in Chuy (Brazilian,

[128] "Que não há problema de um lado ou de outro. Normalmente, a gente casa brasileiro com uruguaio, uruguaio com brasileiro. Eu mesmo sou casado com uma uruguaia".
[129] Henceforth (Jomaa Sr, 2016).

Uruguayan, and Arab): "Chuy is different to other places, business on the Brazilian side is dominated by the Arabs. Maybe that is why they think there are three cultures"[130] (Jomaa Sr, 2016).

His view of the borderlands surround two main regions. On the one hand, business and shopping, which seem connected, from his answers, to cultural diversity, and, on the other, local government, heavily influenced by the fact that Mr Jomaa was the first mayor of independent Chuí Brazil between 1997 and 2000. Our conversation thus consolidates the understanding that individuals hold their own view of the border mostly in accordance with their experience around/of it.

If elsewhere in this thesis it has already proven difficult to separate ideas of shopping and culture, that is even more difficult here. Mr Jomaa is adamant in his placing of 'Arab culture' next to ideas of commerce, business, and shopping. "I have a saying", he warns, "I always say that a border without Arabs is a bad border and you can quote me on that [...] because, if there is no business to be made there, the Arabs will leave"[131] (Jomaa Sr, 2016).

Soon after saying that, Mr Jomaa tackles the 'myth' of the three cultures in Chuy by stating that the Arabs in Brazil, most of whom have already been born and raised in the country, have become "more Brazilian than Arab"[132] (Jomaa Sr, 2016). This leads to the issue of the misnomer *turco* (see 4.5.2), which both father and son believe is a result of ignorance but is not ill-intended per se. Mr Jomaa admits, however, that, although it is not usually the case,

[130] "Porque o Chuí tem uma diferença dos outros lugares, o comércio do lado brasileiro é dominado pelos árabes. Até por isso que eles devem levar que são três culturas".
[131] "Eu tenho um ditado. Eu sempre digo que, na fronteira que não existir um árabe, vocês podem escrever que essa fronteira é ruim [...] porque o árabe, se não tiver um negócio para fazer ali, ele vai embora".
[132] "São mais brasileiros que árabes".

turco can be occasionally used as an offence, which is later addressed in another interview, with Maria Gabriela Oliveira, Geography teacher at *Liceo N°2*, when she claims that, despite coming from established Chuiense families, people of Arab descent might have to defend their position "in quarrels, perhaps, they will say 'no, I am not *turco*; I am Uruguayan, I am Brazilian"[133] (Maria Gabriela Oliveira, 2016).

At this point, it is important to note how neither position, as a Brazilian or as a '*turco*', seem to be mutually exclusive. Mr Jomaa is emphatic in saying that there is usually no prejudice against the Arab community in Chuy and that they, in his words, are now more Brazilian than anything else, presumably implicating himself in the formula as well. However, when talking about the Arab Club in the city, I ask him if a lot of people who are not of Arab descent join the club, to which he replies with: "there are very few foreigners"[134] (Jomaa Sr, 2016). This is effectively an inversion of the inside/outside positions, qualifying the Club as the proper space of the Arab community, against whose members everyone else becomes a foreigner despite the fact that probably all involved have either been born in Brazil or Uruguay or have spent most of their lives here.

Later in our chat, Mr Jomaa is listing the names of candidates against whom he has already run in local elections, all of which he labels as 'Brazilian names'. Anuar interrupts him by saying that "they are all immigrants too"[135] (Anuar Mohamad Jomaa, 2016[136]), reminding us that positioning oneself as the 'proper/original in-

[133] "En peleas, de repente, dicen 'no, no soy *turco*; soy uruguayo, soy brasileño'".
[134] "Estrangeiros, muito poucos".
[135] "São todos imigrantes igual".
[136] Henceforth (Jomaa Jr, 2016).

sider' is always susceptible to scaling. After all, if we widen our angle of view, have we all not come from somewhere else at some point? A different country, region, city, borough, family, etc.? Is it not true of everyone at some point, as Jorge Drexler sings, that "I am not from here, but neither are you. From nowhere at all, from everywhere a little"?[137]

This ambivalence in position is clear when we are discussing the possibility of taking advantage of the economies of both Brazil and Uruguay at the same time. Note, in the following quote, how Mr Jomaa shifts between pronouns:

> For example, *dulce de leche*.[138] We buy Uruguayan *dulce de leche*. I sell *dulce de leche* here, but I would never trade a *Lapataia* or *Conaprole*[139] *dulce de leche* for the best *dulce de leche* in Brazil. Their speciality is *dulce de leche*, cheese, beef. We have good cuts of meat, but their beef is very good too. They have wool and they work really well with it. The leather. So, they have some things that have always been of better quality. I am not sure if they are cheaper or not, but they are of better quality than ours[140] (Jomaa Sr, 2016).

Despite such a stark distinction between 'our' products and 'theirs', which can, in fact, be easily consumed by any Chuiense regardless of the side of the border, Mr Jomaa later addresses what he considers to be the inexistence of the line. He says that:

> This here is a single Chuy. I will not wish for the other side to be doing badly because it is bad for me. I use it there and I use it here. So, no

[137] "Yo no soy de aquí, pero tú tampoco. De ningún lado del todo, de todos lados un poco" is the chorus of Jorge Drexler's 2017 song *Movimiento*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/llGRyRf7nH4> [Accessed 9 Nov 2017].

[138] In my understanding, the Spanish name is more widely known than the Portuguese one, which is why I chose to use the former in this translation into English.

[139] *Lapataia* and *Conaprole* are both famous brands of Uruguayan *dulce de leche*.

[140] "Por exemplo, o doce de leite. Nós compramos doce de leite uruguaio. Eu vendo doce de leite aqui, mas eu não troco um doce de leite Lapataia ou Conaprole pelo melhor doce de leite do Brasil. A especialidade deles é doce de leite, queijo, carnes. Nós temos carnes boas, mas as carnes deles são muito boas também. Eles têm a lã e trabalham muito bem a lã. O couro. Então, eles têm algumas coisas que sempre foram de melhor qualidade. Não sei se baratas ou não, mas de melhores qualidades [sic] que as nossas".

> way! This here is an imaginary line that separates Chuy from Uruguay because it exists, right? Other than that, for us…I have always said, Chuy, for me, Chuy is one single thing. There is no Uruguayan Chuy and Brazilian Chuí. They exist for some reason, but, in general, it is Chuy[141] (Jomaa Sr, 2016).

There are, in these instances, signs of a strong positioning of the self on one side of the border as well as of a complete acceptance of the inextricable proximity between the two. This is visible when Mr Jomaa jumps between 'we' and 'they', 'ours' and 'theirs' and, likewise, when he states that the border is 'an imaginary line that separates *Chuy from Uruguay*', thus clearly implying that he speaks from within Brazil. It is this utter ambivalence whereby one speaks of being on one side at the same time that they speak of both sides being one and the same that makes the everyday in Chuy so difficult to apprehend.

Dulce de leche, to name the one abundant example in Mr Jomaa's statement, is perhaps helpful in understanding this ambivalence, ultimately referring back to what I called culture through consumption (see 4.5.2). *Dulce de leche* or *doce de leite* is widely known, produced and consumed in both Uruguay and Brazil, though, in this region, it is more commonly associated with the former. Notwithstanding, for those who live in Chuy, there is no impediment to buying a jar of *dulce de leche* made in Uruguay. Likewise, *Bombons Garoto*, a famous brand of chocolate made in Brazil which was often mentioned by Uruguayans, can be bought by a Uruguayan who lives in Chuy just as easily as *dulce de leche* can be bought by a Brazilian who lives here. Products arrive from both

[141] "Aqui é um Chuí só. Eu não vou desejar que o outro lado esteja ruim porque é ruim para mim. Eu uso lá e uso aqui. Então, não tem! Isso aqui é uma linha imaginária que separa o Chuí do Uruguai porque existe, né? Mas no demais, para nós...eu sempre disse, o Chuí, para mim, é um Chuí só. Não existe o Chuí uruguaio e o Chuí brasileiro. Existe por algum motivo, mas, no geral, é Chuí".

countries and, at this interface of a city, they become readily available for everyone, regardless of the side of the border where one might live or even with which one might identify the most.

Although these, amongst many other, are products that can be easily consumed, they still withhold their national associations. It reads on the edge of contradiction: anyone in Chuy buys *dulce de leche* and/or *Bombons Garoto*, these are equally accessible, but the first is still seen as characteristically Uruguayan and the second, as quintessentially Brazilian. Here, again, there is no fixed position for these products that may be separate to the act of enunciation. *Dulce de leche* can be 'theirs' and can be 'ours' depending on how one chooses to place themselves in relation to it. This is ultimately what Grimson describes as *transborder cultures*, or cross-border cultures, in which "the same practices acquire, in each configuration and national space, specific and disjunctive meanings" (2013, p.233).

Obviously, whatever the position might be, it does not supress the fact that the produce itself was made in one or the other country. My conclusion, on the contrary, is that the country in which it was made is rendered somewhat irrelevant or, at least, secondary, in light of the associations made to it. In Chuy, we can eat Brazilian-made *dulce de leche* and it will still be considered a 'Uruguayan thing'. In other words, the associations, or the image that is made of things, eventually supersedes its very origin. What it represents becomes more relevant or valuable than its materiality.

Anuar seems particularly aware of that. The ways in which he refers to shopping is marked by the knowledge of the interdependence between the two sides of the border (see Coelho, 2014; Dorfman, 2009; Strassburger, 2018). When I asked Mr Jomaa about the biggest challenge in local government, his answer pointed to

the maintenance of the infrastructure needed for shopping tourists to navigate Chuy. Anuar, in turn, developed his father's answer by saying that:

> Chuí is a Brazilian municipality, Brazilian territory, but Chuí lives off Uruguayans, in terms of commerce at least. I think we lack integration […] Chuí is not like any other town, *there* on the countryside of Brazil. So, if you go, for instance, to Montevideo, where capital is concentrated, and advertise, encourage people to come here, this would really help Chuí […] Chuí is in the borderlands, it lives off its Uruguayan visitors, so you have to see: where these Uruguayan visitors are coming from? You have to *come there* and solve the problem in its root. You have to advertise in Montevideo. The mayor [of Chuí Brazil] has to go for that![142] (Jomaa Jr, 2016, emphasis added).

In this particular instance, it is relevant, all at once, not only the way in which Anuar is conscious of the level at which the two separate municipalities are connected but, especially, the ways in which he mixes both sides of the border as he tries to specifically refer to Chuí Brazil's dependence on Uruguayan customers. Note, for example, how he speaks of other small towns 'there in Brazil' and how he, perhaps unconsciously, replaces the verb 'to go' (*ir*) with 'to come' (*vir*) when he suggests that the mayor of Chuí Brazil needs to go/come to Montevideo to advertise.

Later, as we are talking about whether Brazilians from farther into the country would recognise Chuí as part of Brazil, Mr Jomaa offers an interesting answer, saying that, yes, they would feel in Brazil but that:

[142] "O Chuí é uma cidade brasileira, território brasileiro, mas o Chuí vive do pessoal uruguaio, o comércio pelo menos. E eu acho que falta mais integração [...] O Chuí vive não é como uma outra cidade do interior lá no Brasil. Então, se tu vai, por exemplo, para Montevidéu, que concentra o capital, faz propaganda, incentiva o pessoal a vir para cá, isso vai ajudar muito o Chuí [...] O Chuí está numa fronteira, vive do público uruguaio, então tu tem que ver: de onde vem o público uruguaio? Tem que vir lá e resolver o problema da base, né?! Tem que fazer propaganda em Motevidéu. O prefeito tem que ir, tem que correr atrás disso!".

> When they come here from [the state of] Bahia, they are on their way to Uruguay, so they can barely wait to get to the borderlands. And they ask you: 'is this Uruguay or Brazil'? They are super excited. So I tell them that that street over there is Uruguayan and this one over here is Brazilian and they are shocked. Then, they grab their phones and say: 'I'm calling you from Uruguay' and I'm over there, on the other side of the street[143] (Jomaa Sr, 2016).

His answer establishes a clear connection, at the same time, between recognising Chuí as Brazil and the fact that tourists from elsewhere in country "are on their way to Uruguay", ultimately taking both sides of the border as eminently Uruguayan when they say 'I'm calling you from Uruguay' on their phones. Likewise, Anuar mentions public officers who are relocated from Montevideo to Chuy: "they call their families and say 'I'm already in Brazilian territory'. They say that a lot, that they have everything here […] just by crossing the line, because they've got *Tio João* rice, *farofa*, everything they like"[144] (Jomaa Jr, 2016), referring to a famous brand of rice and a typical mixture made of cassava flour, respectively.

Not only are culture and cultural diversity associated with both a proclivity to business – on the part of the Arab community, for example – and the economic interdependence between the two sides of the border, but products become the very countries and cultures that they are considered to represent. Brazilians go to Chuy because they can cross into Uruguay, buy cheese and *dulce de leche*. Uruguayans go to Chuy because they can buy *farofa* and chocolate. Those who move here do so because they believe that there are more job opportunities due to the intermingling and the overlap of

[143] "Quando vêm para cá da Bahia, eles vêm para ir para o Uruguai, então eles não veem a hora de chegar na fronteira. E já te pergutnam: 'aqui é Uruguai ou Brasil'? Faceiros da vida. Aí eu digo que aquela rua é uruguaia, essa daqui é brasileira, eles já ficam apavorados. Aí pegam o telefone, ligam e dizem: 'tô te ligando do Uruguai' e eu tô ali do outro lado da rua".

[144] "Ligam para a famíia e dizem 'já estou em território brasileiro'. Eles dizem muito isso, que tem tudo aqui […] só cruzando a fronteira, porque tem arroz *Tio João*, farofa, tudo que eles gostam".

the two economies. No one, however, seems to come *to Chuy*. "No one visits Chuy because they like Chuy. That's a lie. They come because it's cheaper"[145], says Mr Jomaa (2016).

It is the flow that runs through Chuy precisely because of its position by the border that ultimately seems to characterise the city as well as to lay out the material conditions off which people can make a living. Stretching over two countries or even stuck between them, this position is indissociable from what makes the city. Economic advantages emerge, again, as the main feature, morphing into ideas of culture and diversity that are undeniably associated to access to products from both countries, whose very consumption becomes culture rather than an expression thereof.

In this space, marked by the border, the line between the two sides becomes blurry and so do many other lines, such as that between legality and illegality. Anuar himself says that "smuggling is all legal until you cross customs"[146] (Jomaa Jr, 2016), a statement that, anywhere else other than Chuy, would make very little sense. However, let us not replace the romanticised version of the borderlands as the epitome of hybridity and conviviality with a vitriolically utilitarian one. "Mate", Mr Jomaa calls me jovially, "Chuy is the best border in the world. You can quote me on that. It's the best border in the world"[147], he says at the beginning of our interview (Jomaa Sr, 2016). By the end of it, yet again, he warns me not to forget that "these borderlands have given us much satisfaction. A lot of headaches, a lot of satisfactions, and a lot of work […] You've got

[145] "Ninguém vai vir visitar o Chuí porque gosta do Chuí. Mentira. Eles vêm porque é mias barato".
[146] "O contrabando, até tu não passar da aduana, é legal".
[147] "Cara, o Chuí é a melhor fronteira do mundo. Pode escrever isso. É a melhor fronteira do mundo".

to work. Work and work"![148] (Jomaa Sr, 2016). The discomfort that we might feel, that I certainly felt with this volatility of Chuy between Brazil and Uruguay, between a place where people can afford to live and a place that people visit to access the other side is perhaps but a sign that the tension between the line as a mechanism of division and as a node of everyday connection is at work all the time, at various levels, and through countless subjectivities.

5.3 VIRGINIA ROCHA GALEANO: "IT'S MORE URUGUAY HERE"

On the cold Sunday afternoon of the 10th of July 2016, Virginia took me on a tour of Chuy. We walked along the line, so to speak, very briefly before heading inwards and roaming around the Uruguayan side for the most part. At some point, roaring drums dawned in the horizon, grabbing our curiosity. We kept following the thumps and thuds as they grew louder until, around one corner, we met with a group of musicians playing *candombe* as they marched down the streets, banging to the beats of African heritage that are not often associated with Uruguay.

Virginia Rocha Galeano – whom I still like to think must be related to the late Eduardo Galeano – studied Biology at university, but she now works as a social worker and a dance teacher – Afro-Latin dance, as she likes to say. She is vocal about how difficult it is to interest Chuienses in learning these rhythms, which she credits to a widespread prejudice against Latin America's African heritage. If these roots might be less dismissible in other parts of the subcontinent, they are certainly easily forgotten in the Southern Cone, where European names and family trees are sported with pride.

[148] "Essa fronteira tem nos dado muita satisfação. Muita dor de cabeça, muita satisfação e muito trabalho (...) Tem que trabalhar e trabalhar"!

Soon, we are following the ensemble, who end their musical pilgrimage on *Plaza Artigas*. Virginia and I decide to take a seat on one of the square's benches as the group slowly disband. The squeaking of the chains between which children swing back and forth on the playground has come to mark the tempo of our conversation. *Screech.* It is a busy Sunday in Chuy. *Screech.*

There is a lot of chattering in the air. It is a cold but sunny day, so people are out and about, guarding their flasks under their arms as they drink *mate* on the go. As we are chatting, a couple interrupt from some meters away to greet Virginia, who switches between Portuguese and Spanish so quickly that the swing had only time to squeak once.

Virginia was born in Santa Vitória do Palmar but has lived most of her life in Chuy. She was extremely helpful and was, by far, the person who was most interested in my project. She is also the one who seems to embody the idea of the normative border subjectivity most vividly as she makes an effort to provide the 'right' answers, oscillating between a certain degree of resentment and frustration with Chuy.

For many years, she worked with environmental education in a local NGO called *Alternativa Chuy*. She tells me that one of the main problems in the city is the illegal extraction of sand from the banks of the stream after which Chuy is named. I myself would later head for the first boundary marker, the one by the stream, to take some photos of it only to find a shaky wagon into which a man shovelled sand carelessly, making the old horse struggle as they left, the man staring at me in a way that was not distinguishable between grimness and threat. The imperative to make a living in Chuy is not only stronger than the boundaries between legality and

illegality when it comes to taxes and currencies, it spreads into every aspect of life. Nothing here is holly, untouchable if you can make some money out of it – not even the original stream.

Virginia sounds tired and hopeless when she tells me about her work with the NGO. She stopped working with them after the group were threatened by some dodgy figures who control the sand business in the region. Though she seems to really like Chuy when she says that, ideally, it should envisage "other ways of welcoming tourists. If we had the historic part preserved and if we had environmental education, if that part were seen, tourists would get here and think 'it's not just all shops here'"[149] (Virginia Rocha Galeano, 2016[150]), thus implying some effort into imagining a better place. She is also open about her plans to leave the city, mentioning jobs and education as the primary reasons. Curiously, the other reason mentioned by her during one of our first conversations was her fear that her son would grow up to be involved with illegal drugs, highlighting Uruguay's ground-breaking cannabis policy, out of all things, as the big bad wolf.

Virginia was one of the very few people who asked me about my life – not my project, my university, but my life. She seemed interested in learning more about living in another country, which was ironic given that she has always lived between two herself. I could sense a certain awe in her interaction with me, which was not particularly due to anything about me per se, but was somewhat of a projection of her own desire to leave Chuy for somewhere distant and more exciting. She expresses her sorrow by saying that:

[149] "Outras formas de receber o turista. Se tivéssemos a parte histórica preservada e educação ambiental, se essa parte fosse vista, o turista chegaria aqui e pensaria 'não é só comércio que tem aqui'".
[150] Henceforth (Galeano, 2016).

> Chuienses' mindset is dominated by shopping, even those who live here and buy from both sides. So much so that the view that I have [referring to environmental and heritage conservation] is shared by only a few people here. I haven't spoken with any young people who were interested in that part. I'm sure that most people who live here don't know the [Chuy] Stream and the Historic Marker. The Marker is falling apart, it's forgotten. The historic part of Chuy is sinking and I think one thing leads to the other[151] (Galeano, 2016).

Every time she and I spoke, there were clear indications that Virginia, for one, was someone who had already elaborated on the everyday of the borderlands. This is not to say that her answers were not genuine, but that she was aware of the aspects of life here that she felt were due to be highlighted. I do not wish to make an issue out of people's reluctance to articulate more sophisticated answers than 'it is normal' about their everyday only to then complain about it when they do. My doubt, however, has to do with whether she did that to flourish the image of Chuy for the listener or for herself. In fact, to what degree have anyone's answers during interviews and surveys not contained a level of, say, self-interest or self-involvement? Of rebuilding the everyday as it is told *in* and *as* a story, altering it ever so slightly with the creation of a narrative that allows for the speaker to offer, at the same time, clues about the everyday that is and the one that should be? This invokes the "*unrepresentability* of time" (Ricœur, 1985, p.438), questioning the extent to which the telling of life can be understood as an untarnished duplicate of the reality lived by the individual.

[151] "A visão do chuiense é voltada ao comércio, mesmo quem mora aqui e compram dois lados. Tanto é que essa visão que eu tenho, são poucos que têm aqui. Eu não conversei com nenhum jovem que se interessasse por essa parte. Eu tenho certeza que a maiora das pessoas que moram aqui não conhecem o Arroio e o Marco Histórico. O Marco está caindo, está esquecido. A parte histórica do Chuí está afundada e eu acho que uma coisa puxa a outra".

It seems as if all interviewees, at different levels, rebuilt Chuy in telling a story that is marked by their own views of the city. Creating narratives that somehow imagine or design a different reality is not surprising, especially here, where the city's peripheral position leads to people feeling forgotten and mal-attended. In the spirit of the Neutral Fields, this is the city of the harsh reality in which people's everyday life is not steered by the intellectual attempts of comprehending the poetry that might lie underneath very ugly, impoverished, and chaotic surroundings. People in Chuy make do.

And so does Virginia. The difference with her being that her frustration at the city's limited opportunities, counterintuitively, comes across as a deep admiration for Chuy, especially for its history. She does not wish to abandon the city because she hates it in and of itself, but because she cannot find what she desires or needs here. Now, whenever I read Virginia's interview or remember our many other conversations, I think of the college essay scene in the 2017-film *Lady Bird*:

SISTER SARAH-JOAN
I read your college essay. You clearly love Sacramento.
LADY BIRD
I do?
SISTER SARAH-JOAN
Well, you write about Sacramento so affectionately and with such care.
LADY BIRD
I was just describing it.
SISTER SARAH-JOAN
It comes across as love.
LADY BIRD
Sure, I guess I pay attention.
SISTER SARAH-JOAN
Don't you think maybe they are the same thing? Love and attention?[152]

[152] *Lady Bird* (2017). Directed by Greta Gerwig [Film]. USA: Universal Pictures.

I am prone to arguing that Virginia herself was not merely describing Chuy, but that she was describing what she hoped that people, from Chuy and otherwise, would see in the city. "Life in the borderlands", she had started our interview, "it's interesting because it's only in the borderlands that we have this mixing of, well, different cultures"[153] (Galeano, 2016). Her answers, therefore, read more as descriptions of that for which she would like Chuy to be most known rather than that for which it usually is.

This attempt to meet what she might have interpreted as my expectations was accompanied by a tactics of approximation to the interviewer. Virginia is a *doble chapa*, a citizen of both Brazil and Uruguay. Her father is Uruguayan and her mother, Brazilian in yet another example of the cross-bordering topiary that is so common in Chuy. Though she has spent most of her life in the borderlands, she has also lived inland both in Brazil and in Uruguay. When I asked her if she thought other Brazilians would see her as a compatriot, she replied emphatically that "no, because I have already lived in Florianópolis [the capital of the state of Santa Catarina] and they did not identify me as Brazilian. I was a *gringa*"[154] (Galeano, 2016). Conversely, if she were in Montevideo, she would be seen as "yet another Uruguayan, absolutely"[155] (Galeano, 2016). Therefore, despite the possible conclusion that she might be seen more often as Uruguayan rather than Brazilian, our conversation, held in Portuguese, was marked by her positioning of herself as Brazilian, which clearly transpires from statements such as "Uruguayans are very

[153] "A vida na fronteira, ela é interessante porque é só na fronteira que a gente tem mistura de culturas, né, diferentes".
[154] "Não, porque eu já morei em Florianópolis e eles não me identificavam como brasileira. Eu era 'gringa'", in which 'gringa' means 'foreigner'.
[155] "Mais uma uruguaia, com certeza".

attached to *their* land"[156] (Galeano, 2016) when she is speaking of differences in expressions of patriotism. She argues that Uruguayans feel entitled to the territory of Rio Grande do Sul, thus leading to a situation in which "it is as if, culturally, *we* are left to *their* mercy. *Their* culture has invaded Chuí Brazil in such a predominant way"[157] (Galeano, 2016).

There emerges a contradiction in which Virginia is somewhat resentfully aware of the fact that she is more often labelled as Uruguayan as opposed to Brazilian despite articulating life in the borderlands as a positive hybrid of both cultures. She is equally capable of adopting the position of a subject who is exclusively Brazilian and who feels abandoned to the whims of Uruguayan culture, ultimately applying what is effectively a brief position for her, given that she speaks of herself as Uruguayan at other times, by saying that fellow Brazilians will not feel in Brazil in Chuy: "I'm from here and I feel that difficulty. I can only imagine what it's like for someone who *comes from outside*. They will definitely not feel [in Brazil]"[158] (Galeano, 2016).

There are pieces of evidence that corroborate my argument. The first is actually hidden in the original transcript of the quote 'it is as if, culturally, we are left to their mercy'. The way in which she said what I translated as 'it is as if' was '*como que*', which, although comprehensible, reads as a Hispanicism given that that is how the expression is commonly uttered in Spanish in opposition to the Portuguese '*como se*'. I understand that the difference between '*que*'

[156] "Os uruguaios são muito aguerridos à pátria deles".
[157] "Como que nós estamos à mercê culturalmente deles. A cultura deles invadiu o Chuí Brasil de uma maneira que predomina muito".
[158] "Eu sou daqui e sinto essa dificuldade. Imagina uma pessoa que vem de fora. Não vai se sentir, com certeza não".

and '*se*' might not seem that relevant, but it is loud enough to sound as a shibboleth to a L1 speaker of Portuguese.

That was not the only hint at the influence of the Spanish language in the way Virginia speaks Portuguese. I have already mentioned elsewhere in the thesis that, to me, she sounds very Uruguayan when speaking Spanish but not particularly Brazilian when speaking Portuguese (see 4.1.4), which, in no way, detracts from her ability to use the latter. Ultimately, these differences in accent and speech patterns can only be noticed in comparison: another person from Chuy might very well promptly identify Virginia as Brazilian when she speaks Portuguese, but I assume that the farther inland, the more unlikely that would be the case.

The second piece of evidence is how she describes Brazilians from other regions as 'coming from outside' despite speaking from her position as Brazilian, thus implying an insider's standpoint which, in contrast, has to be contained within Uruguay. Basically, then, we are left entangled in a web of references and positions as Virginia identifies as Brazilian, in addition to Uruguayan, and speaks somewhat negatively of the 'invasion' of Uruguayan culture into Chuí Brazil. Likewise, she says that:

> *We feel* as if [*como que*] Brazil is over there. No, Brazil is here. It's our flag, it's Brazil, it's Rio Grande do Sul. A lot of people say Brazil ends here. No, Brazil starts here. So it's difficult *for me* [to feel Brazilian] even though I am from here[159] (Galeano, 2016).

She replaces a collective feeling ('we feel') with her own struggle ('it's difficult for me'), ultimately presenting herself as an

[159] "A gente se sente como que o Brasil tá mais lá. Não, o Brasil tá aqui. É a nossa bandeira, é Brasil, é Rio Grande do Sul. Muita gente diz que aqui termina o Brasil. Não, aqui começa o Brasil. Aí, eu sinto essa dificuldade, mesmo sendo daqui".

unequivocal Brazilian in spite of her understanding that Uruguayans and Brazilians alike might often see her as Uruguayan. It is thus clear that, throughout our conversation, Virginia tried incessantly to consolidate her position as a fellow Brazilian, describing many characteristics that she saw as differences between Brazilians and Uruguayans. My favourite one was a common allegory in conversations with a few Chuienses: the home. The differences between a 'Uruguayan home' and a 'Brazilian home' seem to synthesise, for the speakers, how the two peoples are different. To me, however, this differentiation reads as an illustration of Freud's concept of "the narcissism of minor differences" (2002), something that, from afar, might seem irrelevant or secondary but that, from within the adjacent yet opposing entities, is seen as an absolute marker of distance.

Virginia follows the tendency in naming the three cultures in Chuy. She does not mention the Arab culture, however, but Brazilian and Uruguayan cultures "as well as cultures coming from other countries"[160] (Galeano, 2016). In discussing what the differences between Brazilian and Uruguayan cultures are, the home accordingly emerges as the ultimate example. And Virginia was not the only interviewee to mention that specific example in the same way. Letícia Ribeiro Martins, a psychologist and social worker – a colleague of Virginia's actually – also mentioned the difference in household between the two countries, although, as we will later see, she has a much stronger opinion thereon. In addition to Letícia and Virginia, Chuienses at large mentioned the same kind of example in informal conversations. According to Virginia,

[160] "E também culturas advindas de outros países".

> What differentiates them in terms of cultural aspects, for example, [are] cuisine, clothing, lifestyle within the household. A Brazilian home and a Uruguayan home, they are very *different*[161] to one another. A Brazilian's home, they organise it in a certain way; the Uruguayan's home, they organise it in another way. So, for example, you go to a Brazilian's home, the kitchen table is empty, [but,] in a Uruguayan's home, the table will be full of stuff. Almost everything on the table. Uruguayans are not given to putting things away[162] (Galeano, 2016).

The disposition of food and belongings on the kitchen table was never mentioned lightly. Whoever said it meant it. Just as many people added that the biggest difference between Uruguayans and Brazilians in Chuy was that Uruguayans keep a curtain behind their front door. My poker face became very good in the field, but I will admit that using tables and curtains as the elements that distinguished, by extension, Brazilian and Uruguayan cultures made me wonder, at first, at how frivolous that alleged difference was, how insignificant it was to the point of splitting people into opposites sides of an imaginary line. However, the sheer number of times when these examples were mentioned was symptomatic of how seriously they might be actually taken. By then, my slightly jocose mien turned into one of contemplation: belligerence thrives on any kind of division. This is not to say that Virginia – nor anyone else in Chuy, for that matter – was actively feeding into some kind of call to arms. The fact is that she did draw a line. She reinstated a

[161] In the original script, the use of the word '*distintas*' also functions as a shibboleth. Although both *distinto* and *diferente* exist in both, the former is more commonly used in Spanish and the latter, in Portuguese to refer to 'different'.

[162] "O que as diferencia nos aspectos culturais, por exemplo, culinária, vestimenta, modo de vida dentro de casa. Um casa brasileira e uma casa uruguaia, elas são bem distintas uma da outra. A casa do brasileiro, ele costuma arrumar de uma forma; a casa do uruguaio, ele arruma de outra forma. Então, por exemplo, você vai na casa de um brasileiro, a mesa da cozinha está vazia, na casa do uruguaio, a mesa vai estar cheia de coisas. Quase tudo em cima da mesa. Os uruguaios não são de guardar muito, não".

boundary between the two sides based on something as apparently trivial as a general perception of the arrangement of kitchen tables.

Why? Overall, I would argue that Virginia maintained a position of stark Brazilianness during our interview as a result of our previous interactions, in which we always spoke Portuguese and it was known, from the first time that we had met, that I was Brazilian myself. Virginia based her position on a common linguistic calculation. In that (a) she is able to speak Spanish and Portuguese, and to easily switch between the two, and (b) she knew my nationality as expressed by my proficiency in Portuguese and limited knowledge of Spanish in comparison, Virginia ultimately decided to speak with me *as a Brazilian*.

There are two instances in which she lays out the connection between language and position quite clearly. At the beginning of our interview, she mentions that Uruguayans feel entitled to the territory of Rio Grande do Sul, an idea that is generally sustained by Golin (2002, p.55). Later, she follows it up with a statement that opens with "I think there's a lack of primacy[163] on the part of the Portuguese people [in Chuy]" and ends by reaffirming this original utterance in saying that:

> Chuy is somewhat [*como que*] left to the mercy of the predominance of Uruguayan culture. Not that this is a bad thing, but *we* feel that difficulty a bit: those who like and prefer *Brazilian culture* sometimes struggle to show it[164] (Galeano, 2016).

[163] I chose to translate the original *'prevalecimento'* as 'primacy' though this does not capture all the possible interpretations. The original term is commonly used to refer to bravery on the verge of abuse. When you call someone '*prevalecido*', for example, you are effectively calling them a bully.

[164] "Eu acho que faltaria um pouco de prevalecimento do povo português (...) Como que o Chuí ficou à mercê do predompinio da cultura uruguaia. Não é que seja ruim, mas a gente sente um pouco dessa dificuldade: quem gosta e prefere a cultura brasileira às vezes tem uma certa dificuldade de mostrar".

In this example, it is clear that she has replaced the first expression 'Portuguese people' with its assumed synonym 'Brazilian culture', thus hinting at a subconscious equivalence between present-day Brazil and its past of Portuguese dominion as a mechanism for differentiating the two sides of Chuy. This echoes one of the first episodes in the field. On my first day, I went to a diner called *Sabroso's*, owned by a Uruguayan couple in Chuí Brazil. I asked for permission to take a photo of the bilingual menu, which led to a little chat between one of the owners and myself, which he punctuated with:

> — Are you Portuguese…I mean, Brazilian?
> — Yes, I am.
> — Everyone else here is Uruguayan.

He was not threatening me with his last sentence. I had explained to him what I was studying and he found it rightly relevant to highlight that most of his customers were Uruguayan despite the establishment being located on the Brazilian side. He, just like Virginia and – we will later see – Pedro Rodríguez, the headmaster of *Liceo Nº2,* had drawn a parallel between primary language and colonial heritage on the one hand and perhaps not nationality per se but, at least, a position in relation to the border on the other.

As the conversation with Virginia moved into how she dealt not only with growing up bilingual, but also with two such similar languages, she unsurprisingly mentioned the habitual slip-ups that can cause from minor embarrassment to major innuendoes. At this point, she tells me that her son's father is Uruguayan but that "I think my son is Brazilian and Uruguayan. I don't consider him to

be just Uruguayan because he speaks Portuguese correctly"[165] (Galeano, 2016).

Finally, the fact that Virginia strongly positioned herself as Brazilian during our interview is probably connected to the relationship that we had already been building. By the time we had our interview, we had already spoken at length about the project and about life in the borderlands – always in Portuguese. Language – not kitchen tables, it turns out – was, in this case, the ultimate parameter by which Virginia reinstated the border as a marker of division despite her plentiful references to instances in which she is more closely associated to the opposite side to that on which she placed herself. As she had initially stated that nowhere else but in the borderlands was it possible for cultures to mix, I asked her where Chuy lied on that spectrum: Brazilian, Uruguayan, or something else? "It's more Uruguay here", she says, "the culture that prevails is Uruguay"[166] (Galeano, 2016).

5.4 MARIA CECILIA DEAMBROSIO: "CHUY IS A SINGLE THING AND IT'S ALL A SMALL TOWN"

Ms Deambrosio is a Maths teacher at *Liceo Nº2*. We met rather briefly, during one of her free periods on the 16th of August 2016. She was the first teacher with whom I had an interview, so the first minute or so of our conversation involved a courting process in which I navigated the pronominal choices. Between formality and

[165] "Eu acho que meu filho é uruguaio e brasileiro. Não considero ele só uruguaio, porque ele fala o português corretamente".
[166] "Aqui é mais Uruguai. A cultura que predomina, o Uruguai".

informality, I was duly authorised to use *tuteo* or *voseo*[167], the latter of which is more common in Argentina as well as in Uruguay.

In my crusade to come across as Uruguayan as possible, which, I imagined, would be advantageous in my interviews with Spanish-speaking Chuienses, I unwaveringly opted for *vos*, thinking that it would grant me some proximity to my interviewee. Little did I know that, just as using *tu* instead of *você*[168] assigns Rio Grande do Sul with its own dose of regional identity within lusophone Brazil, the department of Rocha, where Chuy is located, is the exception to *voseo* in the Rioplatense region. Using *tú* instead of *vos* is a sign of pride and identity in the region, "where the self-proclaimed purest Spanish is spoken in Uruguay" (Weyers, 2014, p.392), mirrored in one of the first things that Ms Ambrosio told me: "in general, language is kept purer in Rocha"[169] (Maria Cecilia Deambrosio, 2016[170]). My attempt to seem as Chuiense as they come did not backfire as horribly as the urban legend of the Berliner doughnut, but my tendency to use *vos* made me come across more as a wannabe Montevidean if anything.

Pronouns established, I asked Ms Deambrosio the usual first question, to which she started replying that "life in the borderlands, from my personal point of view as I've been living in the borderlands for 25 years…"[171] (Deambrosio, 2016) and never actually finished that initial thought. Her answer morphed into an explanation of why she had moved to Chuy rather than what her 'personal point

[167] These refer to the use of *tú* or *vos* in Spanish respectively, both of which mean you (singular). Rioplatense Spanish is particularly known for its widespread *voseo*.
[168] This is a similar case to Rioplatense Spanish. In fact, *vos* and *você* are etymologically connected as both derive from the Latin *vos*, which, in French, for example, originated the pronoun *vous*.
[169] "En general, en Rocha, conservan la lengua más castiza".
[170] Henceforth (Deambrosio, 2016).
[171] "La vida en la frontera, desde mi percepción personal, yo vivo hace 25 años en la frontera…"

of view' entailed: two and half decades ago, her husband was transferred to Chuy, so she accompanied him. By the time she finished her answer, however, she had mentioned the expression "and so I stayed"[172] four times.

This expression is not devoid of meaning in relation to the overall tone of the interview. Ms Deambrosio says that, like most Uruguayans from elsewhere in the country, her image of Chuy used to be negative. She says that:

> At first, I was a bit afraid when I visited, I would see the disorder, the cardboard boxes, the litter and, in Montevideo, you speak of Chuy and the first thing people associate it with is litter, cardboard boxes tossed around[173] (Deambrosio, 2016).

With time, her perception changed, though she still needs to handle the many questions that people from the capital ask of her, born and raised in Montevideo as well, as to, as she words it, "how do you manage to live here"?[174] (Deambrosio, 2016). Her answers to this sort of question touch on the main theme of our conversation: "I tell them, I like living here. It's like any other small town in Uruguay. *I got used to it*. They still don't buy it. They say: 'I can manage one or maybe two days, tops'" (Deambrosio, 2016).

The reason why she stayed comes to surface more clearly as the interview progresses. She moved here to accompany her husband, but, even after divorcing him, she stayed. Not only did she already have a job, but her son had been born. So, again, she stayed. She tells me that, since 2015, she has been pondering whether she should move back to Montevideo because her son has recently

[172] "Y me quedé".
[173] "Al principio, tenía como un poco de miedo porque, cuando venía, veía como el desorden y las cajas y la mugre y, en Montevideo, tú hablas de Chuy, lo primero que asocian es la mugre, cajas tiradas".
[174] "¿Cómo haces para vivir acá?"

moved to the capital to study, the lack of opportunities thereto being, for her, the biggest disadvantage of living in Chuy.

It is in mentioning her son that she addresses the issue of what she calls "the times of life"[175] (Deambrosio, 2016), which reads effortlessly as linked to the idea of rhythmanalysis, as per Lefebvre (2004), in comparing Montevideo, the big city, to Chuy, a small town. Ms Deambrosio shares that her son often complains to her about the time that he needs to spend commuting in the capital, which she ultimately describes as "hours of your life that are lost" and as "time of sanity"[176] (Deambrosio, 2016). There is a tension, in other words, between her desire to be closer to her family on the one hand and her knowledge that quality of life is, for her, significantly lower in the capital in comparison to Chuy, a city to which she has now fully grown accustomed. And so, she stays.

A rhythm that would not be expected in a small town, nonetheless, is pervasive at Chuy's schools, towards which our conversation easily steered not only because Ms Deambrosio is a teacher herself, but perhaps equally because we were at school at that very time. The strong flow of people through Chuy due to preconceptions that jobs abound here also brings along school-aged children as well as new teachers. When I asked her to highlight the peculiarity of a school in the borderlands, she said that:

> What happens a lot is that there are many people who come and go. They come try their luck and they leave. So, they move around with their children back and forth, from Maldonado to Chuy, from Chuy to…looking for work and, as these are the borderlands, they come, they move here a lot[177] (Deambrosio, 2016).

[175] "Los tiempos de vida".

[176] "Tiempo de salud [...] horas perdidas de tu vida".

[177] "Lo que pasa mucho acá es que hay mucha gente que viene y se va. Viena a probar suerte y se va. Viene a probar suerte y se va. Entonces, andan con los chiquilines de acá para allá, de Maldonado para Chuy, del Chuy para…buscando trabajo y, como es frontera, vienen, pican mucho acá".

Particularly interesting here is the way in which she punctuated the repetition of the verbs 'to come' (*venir*) and 'to go' (*ir*) at the end with a sentence ('They come and they go/leave'), whose beauty lies precisely in how the words emulate the rhythm of movements to which they refer.

Viene y se van, vienen y se van, vienen y se van
Viene y se van, vienen y se van, vienen y se van
Viene y se van, vienen y se van, vienen y se van

Ms Deambrosio's view of Chuy is, therefore, marked by her experience of a common characteristic, that of fluidity, within her immediate context, that of the school, its pupils and their family dynamics, as well as teachers who find in Chuy a good opportunity to start their careers and save money by living somewhere cheaper. Likewise, it is embedded in this context that Ms Deambrosio confirms that there is no project of binational education. When we discuss what pupils learn, she replies that "it's national. The curricula are national. It's the same all over Uruguay"[178] (Deambrosio, 2016).

I argue that the lack of a binational education combined with a high level of mobility through the city leads to an environment in which young people can only learn *about* the city *in* the city – but not necessarily at school. They have limited opportunities to explore the vicissitudes of a binational town – though they do exist as we will see in the interview with Maria Gabriela Oliveira. What they experience of Chuy is therefore marked by a high level of everyday improvisation in which the liminal condition of the city results in

[178] "Es nacional. La parte de los programas son nacionales. En todo el Uruguay, es lo mismo".

what Ms Deambrosio describes as a blurring of the lines between legality and illegality. "Children in the borderlands", she says, "have different codes, in that you have to keep an eye on them. The illicit and the licit become confusing"[179] (Deambrosio, 2016).

From the examples that she then gives, it is possible to infer that she is referring to the general phenomenon of 'smuggling' and how it only becomes a problem when it visibly supersedes the extent to which the line will yield in overlooking the technical illegalities whose constant surveillance would otherwise fundamentally alter the everyday of these borderlands. In spite of the challenges posed by the malleability of the line, Ms Deambrosio concludes that, for the most part, it remains invisible, unnoticeable and unnoticed.

> I don't live the border so much as a border 'this here is Uruguay, this here is Brazil'. For me, this is […] a small town in the countryside of Uruguay. I don't see it like this line: Brazil is there, Uruguay is here. No, for me, it's all the same. For me, Chuy is a single thing and it's all a small town[180] (Deambrosio, 2016).

5.5 MARIA GABRIELA OLIVEIRA: "BUT HERE, IN OUR CITY, WE ARE VERY MUCH THE SAME"

Right after Ms Deambrosio and I finished our conversation, it was Maria Gabriela Oliveira, Geography teacher, who had a free period, which she kindly spent talking with me. At this point, there had been so many visits to *Liceo Nº2* that the headmaster's office

[179] "Los chiquilines en frontera tienen otros códigos en el sentido de que tenés que estar muy arriba de ellos acá. Lo ilícito y lo lícito se confunde[n]"

[180] "Yo la frontera no la vivo así tanto como la frontera 'acá Uruguay, acá Brasil'. Para mí, es como (…) un pueblo del interior de Uruguay. No lo veo así, esa línea: allá está Brasil acá está Uruguay. No, para mí, es todo como lo mismo. Para mí, el Chuy es todo uno y es todo un pueblo del interior".

had been offered for our interview. I sat where Pedro, the headmaster, usually sits and Ms Oliveira sat across from the ministerial desk. There was an inebriating waft of citric *yerba mate* coming from a tin in the shelf behind Ms Oliveira's seat as the sun battled the thin beige drapes, bathing the room in a warm terracotta hue. Paired with her incredible openness and her experience in reflecting on the city's liminal position, I remember wishing that our interview would have lasted for longer.

Ms Oliveira speaks elaborately, with a touch of hyperactivity that is only superseded by her thunderous laughter. Perhaps these are traits to be expected from someone who works so much. On top of being a teacher, she also runs a local radio station, *FM Coronilla.*[181] On her school days, she will often arrive at 7.15 in the morning and leave at 6.30 in the evening.

Unsurprisingly, when I ask her the infamous question about life in the borderlands, she does not hesitate: "Very fast. Very busy", she shoots, "people in the borderlands, we work a lot. Normally, more than eight hours of work [a day] across all occupations"[182] (Maria Gabriela Oliveira, 2016[183]).

The original word that she used, which I translated as 'fast', actually offers a level of ambiguity that is appropriate to the context. '*Movida*' is the past participle of the verb 'to move', implying both speed and agitation. According to her answer, then, it can be concomitantly interpreted that life in Chuy is quick and mobile. Right after that, I included the pronoun 'we' in the translation to mark the ideological agreement between the verb '*trabajamos*' and

[181] Available online at: <http://www.fmcoronilla.com.uy/>.
[182] "Muy movida. Muy ajetreada. La gente en la frontera trabajamos mucho. En general, son más de ocho horas de trabajo en los distintos oficios".
[183] Henceforth (Oliveira, 2016).

the singular third-person subject '*la gente en la frontera*', which implies that Ms Oliveira includes herself in the group.

Ms Oliveira was born and raised in Chuy. She moved to Montevideo for a few years to study International Relations at university. As she realised that her dreams of becoming a diplomat were hit by the low rotation of Uruguay's Foreign Service, she moved into a career in teaching Geography. Her experience with these borderlands are, therefore, deep-rooted. The triviality of this situation is often mentioned by her, spanning from pragmatic statements such as "[if] I need something, I go and cross onto the Brazilian side"[184] (Oliveira, 2016) to Márquezian remarks like "living in the borderlands is always magical"[185] (Oliveira, 2016).

It is glaringly clear that she has reflected extensively on the boundary line as a geopolitical division, on the border as a space of lived experience, as well as on the implications of their interrelation. As a Geography teacher, she has been taking her students on field trips around Chuy:

> We go see the stream and the limits, the bridge and the marker, and [we] research since when the markers have been there and all of that. First, general geography, but we always lower it to the ground. I work with the map of Chuy with the children, sort of looking into symbology to see what, in Chuy, they would pin on the map, things we think about in Chuy and they also locate their houses on the map […] The symbolic of the city and, well, they remember the *free-shops*, supermarket *Londres* […] So, they put some icons. We don't have, in our city, important monuments such as those there might be in other cities – the obelisks here, the markers, the limits. These are the things they've put as symbols of our city[186] (Oliveira, 2016).

[184] "Yo necesito algo y voy y cruzo al lado brasileño".

[185] "Vivir en frontera es como mágico, siempre".

[186] "Vamos a ver el arroyo y los límites, el puente y el marco y que investiguen a ver desde cuándo están los marcos y todo eso. Geografía de primero general, pero siempre bajamos a tierra. Trabajo el mapa de Chuy con los chiquilines y hago un trabajo tipo de simbología. A ver qué, dentro del Chuy, que cosas en el plano, qué cosas marcarían que siempre los lleva(n) a pensar en eso en Chuy y que ubiquen su casa en el plano (…) Lo simbólico de la ciudad y, bueno, y ahí se acuerdan de los free-shops, del supermercado Londres (…) Entonces, algunos íconos los ponen. No

She is reluctance to classify Chuy's symbols as proper monuments. She mentions the obelisks, the boundary markers, and the very boundary line as symbols of the city but only in immediate contrast to what she describes as being 'important monuments' that there might exist in other cities. As shown in Figure 17, the markers are far from being secondary symbols of Chuy. Plus, is it not remotely intriguing that the symbol of a city that is defined by the contiguous experience of space is, out of all things, the monument that marks its very split?

Furthermore, I argue that her recurring field trips do not actually contradict what Ms Deambrosio said about the predominance of the national curriculum at schools. Ms Oliveira explicitly states that local geography is a part of the curriculum only as of the third year of secondary school, applicable in any school in Uruguay – by the border or otherwise. It is also inferable from her answer that references to borders still feed back into the model of the nation-state. It is thus only by extension of the unavoidable reality of the location of the school that the borderlands become a topic of study – though briefly and more as a teaching project of Ms Oliveira rather than as a curricular item. The media also enter the scene as educational resources to which she resorts in the classroom, often drawing on Brazilian TV programmes, especially *Fantástico* and *Globo Repórter*, which, she claims, address many of the same issues to be covered in class. [187]

tenemos, en nuestra ciudad, como monumentos importantes que, como, de repente, hay en otras ciudades – los obeliscos acá, los marcos, los límites, lo han puesto algunos chiquilines como símbolo de nuestra ciudad".

[187] *Fantástico* is a Sunday newsmagazine broadcast. *Globo Repórter* is a late-night Friday documentary-style programme. Both are broadcast on *Rede Globo*, the largest network in Brazil.

One of the direct consequences of living in the borderlands, for her, is a certain open-mindedness that comes with an everyday that is so pervasively marked by mobility. In such a fluid environment, therefore, "living in the borderlands means living it daily and all"[188] (Oliveira, 2016). Consequently, the cultural diversity that is so strongly associated with these borderlands becomes, for those who precisely live it, something that "is done every day, daily. Sure. Definitely"[189] (Oliveira, 2016). In other words, it *is* normal after all.

She ponders, nonetheless, that her view of the borderlands might actually be affected by her background and her peers. The open-mindedness mentioned earlier as an intrinsic characteristic of Chuy is offset by the warning that "we must also consider to whom one is attached"[190] (Oliveira, 2016). The issue of the ways in which subjects position themselves in relation to the border re-emerges explicitly in Ms Oliveira's testimonial despite not forcibly leading to the dismantling of any appreciation of the relative openness that is, in fact, experienced in the city at many levels. "This line moves", she says, "we move this line according to [our] convenience, I believe"[191] (Oliveira, 2016) – in which the statement 'we move this line' is at the core of how the boundary line is not simply imposed but equally rearranged and re-signified at the same time that individuals will act within the scope of possibilities of their social and material horizons.

Chuy is the most immediate space in which Ms Oliveira has spent most of her life. So, inextricable to its liminal position as it is,

[188] "Vivir en la frontera, la vives a diario y todo".
[189] "Eso se hace todos los días, a diario. Eso sí. Eso que ni qué".
[190] "Hay que ver también con quien uno se vincula".
[191] "Esa línea se mueve. Esa línea, la movemos según las conveniencias, creo yo".

her perception of the city traverses – more than any other interviewees with the exception, perhaps, of Virginia – an array of micro-eras and angles into the everyday of Chuy. To me, her statements read as the most realistic: aware of the issues that have been raised as both positive and negative aspects as well as of the fact that none of these are capable of epitomising the city.

In sum, "the motif of living in the borderlands, one carries it, embedded, carries it in their skin"[192], Ms Oliveira (2016) qualifies, ratifying that the border is, undoubtedly, at the core of the everyday in the borderlands, playing a monumental role in informing not only people's daily habits, routines, and practices but, perhaps, also in their personality and mindset. "How beautiful it is", she announces, "the possibility that you're offered to be in two worlds that are different at large, but here, in our city, we are very much the same"[193] (Oliveira, 2016). Two worlds that are split into separate realms of symbols and practices, commonly associated to different countries, but two worlds that are also experienced strictly as they intersect into a proper place in its own right.

5.6 PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ: "PEOPLE IN THE BORDERLANDS GET USED TO CONSTANTLY LIVING ON BOTH SIDES, WHICH OFTEN SATURATES THE SENSES"

As I walked into Mr Rodríguez' office, History teacher and headmaster at *Liceo N° 2*, he was having a poignant dispute with his stapler. Slapping it, turning it upside down, and smacking its spine against the desk. He smacked the stapler from every corner,

[192] "Como que el tema de vivir en frontera, uno lo lleva, lo lleva incorporado, lo lleva en la piel".
[193] "Qué lindo es eso de la posibilidad que te da de estar en dos mundos que son distintos en lo amplio, pero acá dentro de nuestra ciudad somos muy igualitos".

raving in wrath against the makers of the product, which was certainly a very different scene to the calm, articulate, and welcoming teacher who arrived wearing his *Chavo Del Ocho* earflap.[194]

As has been noticeable in this thesis, the idea that we are always speaking from one and the same position is too reductive and does not manage to encompass all circumstances that we live through in our everyday. Mr Rodríguez usually presents himself as a well-read savant, which he undoubtedly is, distancing himself from the traps of nationalism and a certain kind of ethnocentrism when he is speaking of what he calls "the traditional paradigm of what identity is"[195] (Pedro Rodríguez, 2016[196]), mentioning his parents and earlier generations as easily convinced by clear-cut divisions between cultures, unlike:

> We who are younger generations, who have studied, and who understand that identity might even be built on a forced progression through many divergent elements and this puts us, from the younger generations, in the split position between 'do we have an identity or not'?[197] (Rodríguez, 2016).

Meanwhile, though he recognises that Uruguay has been influenced by many cultural influences, he argues that there can also be seen "no doubt, many elements of Spanish culture because these are the matrix of our history"[198] (Rodríguez, 2016). Just as Uruguayan culture might be seen as having been heavily influenced

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[194] *El Chavo del Ocho* was a Mexican children's TV programme originally aired between 1971 and 1980. Known in Brazil simply as *Chaves*, it is still broadcast across Latin America, making it an indissociable marker of childhood in the subcontinent. The character after which the programme was named is an orphan boy who is depicted as helplessly naïve though immensely affectionate.
[195] "El paradigma tradicional de lo que es la identidad".
[196] Henceforth (Rodríguez, 2016).
[197] "Nosotros que ya somos generaciones jóvenes, que hemos estudiado y que entendemos que la identidad puede incluso construirse sobre una marcha forzada a través de muchos elementos divergentes y eso nos coloca, a las generaciones más jóvenes, en la disyuntiva entre '¿tenemos identidad o no tenemos identidad?'".
[198] "Sin duda, muchísimos elementos de la cultura española porque son la matriz de nuestra historia".

mainly by Spanish culture, amongst others – in his words, that is –, the former can itself be unpacked into a plethora of further influences in turn, thus fundamentally challenging the notions whereby points of departure are fixed in an attempt to explain the destination from which one speaks at the present.

In reference to the openness of borders in this region, he suggests that Latin America, as a whole, is somewhat behind in terms of integration, referring specifically to the rights granted to citizens of the European Union and the Schengen Area to live and work freely in any member state. That, for Mr Rodríguez, is clear evidence that Europe is, yet again, ahead in history. He says that "all cultures are complex, but to be able to unite or associate to others, one must renounce oneself"[199] (Rodríguez, 2016), which he then illustrates with the hypothetical example of someone who lives in France but works in Germany, later adding that "this requires a spiritual and intellectual maturity that Latin-Americans do not particularly have"[200] (Rodríguez, 2016).

The tone of our conversation follows that constant pendular movement between his grand theorisations "as a teacher, a headmaster, a Psychology student and a few other things" [201] (Rodríguez, 2016) and a provincial way of imagining one's own place as underdeveloped, in the various uses of the word, and the 'good abroad' as an European panacea of superiorly progressive thought. If there is anything particular to Latin Americans, I would

[199] "Las culturas son todas complejas, pero, para poder unirse o asociarse a otras, hace falta mucha renuncia de uno mismo".
[200] "Eso requiere de una madurez espiritual e intelectual que el latinoamericano particularmente no tiene".
[201] "Como profesor, como director de un instituto, como estudiante de Psicología y algunas cosas más".

say that it is our incurable adoration of the metropolitan father figure. Ultimately, Mr Rodríguez seems aware of the current debates on identity and culture as social constructions at the same time that he completely inverts the premises of his views to argue for precisely a linear and hierarchical division of the world into those who are prepared to live in and with diversity and those who are still wallowing in the pits of ethnocentrism.

He revolves his answers to life in the borderlands around an idea mentioned at the very beginning of the interview. For him, the everyday in Chuy is marked by the challenges posed by the mobility that is characteristic of what he calls "the contiguous body"[202] (Rodríguez, 2016). Borderpeople live in a space that is constantly traversed by influences from both sides of the line at the same time that this is, in fact, their local space.

This brings out an ambiguous everyday in which Chuienses feel connected to their city and experience it in its totality, but in which, conversely, there are instances that push individuals to identify fiercely as either Brazilian or Uruguayan. Those instances are, for Mr Rodríguez, always moments of confrontation, when people are pushed to uttering "I am, I exist, I stand"[203] (Rodríguez, 2016) in face of the continuous blurring, as he puts it, of identities – "because of all the dynamism, the permanent mobility that comes with human and economic mobility in the borderlands" [204] (Rodríguez, 2016). In other words, identity is chaotic by the line,

[202] "Cuerpo colindante".

[203] "Yo soy, yo existo, yo estoy". I have chosen to translate '*estoy*' as 'stand' because: (a) there is no exact equivalent to this verb in the English language apart from the verb 'to be', which is already present in the statement; (b) to maintain the distinction in meaning between '*ser*' and '*estar*', the former is a constant state whereas the latter is a momentary circumstance; and (c) to highlight the positionality of the verb '*estar*' by using its etymological cognate [see https://goo.gl/kisWVU, Accessed 16 Jul 2018].

[204] "Por todo el dinamismo, la permanente movilidad que tiene la movilidad humana y económica que tiene la frontera".

but this does not then forcibly lead to a lack of identification for, he argues, "identity can perfectly exist in itself as a chaos, always and whenever the person assumes that, in this chaos, they play a role and that this role is well defined"[205] (Rodríguez, 2016).

It is important to highlight that Mr Rodríguez maintains a certain academic register with me during most of the interview, feeding back into questions on the impact of my presence in the field (see 3.2). He speaks in abstract terms such as 'people', 'individuals', 'we' or makes statements with *la pasiva refleja*[206], but he never lowers these terms and statements to the ground by going into clear examples from the borderlands. At most, he mentions that, despite the confusion of references, influences, and identifications, people are still very much aware of how far they can go without risking the malleability to which they have access by living in the borderlands.

He mentions the case of civil construction. Chuienses will easily buy bricks, cement, or other materials from whichever side on which it is cheaper – thus following the general trend of economic convenience –, but lorry drivers themselves will not usually drive through the line to deliver the material. They will leave the material as close to the boundary as possible to avoid being tracked by their companies' satellite surveillance systems. Here, then, we have a clear indication of that chaos to which he referred earlier,

[205] "Perfectamente la identidad puede existir en sí misma como un caos, siempre y cuando la persona asuma que, en ese caos, esa persona juega un rol y ese rol está bien definido".

[206] The passive-reflexive voice is extremely common in Romance languages. It removes focus from both the subject and the object of a clause by nearly impersonalising the action. So, instead of saying either *I crossed the line* (active) or *The line was crossed by me* (passive), one would say *Cruzose la línea* (Spanish) or *Cruzou-se a linha* (Portuguese). In practice, this form is preferred to formalise the register just as we would use 'one' in English to make statements supposedly more objective or distant.

one in which tight divisions become blurred, perhaps especially because individuals learn to navigate ambiguity as long as their immediate role can be fully grasped.

There is absolutely no doubt that Mr Rodríguez is equally speaking from the position of a Uruguayan. He expands on his views on the construction of national identities by referring to the example of Uruguay alone. Here, it is obvious that he is not simply speaking about the history of the formation of Uruguay solely because he himself is Uruguayan, but because he is – bare the redundancy – 'a History teacher, teaching history at a Uruguay-based school after having studied History in Uruguay'. That is, his position is a result of his own interaction with his social horizons, not a genetic determinant of his being from this country.

The fact that he is a History teacher also seems to explain his vast knowledge of dates and names, some of which come through in the interview. It was particularly noticeable how he cared to include England in the discussion whenever possible as a vector of Uruguay's independence. Given that he was the one who would always introduce me as 'coming from England' (see 3.2.2) and that we had already spoken many times before the official interview, I can only assume that this was another attempt at liaison.

Amongst his mentions to countries, national heroes, important dates, and the overall myth of the nation, Mr Rodríguez made a powerful remark about the relation between the individual and the state in terms of identity:

> By nature, human beings tend to leave their own core behind, their own self to find, in their midst and in their surroundings, things that might be beneficial to the soul – between inverted commas, eh? – or that grant them immediate pleasure [...] That is why the modern states were born: to make sure that these centripetal forces are present always in the opposite direction to the centrifugal ones and it is

> by means of that forceful act of the government that not only people are controlled, but also that the disaggregation and the destruction of this community is avoided[207] (Rodríguez, 2016).

His specific references to the terms 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' indicate that Mr Rodríguez has some knowledge not only of History but also of Political Geography as these terms often feature in the literature on Border Studies. The idea that the state somehow attempts to gauge and control forces that otherwise tend to infinite expansion is an established view across disciplines (see Kristof, 1959; Raffestin, 1986; Van Houtum, 2012). Likewise, it resounds in Mr Rodríguez' understanding that the assumption of fixed roles, even if briefly, in an everyday that is marked by fluidity, as is the case in Chuy, can be seen as a defence mechanism.

> It would be very difficult [to live in the borderland] and this is where, I think, those forces that tend to disperse personality, to divide it, are forces that contain themselves before those that tend to unite, before those that tend to unify [personality] and the customs of people and of institutions adapt to these forces, to this need to unify the inside of this place[208] (Rodríguez, 2016).

In summary, for Mr Rodríguez, the everyday in the borderlands is certainly one through which many vectors cross in what might be described as a proclivity to diversity. However, that does not lead to the suppression of identity, of dichotomous categorisations, or of swift divisions. The everyday in Chuy is "this ocean of

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[207] "El ser humano, por naturaleza, tiende a dejar de lado su propio centro, su propio 'yo' para encontrar, en el medio y en el entorno, cosas que le sean benéficas para el alma – entre comillas, ¿no? – o que le redunden en un placer inmediato [...] Para eso los estados modernos nacieron: para asegurar que esas fuerzas centrípetas estén presentes siempre en la dirección contraria de las centrífugas y es a través del acto forzoso del gobierno no solamente que se controle a la gente sino también que se evite la disgregación y la destrucción de esa comunidad".

[208] "Sería muy difícil [vivir en la frontera] y ahí es donde creo que las fuerzas, aquellas fuerzas que tienden a dispersar la personalidad, a dividirla, son fuerzas que se contienen frente aquellas que tienden a unirla, frente aquellas que tienden a unificarla y las costumbres de las personas y de las instituciones se adaptan a esas fuerzas, a esas necesidades de unificación del medio interno de ese lugar".

identities"[209] (Rodríguez, 2016) whose navigation is constantly negotiated on the go, according to different circumstances and stimuli. As he puts it:

> In my understanding, borderpeople are people who live in a permanent confusion in relation to the traditional paradigm of what identity is, which obliges them to reinforce those elements with which they believe to identify themselves[210] (Rodríguez, 2016).

In other words, there seems to be "this need to reinforce, to reconstruct one's identity"[211] (Rodríguez, 2016) in Chuy because of its liminal position, which bombards Chuienses with an incommensurable fluidity that is incompatible with what he earlier called 'the traditional paradigm of identity'. However, in light of the fact that this liminality is, at the same time, precisely what characterises Chuy, how then does one reconstruct their identity in what Mr Rodríguez implies to be a process in which the grand categories of Brazilian or Uruguayan are the options in relation to a specific reality that is located by its overlap, or even escape routes, of such categories? How can one locate themselves within that paradigm if their location is one of a paradigm shift?

Towards the end of the interview, Mr Rodríguez seems to synthesise the experience of living in the borderlands of Chuy by saying that:

> People here in the borderlands get used to constantly living on both sides [...] Sometimes, it is a race against time and against the same

[209] "Ese mar de identidades".
[210] "Entiendo que la persona de frontera sea una persona que vive de una confusión permanentemente para el paradigma tradicional de lo que es la identidad y eso lo obliga a reforzar aquellos elementos con los que cree identificarse".
[211] "Esa necesidad de reforzar, de reconstruir su identidad".

> space that can encompass all these phenomena, which often saturates the senses and overwhelms the emotions[212] (Rodríguez, 2016).

Living by the line, that is, can very well function as a sublime motif for reimagining a world without border control, racism, xenophobia, or any other politically-charged division. If one actually lives by the line, however, they might feel under constant pressure between the one and the many. Am I this, that, or something other? And is that other in fact something else if, ultimately, it simply responds to the same original divisions?

The force of the concept of the nation as the ultimate social space in the perception of ourselves and of others is still indisputable. Having to leap between the position of a national and the position of one who lives in-between must be, as Mr Rodríguez suggests, a saturating experience. But then again, this is the everyday in Chuy and no one lives their daily lives reflecting on what makes them so.

Even saturation can become ordinary. Ironically, given the utter villagelike aesthetic of Chuy, it is here that it resembles the image of a metropolis the most. The fact that the city is marked by the rapid succession of referents and positions leads to "the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli" (Simmel, 1950, p.410). In other words, there seems to be, as Mr Rodríguez argues, a kind of self-defence mechanism by which subjects avoid total disintegration by the flows that run through Chuy. For those who experience that uninterrupted fluidity, that is, saturation might as well express itself in a *blasé* attitude with the most noteworthy aspect of the city precisely because it is so ubiquitous.

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[212] "La gente aquí en la frontera se acostumbra a vivir permanentemente de los dos lados (...) A veces, es una carrera contra el tiempo y contra el mismo espacio poder abarcar todos estos fenómenos que a veces saturan los sentidos y abruman las emociones".

The mechanisms by which either of these positions is deemed more convenient – a Brazilian/Uruguayan or a *fronterizo* – are themselves equally infraordinary in that they respond to ongoing local circumstances, not templates. Therefore, trying to create a log of all instances in which the border disappears or remerges is as futile as trying to describe the everyday in its totality. All we can do is access this everyday through the views of those who live it.

Each individual will have their own reasons, explanations, suppositions about why, when, and how the border is activated or bypassed – but never denied for it is inscribed in material reality even if not visibly so for the most part. All of which leads me to the conclusion that there is not one everyday in the borderlands but as many as there are people, moments, and possible inlets. In other words, the everyday tends to infinity.

And yet, despite that tendency, there seems to be, so far, a narrative identity across the interviews that does not necessarily address the issue of living by the border but actually of living with ideas of what can only be described as *quantum diversity*. That is, difference as a process in which certain elements or characteristics are rendered important enough to force a break in reality, to act as a division, to separate – only to, moments later, be undone into something that is thrown to the background, unnoticed and unnoticeable until it is invoked again. My focus, then, is shifting from cataloguing such episodes in the borderlands of Chuy to speculating why we cannot seem to make sense of chaos, only of normality.

By that point of our conversation, the phone rings and Mr Rodríguez answers. "Excuse me", he tells me, "I will probably have to call the police"[213]. No, not the Thought Police. Apparently, there

[213] "Permiso [...] Probablemente, tendré que llamar a la policía".

were a few underage students smoking weed on school grounds. That must be why – I thought to myself – I cannot make sense of my own ideas right now. The wind had been blowing into the office.

5.7 ANTONIO MADRUGA: "IT'S IN PEOPLE'S DNA. THIS IS THEIR PLACE"

A couple of days before my disastrous one-time public meeting, Antonio Madruga, a local journalist, invited me for a brief interview after I had asked him to promote the meeting himself on air. *Rádio Chuí FM* is a community radio station that operates in an extension to Mr Madruga's house, on the outskirts of Chuí Brazil. [214] He talks like an old-school radio host, overpronouncing his words, which twang emphatically through his thick *gaúcho* accent.

In early September 2016, I sat with Mr Madruga at his kitchen table, a wall apart from the radio station. It is clear, from his first sentence, that not only will he speak from the position of a journalist, but also that he will use it as a way to establish some kind of connection – he knows that I studied Journalism at university myself. "I'm an observer, every journalist is an observer"[215] (Antonio Madruga, 2016) is his opening line. And, according to his observation, Chuy is "a mosaic of many cultures, a stew of cultures", but the reason why people come here is, on the other hand, that "it's a land of opportunities"[216] (Madruga, 2016). So, again, we see the flows of culture and diversity placed next to that of economic advantages, as this is what virtually everyone meant by 'opportunity'.

[214] Available at: <http://radiochui879.blogspot.com/>.
[215] "Eu sou um observador. Todo jornalista é um observador".
[216] "Um mosaico de várias culturas, um caldo de culturas [...] é uma terra de oportunidades".

The difference that can be inferred from Mr Madruga's opening remarks, however, lies in the verbs that he used to introduce these characteristics. Before he talks about cultural diversity, he says that that is something that one can *see* here. On the other hand, people *come* to Chuy in search of opportunities. That is, cultural diversity exists here, it is a state of the city whereas opportunities are what pulls people in this direction. These allude to some of the questions on the three flows that were identified earlier, especially in terms of the indissociable connection between ideas of culture and of shopping, in which the latter is the propeller of said (job) opportunities, finally leading to the suggestion that culture is effectively projected onto consumption, the origin of products, and the images usually associated with consuming these.

Mr Madruga recognises, from beginning to end, that Chuy is a commercial hub, often referring to Mercosur and describing the city as being in a corridor amongst Porto Alegre, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires. He equally understands that Chuy lives off that transit, which ultimately creates the image of the city as a land of opportunities, as seasonal as they might turn out to be. However, in that he has to live not only with the flows of people and money but also with the consequences of that fluidity, he admits that "honestly, I'm selfish enough to say I don't like it"[217] (Madruga, 2016).

We were talking about the masses of tourists who arrive in Chuy, usually either on a one-day shopping trip or on their way somewhere else, and the shortage of products that ensues. "In summer", he says, "I will go to the supermarket earlier on to do the shopping in advance"[218] (Madruga, 2016). Chuy, again, is presented as a

[217] "Sinceramente, eu sou egoísta a ponto dizer que eu não gosto".
[218] "Quando chega a época de veraneio, já vou no mercado antes e compro com antecedência".

small town whose already deficient infrastructure has to support the demand of many times its inhabitants in sprints.

The dilemma is that these periods of intense trade are what provide Chuy with much of its resources. You take away shopping tourism and Chuy becomes an idle village. You invest in the infrastructure to host that many people and, during most of the year, Chuy will resemble a ghost town that is occasionally brought back to life.

What happens now though? "Sometimes, we have to go shopping on the Uruguayan side and that's more expensive"[219] (Madruga, 2016). In other words, what happens now is that Chuienses need to frequently invert the logic of what they usually do. Groceries are usually much cheaper at Brazilian supermarkets and, so, considering that Mr Madruga was not referring to the new bottle of perfume or the new tablet that he casually buys *en passant*, people end up acting counterintuitively. If, on a regular basis, Chuienses take advantage of living in the borderlands by doing their everyday shopping wherever it is cheaper, on busy days, they are effectively pushed to do the very opposite. The problem, however, is that it is precisely those busy days that feed the local economy, which is seen to ultimately attract people to settle here.

Evidently, job opportunities and economic benefits cannot be seen separate to a series of other, individual circumstances that form the web of reasons why someone might in fact relocate to Chuy. Were this solely a matter of adding up the numbers, Chuy would be less of a city and more of a market square where people meet to trade and then leave. In other words, this is a city because people come, indeed, but especially because some of them come *and*

[219] "Às vezes, temos que ir no lado uruguaio comprar e é mais caro".

they stay. We know now that most of them come for the jobs, but that does not mean that it is the only reason to remain.

What brought Mr Madruga to Chuy, for example, was his heart. No, not like that. In 2003, he suffered a heart attack and was forced to lose weight and quit his usual three packs a day. "I was a workaholic, I worked the whole time"[220] (Madruga, 2016), he explains. He needed a calmer life somewhere that could also offer him an opportunity to make a living. His father lived in Hermenegildo, a small beach nearby, in Santa Vitória do Palmar. And this is how Mr Madruga ended up in Chuy: a calmer, healthier lifestyle in a place where he could still do that at which he was good.

He was born in Quaraí, in the borderlands between Brazil and Uruguay. In 2003, he had been living and working in Uruguaiana, in the borderlands amongst Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. A true *fronterizo*, that is. In Uruguaiana, he worked with radio, print, and advertising. In Chuy, he had a few other jobs but found his way back to the media when, in 2011, his request to set up a community radio station was accepted by the Ministry[221] in charge and Chuí Brazil got its first-ever radio station, *Rádio Chuí FM*.

Not that Chuy did not already have its radio stations before that, but this was the first one set up on the Brazilian side. It is also the first one that operates effectively as a non-profit organisation, which means that, unlike at the private stations based in Chuy Uruguay, *Chuí FM* does not charge people for public announcements. When I was in the booth with Mr Madruga for the interview, weeks earlier, for example, someone wanted to go on air to ask for a job.

[220] "Eu era um *workaholic*, eu trabalhava o tempo inteiro".
[221] Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovation, and Communications – usually referred to as MCTIC.

Given our shared background, communications and the media were a fervent topic in our conversation. Mr Madruga tells me that, all over the borderlands, Brazil's main TV networks, for example, set up antennas to reach as far as possible into the neighbouring country. With their waves of telenovelas, news, and weirdly dubbed US blockbusters come the advertisements for products that are easily accessible by the border.

These phenomena do not only have economic consequences. Mr Madruga argues that "uses and habits have been affected by the media"[222] (Madruga, 2016). In Chuy, one cannot only buy what is in stock at shops on both sides of the line, but they can figuratively buy what is on TV and on the radio as well. Some 80 to 100km inwards either side is all that it takes, according to him, to see the difference. Because people who do not live in the borderlands cannot access products and media from both countries as easily and pervasively as those in Chuy, "they do not have the same access to these cultural spaces"[223] (Madruga, 2016).

Consequently, the idea of culture through consumption must now be parsed out into two, interdependent and equally important, strands: culture through the consumption of (a) consumer goods and of (b) media products, the latter of which approximates this project to research on the role of the media in forming identities and a sense of locality in the borderlands of the Southern Cone (see Müller, 2003; Silveira, 2007; Strassburger, 2018). This role is particularly interesting, for example, when we learn that one of the rules by which Mr Madruga has to abide is that, according to him,

[222] "Os usos e os costumes foram afetados pelos meios de comunicação".
[223] "Eles não têm o mesmo acesso a esses espaços culturais".

at least 60% of the station's music programming must be made up of Brazilian songs or songs in Portuguese.

In general terms, this is that to which Mr Madruga refers as integration. It is a process of mutual influence that ultimately characterises Chuy. Or, as he puts it, "here in the borderlands, Brazilians have become 'Uruguayanised' and Uruguayans have become 'Brazilianised'"[224] (Madruga, 2016). Yet, he is certain that Uruguayan culture is stronger because it is 'more preserved'. Things become more complicated when he argues that "the reigning culture here is *gaucho* culture, the one congregating all inhabitants of the *pampa*"[225] (Madruga, 2016). Thus feeding back into the notions of *gaucho* culture as being both more connected and more representative of something that is perceived to lie beyond the symbolic boundary of Brazilianness despite the fact that it exists within the political boundaries of the country all the same.

If all of this seems confusing to an outsider, judging from Mr Madruga's statements, it is far from that to a Chuiense "because it's already in people's DNA"[226] (Madruga, 2016), he suggests. Just as the fact that people can roam and live freely on both sides of the line, in what effectively constitutes a contiguous anthropological space, has become ordinary, so too has become this perceived intense hybridity that prevails in Chuy. "There's so much mixture that, today, it is no longer strange for us. Only for outsiders sometimes"[227] (Madruga, 2016). Chuy is ordinarily one of those cultural spaces to which he referred earlier, one in which the quantum leaps

[224] "Aqui na fronteira, o brasileiro se 'uruguaianizou' e o uruguaio se 'abrasileirou'".
[225] "A cultura que mais impera aqui é a cultura do gaúcho, que é a que congrega todos os moradores do pampa".
[226] "Porque já está inserido no DNA da pessoa".
[227] "É tanta mistura que, hoje, a gente não acha estranho. Só quem vem de fora, às vezes".

between categories of Brazilian, Uruguayan, or whatever else are experienced just as often and as strongly as their confusion.

Chuy resembles, to someone from the outside, as a transitional space, a buffer zone perhaps, between tropical Brazil and the cultures of the *pampa*. It seems confusing and it does, indeed, often saturate the senses, as Mr Rodríguez suggested. I myself would often, in a split second of inattentiveness, lose track of the side of the border on which I was. However, for those who live here – and even further than that, *in order to* live here –, this turmoil of references, positions, and meanings must acquire an everydayness to it. "This is their place"[228], Mr Madruga (2016) argues. No one goes around in unrelenting awe of the peculiarity of living across a type of line that, all too often, leads to catastrophic results. "People here only care about that, they only care about their everyday. 'I need to work, to support my family, feed my kids, and pay my bills'. That's what we're focused on"[229] (Madruga, 2016).

That one is Brazilian or Uruguayan, in Chuy, "makes no difference", he says, quickly mentioning the go-to example of both integration and confrontation for Chuienses: football. If, for other people here, football is the only time when nationalities matter and are activated to their fullest, for him, it goes the other way: "there are Brazilians here who don't even support Brazil's national team just as there are Uruguayans who don't support Uruguay's national team"[230] (Madruga, 2016). In the end, then, the result is the same: nationalities do not matter.

[228] "A sua localidade é aqui".
[229] "A população só dá bola para isso, para o cotidiano. 'Eu preciso trabalhar, sustentat minha família, alimentar meus filhos, pagar minhas contas'. Nós estamos focados nisso".
[230] "Não faz diferença. Tem brasileiro aqui que até torce contra a seleção brasileira, como tem uruguaio que torce contra a seleção uruguaia".

Until they do, that is. And I am not still talking about football. Nationalism to the point of 'exacerbation', as Mr Madruga qualifies it, has not reached Chuy. "Yet", he says, "it will gradually affect their lives as soon as rights start to be curtailed"[231] (Madruga, 2016). What is striking in his words is, first, how there seems to be a quick equation between perceiving nationality and then speaking from that position to an unavoidably belligerent situation – 'exacerbation', he said. This echoes other Chuienses' takes on the living together of Brazilians and Uruguayans here – "we have to be proud of what we have and all, but it does not mean we have to fight at all", said Mary Urse (2016). How is it that, even here, where these categories overlap to the point of oblivion, the overt expression of one's nationality is so easily associated with conflict? Or is it precisely because of that abeyance that, when nationalities emerge, they do so in such a vigorous manner?

Secondly, Mr Madruga's final words in this statement made me shiver with the prospect of our times. Basically, your nationality does not matter, it is all good and multicultural and diverse – until, for some reason, instead of an asset, that *thing* becomes a liability. It is interesting that he chose to describe that flip with the curtailing of rights. In Chuy, what would those rights be? What is it that could be taken away from people here?

The answer to that question is eerie because of its sheer destructiveness. The ultimate 'right' – though it is technically more of a privilege – in Chuy, the one that is easily detractable is no other than fluidity itself. That is, the possibility of building a social life that spreads across two countries to a high level of interdependence

[231] "O pessoal aqui ainda acham [sic] que não afetou a vida deles. Ainda. Mas, a partir do momento que começar o cerceamento de direitos, isso paulatinamente vai acontecer".

and intermingling – confusion, even – that constantly defies clear-cut divisions between 'us' and 'them'.

Take the example of currencies. You should not be able to buy Brazilian merchandise at Brazilian shops in Uruguayan pesos, but you do. You should not be able to simply cross the street with large sums of money freely, but you can. You cannot drive your Brazilian-registered car in Uruguay without insurance, but the very Binational Avenue that marks the boundary has each of its sides going in opposite directions only, thus meaning that, every day, all day long, you drive in and out of both Brazilian and Uruguayan territories, with or without insurance, with every U-turn you make. Smoking weed? Not allowed in Brazil but legal in Uruguay. So, loiter ambiguously by the Avenue and it is unlikely that a police officer will stop you.

Fluidity, after all, is what characterises Chuy more than anything else. Remove that, restrict movement, start filtering the bodies that pass through and, simply put, there is no Chuy any longer. Not like this, at least.

In Chuy, that *thing* is fluidity, but it does not always have to be the case. Whatever else is experienced on the margins of power might be susceptible to come asunder with the strike of the mighty. No line can be completely rigid without arousing continuous opposition to the point at which the very existence of the entity outlined by such line becomes exclusively the maintenance of order. Which is another way of saying that there is no absolute strategy.

To be truly effective, a line has to bend ever so slightly every now and again. And that malleability of dividing lines is pursued in tactical behaviours, in the mis- and re-appropriations of said lines.

Halting these can certainly take the form of a wall, of passport control or passport retention, but it can be subtler than that.

When someone is speaking of 'us' and suddenly switches to 'the Uruguayans' when talking about the problem with littering in Chuy, this is a suspension of fluidity. When someone commends the city for its cultural diversity but later adds that 'some kinds of mixtures are undesired', this is a suspension of fluidity. When I shouted that 'no, I would not take my change in Uruguayan pesos', being in Brazil as we were, this is also a suspension of fluidity.

They are all instances when conviviality is withheld in defence against a punctual – often imaginary – threat that always, always originates elsewhere. I did not shout at the cashier because I actually thought that there was too much Uruguayanness going on at the supermarket, but because I was feeling frustrated at my work that day. The person who describes diversity as positive only to later add exceptions can certainly be seen as a bigot, but perhaps they are also worried that the number of new people coming to Chuy will have structural consequences to everyone's lives. Likewise, all Uruguayans are not to actually respond for the littering problem, but they become the circumstantial scapegoat of a very real problem with tourists who flood the city with packaging, most of whom happen to be Uruguayans *now* but might as well be Brazilian at a different instance of observation.

These are instances that enable for certain elements to become apparent. They can be turned from just something into *the thing* that matters most then and there. When differences become meaningful, they operate as centripetal forces, tearing apart the one from the other.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to how much it would take for one to turn against their closed ones, those who, until that moment, were 'thy neighbour'. In fact, my doubt has precisely to do with Chuy at its very core. Fluidity being its main characteristic, what effectively inscribes Chuy in reality, how certain could we be that these centripetal forces would ever reign within?

'It's in people's DNA', Mr Madruga says, but let us not take that as an ode to eugenics. 'DNA' stands for the most basic unit, one that cannot be tampered with without somehow annulling their very being as such. Next to 'DNA', Mr Madruga said: 'this is their place' and *this* is a place that exists in its fluidity. Chuy is what it is because it shifts between one the other; not because it presents itself as the one. It simply cannot be understood from the extremes of categorisation between 'this side' and 'that side'. "Chuy is a single thing", said Ms Deambrosio (2016). A singularity that only exists as it leaps between the two sides of the border, transcending and, at the same time, reinstating layers of uses and meanings of the line.

5.8 LETÍCIA RIBEIRO MARTINS: "URUGUAYANS THEMSELVES AREN'T THE PROBLEM. THE PROBLEM IS THIS MIXTURE BETWEEN BRAZILIANS AND URUGUAYANS"

Letícia Ribeiro Martins is a psychologist with the Reference Centre for Social Welfare[232] in Chuí, an organisation under Brazil's Ministry of Social Development[233], responsible for offering welfare support and services. Letícia and her colleagues – including Virginia Galeano – work with the most vulnerable groups in society.

[232] Centro de Referência de Assistência Social (CRAS).
[233] Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social (MDS).

No one, I suspected, would be more aware of the hardships of local reality than Ms Martins.

"We use to say that, when we come here, we go to Narnia"[234], she commences our conversation (Letícia Ribeiro Martins, 2016[235]). Not a particularly objective start to our interview, it seemed at the time, though this was, by far, the most imaginative response to my question. She proceeds:

> It's completely different to what you expect people will be and what their way of living will be. For example, on the Uruguayan side, they have their culture, their way of living, and their social manners. Here, in Brazil, we have ours, but, here in the borderlands, on the Brazilian side, it's completely different to Santa Vitória [do Palmar], for example[236] (Martins, 2016).

There seems to be a movement *through* Chuy in her statement when she states that people '*go* to Narnia' when they '*come* here'. There is a disjunction between the verbs, in that they refer to contrary directions, made all the more intriguing by the reference to the C. S. Lewis' fantasy world. Chuy is a surreal locality, one that is marked by a position of not-being: it is not completely Uruguay nor is it completely Brazil; it is 'here in the borderlands', a portal through the two countries and the two supposedly different cultures.

Ms Martins experiences Chuy from a different perspective to the other interviewees. Though she effectively spends most of her time here, she resides in Santa Vitória do Palmar, some 20km north. Ms Martins' history with Chuy, however, is neither only strictly

[234] "A gente costuma dizer que, quando a gente vem pra cá, a gente vai pra Nárnia".
[235] Henceforth (Martins, 2016).
[236] "É completamente diferente do que tu espera que as pessoas sejam e a maneira como vivem. Por exemplo, assim, lá no lado uruguaio, eles têm a cultura deles, a maneira de viver, a maneira social deles. Aqui no Brasil, nós temos a nossa, mas, aqui na fronteira, no lado brasileiro, é completamente diferente do que, por exemplo, lá em Santa Vitória [do Palmar]".

professional nor recent: she spent a lot of time here during her childhood and adolescence, when Chuí was still a district of Santa Vitória do Palmar, because her father ran a local business.

There does not seem to be any other interviewee who is as emphatic and unwavering about their opinion on these borderlands as Ms Martins. She does not like it – at all. In addition to the usual infrastructural deficiencies mentioned by the majority of Chuienses, she holds an extremely low view of Chuy, which often comes across as disdain.

One of the main 'cultural' issues here, so to speak, is what she perceives as a 'lack of perspective', a common way, in Portuguese, of referring to a certain hopelessness, a lack of ambition, and even a degree of immobility as a result thereof. In relation to Chuienses, Ms Martins states that:

> They think about working tonight, watching cars, so that they can buy their cigarettes and maybe milk for the children tomorrow morning [...] They don't have a future. They don't think about moving forwards, studying, evolving. They live in the here and now, at his moment. The only thing that makes them envisage a different way of living is the summer. Why? Because of tourists. Why? Because of the money. That's all[237] (Martins, 2016).

It is clear that 'they' are the people with whom she works on a daily basis: the poorest amongst Chuienses. I would assume that working so closely to such extreme circumstances might saturate one's feelings to the point of desensitisation, but it is not fully comprehensible why this translates, in Ms Martins' perception of Chuy, into such vexatious claims about the city and its people.

[237] "Eles pensam em ir trabalhar hoje de noite, cuidando carro, para poder comprar o cigarro e o leite, talvez, para as crianças amanhã de manhã [...] Eles não têm futuro. Eles não pensam em progredir, em estudar, em evoluir. Eles vivem aqui e agora, nesse momento. A única função que faz com que eles pensem em uma outra maneira de vida é o verão. Por quê? Porque tem o turista. Por quê? Porque tem o dinheiro. Somente isso".

She often reports on hypothetical conversations that she might have with people being helped by the Centre by using the diminutive. She does that in reference to adults, but adults who live in poverty, which, therefore, reads as patronising distancing and even revulsion to their situation and what they represent. She mentions examples of children who are never bathed by their mothers, women who lost all their teeth because they would never brush them, and, as we have seen, the people whom she serves as worried, at most, with milk for the toddlers and with securing their tobacco. Along with the idea of lack of ambition – the opposite of which is disturbingly qualified as 'evolution' –, her view of poverty and the poor is the typical notion that associates these with laziness, apathy, and crudeness.

Nonetheless, I am not trying to crucify Ms Martins for the way in which she expressed herself that day. There is no doubt about my interpretation, that is for sure, and, yet, she is the one, between the two of us, who has to experience Chuy so intensely through the harshest of circumstances. Accordingly, there is a narrative line behind what she says that does demonstrate concern for the city and its people. The issue under discussion here is precisely how much can be inferred about her as an individual only in relation to what she states about her job without, perhaps, taking into consideration the extreme circumstances with which she clearly needs to deal every day.

In this sense, going back to the everyday in the borderlands, one of the peculiarities of her job – and, consequently, of her relationship with Chuy – is how much it is actually limited by the border. It has been long established that family trees here spread across the line in entanglements that render the very distinction between

who is Uruguayan or Brazilian nearly meaningless. However, Ms Martins says, when it comes to being aided by the state or claiming benefits, for example:

> This is how it goes. If the father is Uruguayan and the mother, Brazilian, she is served and those amongst her children who are also Brazilian are served, but not the Uruguayan children, no. That because, on the Uruguayan side, they've got MIDES, which is their Ministry of Social Development, who look after them as well. Basically, everything we've got here in Brazil, they've got it in Uruguay too[238] (Martins, 2016).

Whenever the state is directly involved, there is no room for ambivalence. One is either Brazilian or Uruguayan regardless of the lived reality that characterises Chuy. As a consequence, individuals are simply counted out of the reach of assistance of the state based on something as fortuitous as the side of the boundary on which one was born and/or registered. Thus, even here, where the side of the line seems generally irrelevant in terms of how it might affect individuals' corporality, the division between countries is reinstated in its most draconian fashion: 'we help our own'.

The nonchalance with which Ms Martins explains the protocol is particularly intriguing given that she immediately adds that there are equivalent government bodies which are responsible for assisting those in need in Uruguay. If a family are in socio-economic distress, it is hard to imagine that only a few of its members would be eligible for assistance regardless of their citizenship. Yet, this is 'how things go'. Either way, the family are still the same whether or not a few are counted under the jurisdiction of Brazil's

[238] "É assim, por exemplo, se tem o pai uruguaio e a mãe, brasileira, a mãe é atendida e os filhos dela que são brasileiros também, mas os filhos que são uruguaios não. Isso porque, no lado uruguaio, existe o MIDES, que é o *Ministério de Desarollo Social*, que cuida deles também. Basicamente, tudo que a gente tem aqui no Brasil, eles têm no Uruguai também".

or Uruguay's Ministry of Social Development. In instances like this, the same Chuy whose overlapping position produces binational families – for lack of a better term – is the same where families can be broken into two, which is all the more worrying given that it happens so easily to those who are in most need.

Conversely, there are circumstances when even the counting of the state is confused by the piercing of local reality. Both Brazil and Uruguay allow their citizens by birth to acquire a second citizenship. However, this usually happens when one is born in a country and, later in life, claims a second citizenship. That, I call being *counted as two once*. For instance, someone is born in Brazilian territory – say, in Chuí Brazil –, so they are a Brazilian citizen who might, in meeting certain criteria, claim Uruguayan citizenship as well. They are counted as Brazilian and, later, as Uruguayan – but it is still the same body being incorporated into one and the other state. The same goes if someone is born in Chuy Uruguay and later claims Brazilian citizenship. On the other hand, in Chuy, this liminal amalgamation across the two territories, someone can be born and registered in both countries separately. They are, therefore, *counted as one twice*. In these cases, it is much more difficult for states to crosscheck information because, technically, this same individual might be seen as two different persons.

According to Ms Martins, nonetheless, Brazil and Uruguay have been cooperating more intensely in recent years to ascertain that *doble chapas* are not claiming benefits from both countries.

> So, they claim it [benefits] there and here. They would retire there and here, so they had two state pensions. So, INSS[239] started to crosscheck data with Uruguay and people had to choose where it was that

[239] *Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social* (National Social Security Institute), analogous to the UK's National Insurance Fund.

> they wanted to get their pension from, if Brazil or Uruguay. Depending on their choice, one of them would be cut[240] (Martins, 2016).

This is a riveting example because it shows how much the state is capable of bending its own principles by the margins, one of which can be seen as an extension to the concept of sovereignty onto its citizens' bodies. In this sense, only the state of which one is a citizen would have the legitimacy to either grant or remove, in this case, social benefits. What is peculiar, in this case, is that both states work together to effectively curtail the rights of individuals who are still, in fact, citizens of both countries. Life in the borderlands is not, therefore, always marked by the possibility of thriving on the ambivalence of this space. States might equally join forces against their very citizens.

In turn, Ms Martins credits the taking advantage of dual citizenship to "that infamous *jeitinho brasileiro*"[241] (2016). *Jeitinho*, or 'little way', derives from the expression 'to find a way' ('*dar um jeito*') and is historically associated to a mischievous facet of Brazilian identity. It is still used, to this day, in a derogatory tone against what is seen, by Brazilians themselves, as our corrupted nature. *Jeitinho* is a type of resilience characterised by a disregard with the norm and the law over immediate and self-centred gratification or, as DaMatta writes, it is something "that adds the law to the individual in their devious will to win" (1984, p.9). Ms Martins, however, not only finds no reason to celebrate this *jeitinho,* but also adds that

[240] "Aí eles tiram lá e aqui. Se aposentavam lá e aqui e, aí, tinham duas pensões. Aí o INSS começou a cruzar dados com o Uruguai e a pessoa teve que escolher onde é que queria receber, se aqui no Brasil ou no Uruguai. Conforme a escolha, uma delas era cortada".
[241] "Aquele famoso jeitinho brasileiro".

"here, though, it's not the *jeitinho brasileiro*. It's a *jeitinho* of these two races that came together, you see"[242] (2016).

In that sense, another aspect of the ways in which Ms Martins refers to Chuy is her tripartite division of spatial categories that seem to have a direct and causal connection to people's character. When she was talking about the 'lack of perspective' in Chuy, I asked her if the same could not be found in Santa Vitória do Palmar, to which she quickly replied that "it was different. There is, but it's different. There's a different accent, a different way of looking at life. There's poverty, there's vulnerability, but there's the will to move on"[243] (Martins, 2016). In their own right, her words echo those of Selene Marquez, counsellor of Chuy Uruguay, when this suggested that "Brazilian-Brazilian" people could only be found after Santa Vitória do Palmar. That is, in juxtaposing both statements, Chuy lies in a zone where one can ever only be identified partially, never fully anything, to the point that Ms Martins even seems to be able to tell the difference in people's accent from 20km away.

Fact or artifice, she digs a merciless abyss between Chuy and the two countries that intersect here. Her emphatic mentions to 'here', 'we', and 'our' in relation to Brazil alongside her frequent positioning of the borderlands as neither 'us' or 'them' – in which the latter refers to Uruguay – serve a purpose that rests on a cruel framework. "Uruguayans themselves are not the problem", she says towards the conclusion of our interview. "The problem", she proceeds, "is this mixture between Brazilians and Uruguayans"[244] (Martins, 2016).

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[242] "Só que, aqui, não é jeitinho brasileiro. É um jeitinho dessas duas raças que se juntaram entendesse [sic]?"
[243] "Era diferente. Existe, mas é diferente. Tem um sotaque diferente, tem uma maneira de ver a vida diferente. Existe a pobreza, existe a vulnerabilidade, mas existe a vontade de progredir".
[244] "O problema não é o uruguaio em si. O problemas é a mistura entre brasileiro e uruguaio".

From her clear association between, on the one hand, the conditions under which the people whom she serves live as well as the circumstances that, she believes, leads them there, and, on the other, notions of what it means to be Brazilian or Uruguayan, hers seems to be an attempt to mitigate some kind of pressure or saturation caused by the continuous exposure to extreme circumstances in her work. She distances herself from the issues that, for her, are indissociable from Chuy's reality of immanent contact between these so-called national cultures. The pulling inwards of the cultural boundary of Brazil, towards Santa Vitória do Palmar, ends up excluding Chuí from a space that might have its own disturbances, but that, at least, offers some idea of stability that is evoked in terms of purity.

"A new species has arisen in Chuy", she argues, one "in which you do not live by the culture of either side"[245] (Martins, 2016). Honestly, I must say that I felt very uncomfortable, which was made ever worse by the small cubicle filled with stuffy air in which we had been sitting for the past hour. She asks me if I knew of the Neutral Fields, finally concluding that:

> This here is a neutral strip. Chuy is a neutral strip, a new species to be studied [...] because you don't have the culture of Brazil – the social, hygienic life or any other habits – but you don't have those of Uruguay either[246] (Martins, 2016).

Before we end our conversation, she advises me on what to mention during my thesis examination. "On the day of your *viva*",

[245] "Surgiu uma nova espécie, que tu não cultua a cultura de nenhum dos lados".
[246] "Isso aqui é uma faixa neutra. O Chuí brasileiro é uma faixa neutra, uma espécie nova a ser estudade (...) porque tu não tem a cultura do Brasil – os hábitos sociais, higiênicos, de vida, de nada – mas também não tem do Uruguai".

she says pointing at me, "you must say that there is a new species"[247] (Martins, 2016). Soon after that, I thanked her for her time and stormed out of that stuffy cell, gasping for a *changement d'air*.

5.9 ON USES AND POSITIONALITY

Interviews exemplify a general tendency in the field. Chuienses speak of the border and, by extension of its local semantics, of the borderlands in relation to their own lives. That is, their perception of the border and of its developments is based on the everyday experience that they have *of* and *through* the line.

Initially, there might be an effort to generate a comprehensive understanding of the border, especially in relation to its normative meanings in the region. However, the longer and the more personal conversations become, the more nuanced the individuals' views become, too. Ultimately, there can be no universal meaning of the border because individuals are not defined – though certainly influenced – by the shared material reality that the presence of the border imposes. Their lives develop, so to speak, on top of this geometric space that is created by the line, but, more than that, they do so by adjusting themselves into particular arrangements with the line, in which count each individual's set of experiences, opinions, and biases, as well as their position both in society at large and in relation to the line.

This positionality also leads to the somewhat volatile practices for de-bordering and re-bordering. "Border areas represent liminal spaces where both transnational identity and intergroup conflict occur" (Grimson, 2012, p.201). So, on the one hand, people

[247] "No dia que tu for fazer a tua defesa, tu diz que tem uma nova espécie".

tend to mark the invisibility of the line for issues that are closer to their own everyday and that, in a way, allow for their lives to unfold in their current arrangements. On the other, nonetheless, the line can be promptly summoned and reinstated if, contradictorily, that same permissiveness seems to jeopardise their convenience, usually seen to be a result of other people's misuse of the same border condition, even when it might be equally associated to circumstances that are deemed to be closely associated with those issues that enable their own everyday.

Shopping remains the most topical characteristic of everyday life in the borderlands. It is usually presented as the ultimate advantage by being placed at the top of any implied list of positives. Ideas on *culture* and *diversity* are generally combined into a predictable follow-up to the economic advantage. That does not mean, however, that they are less important, but it does raise questions as to the degree at which we can speak of any particular cultural diversity in these open borderlands as a separate element to that of shopping or, in fact, as a distinguishable phenomenon at all given that, ultimately, we might argue that 'differences' in 'culture' can actually be found anywhere where a bordering parameter might have been set.

Notwithstanding, the peculiarity of these borderlands in relation to cultural diversity might be associated to issues of scale and fluidity – the latter of which stands out as the undeniable main aspect of everyday life in Chuy. First, there seems to be a generalised perception of diversity and culture – and all other ideas that were associated to these two – not as a static feature of the city but as a result of mobility. That is, cultural diversity becomes more visible because it flows more rapidly and more intensely. Secondly, the

reason why it is more visible and more intense has to do with the gap between jurisdictions – between the two countries as law-defining and power-enforcing entities –, which offers multiple opportunities to escape legal restrictions to financial advantages as well as opportunities to circumvent spatial constraints to individual's bodies and lives in relation to the state.

In summary, these two aspects of scale and fluidity generate a non-fixed lived space that is only possible because of its interstitial geometric position. As long as one state cannot stretch its power into a different state, which would be utterly paradoxical, Chuy can build its everyday as a practice of in-betweenness that is, as such, marked not by a pendular movement, which would imply distinct points of departure and arrival, but by a circular mobility, a radical fluidity that can only be observed at a quantic level.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis started with the establishment of the type of border under discussion from a multiplicity of terms and references onto which this notion might be extended. The border discussed here was, therefore, that between countries, there being, in this sense, three key definitions. First, the idea of *boundary* was developed to indicate the very dividing line itself in its moment of inscription, i.e. the moment when the intention to delimit or divide is expressed and performed. Secondly, the *frontier* refers to the movement of expansion, from which a territory is conquered and internalized. This is the classic idea of a military front that marks the reach of conquest. Finally, the idea of the *border* is understood as the resulting entity, which presents container and content, that is, what marks and what is supposed to be marked within this outline.

From that point, I introduced the idea of *borderlands* to emphasise that the border is not merely a line that marks the extension of the nation-state without consequences. It is also, and perhaps most importantly, a region where contact as well as potential conflict are always imminent. In other words, as much as the interstate boundary might be conceived as a line that fundamentally bisects space, in the lands adjacent to the boundary itself, it is never experienced as a distant or abstract concept. The border is always a fold rather than an abyss. It leaves marks in space, but it does not manage to fully separate. The border creates a division that is experienced as a volumetric phenomenon, which has implications around it, connecting the immediate vicinity even if, at the same time, it sustains a break between jurisdictions and ontologies.

In this regard, there were three axiomatic propositions that underpinned this research. These responded to a confluence of dated approaches to the border that were identified in common sense and, to a lesser degree, in academic literature before the advent of Border Studies as a delimited field of study in the period following the Cold War. So, the first axiom introduces the categorical understanding that no border is natural, which is to say that all borders are created by the intention to define by delimiting that, later, sets the ground for the *raîson d'être* of the nation-state as the container of a preconceived susbtance that is, furthermore, supposed to be expressed in natural features, that is, in features of physical geography. The second axiom developed from this understanding in establishing that, accordingly, borders do not derive from pre-existing differences of any kind. On the contrary, borders create these differences in a strategy to consolidate the project of the nation-state as tangible and, most of all, legitimate. In turn, the final axiom claimed that every dividing line is both an inscription in space as well as a surrounding area, where the notion of the border morphs into that of the borderlands, creating a zone in which the border becomes an experienceable phenomenon rather than a mere abstract category.

The focus of this thesis was on the concept of the border as a line that marks the division between nation-states primarily as a mechanism that highlights the process by which the intention and the enactment of a project to divide and control is first built in discourse and then materialised in the physical space. The idea of discourses of the border thus makes room for the notion of the 'cultural differences' that sustain the need, or even inevitability of the

division where and as it presents itself in the moment of observation. In addition to that, the materialisation of the border enables the conceptualisation of the territory, over which power is considered to be an exclusive and almost unquestionable right of the state. This power over itself – that is, sovereignty – is ultimately grounded on the cultural argument of the border, according to which there is a direct correlation between, on the one hand, an essential community of equals whose utter distinction from other communities is precisely visible by means of the border, and, on the other, the legitimacy of claims over land, resources, and the right to rule unchallenged.

The two central arguments were that, first of all, there is no causality between geographical features or putative cultural differences and the border just as there is no inevitability between the border and the nation-state. In other words, this thesis conceived of the border as a *maker* of processes of differentiation which are then projected onto the dividing line as the foundation for the legitimacy of the nation-state. Secondly, it cannot be purported that the self-proclamation of power over territory and people, which is delimited by the border, actually goes unchallenged. In that around every border emerges a zone where division is not so much abrupt as it is transitional, the experience of these borderlands is not completely dominated by the static notion of the boundary between states.

Where there are border communities, as is the case of Chuy, the borderlands carry an element of human interaction that constitutes the very everyday of the place, in which the supposition of utter and infallible separation and complete distinction between the sides of the border is not compatible with the complex web of cross-

border relations and practices that are enabled by the line despite the fact that they fundamentally defy its purpose. Thus, the everyday of Chuy, a twin town in the borderlands between Brazil and Uruguay, cannot be considered to exist separately within its respective countries. It is an open space whose very origins are inextricably connected to the variation of boundaries and limits in the region. Here, the border becomes more than the separation between Brazil and Uruguay; it is the very inception of Chuy.

This connection is evidenced by centuries' worth of territorial disputes, first between Portugal and Spain as well as, later, amongst Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, the latter of which can be understood, alongside the state of Rio Grande do Sul, as the major borderlands of the Southern Cone par excellence. The choice to study the everyday of these borderlands stems from Chuy's location in the historical Neutral Fields, created by the Treaty of San Ildefonso (1777), signed by Portugal and Spain in an attempt to bring disputes in the region to an end. The solution was to impose a buffer zone through which no communication, of any kind, would be allowed so as to avoid any spark of conflict, which had, up to that point, jeopardised the relations between the two Crowns.

In reality, however, neither this treaty nor any of the many others that were negotiated concerning the region yielded lasting and effective results. Consequently, Chuy is split into two identities. On the one hand, state intervention has transformed from conflict over territory to a preoccupation to nationalise the borderlands. On the other, however, Chuy still retains much of the local tradition of mistrusting too stark an involvement by any political entity given its extremely confusing and instable history of territorial disputes, moving boundaries, and the conceptual emptiness of

the buffer zone. Today, Chuy is faced with the tension between discourses on globalisation and the supersession of international borders as well as the return to hermetic notions of national identity and exclusive allegiance thereto.

From the start, what was noticeable in Chuy was that neither extreme is fully operative at all times. Chuienses acknowledge the existence of an interstate boundary as much as they are able to recognise the opportunities to transcend it that the particular arrangement of the urban space offers, especially in terms of economic advantages. The strategy of the border to divide and control is, therefore, met with the daily tactical procedures that have been developed in an everyday that is marked by the division between nation-states, and its implications, as well as by the possibility to simply cross the line, to bend it in their own favour. In this sense, studying the borderlands of Chuy demanded for a specific approach that could account for this ambiguity.

The semiotic approach to the everyday of the borderlands in Chuy was chosen due to the realisation that the border in fact works as a sign, to which virtually any meaning can be attached as long as it finds some kind of referent in the material and discursive reality that results from the history of the city and from the locals' adaptation to changing scenarios in the international relations of their respective states in general and, particularly, with regard to their policies towards the borderlands. The border, in other words, has no specific meaning that can be detached from the reality where it becomes perceptible and on which it impacts. Thus, it was clear that the most appropriate way to study the everyday in Chuy

in this thesis was precisely to focus on the ways in which the perception of the border is constructed by those who live in these borderlands.

Accordingly, the central question was: *what does it mean to live by the border?* This unfolds into a double take to what meanings might imply: it is both the ways in which Chuienses form discourses on the border as well as the ways in which these can be enacted in daily life. Given the intrinsic ambiguity of effectively living *between the line*, this is an extremely pertinent question that addresses the mechanisms whereby the already established arbitrariness of the border, both in its constitution as well as in its descriptions, can be analysed in reference to the ways in which Chuienses speak of the border, but also in the ways in which they appropriate the concept at their own convenience. In other words, this thesis looked at the speech acts of Chuienses, which raise attention to the observable implications of the enunciative stances taken by locals. What they say about the border, that is, comes to be related, either in confirmation or in contrast, to what they are able to practice because of the border condition.

This is, furthermore, where the limitations of this attempt at a semiotics of everyday life became clearest. Everyday life is a complicated enough arena to be studied, which is only made even more complex and harder to pin down by the ambiguity of these borderlands. Any results or generalisation that might have been made on the everyday in Chuy, although based on evidence, must be met with the knowledge that everyday life cannot, in fact, be fully grasped and scrutinised based solely on what people might claim that they think or do.

The semiotic approach to everyday life in the borderlands, that is, is one that, in the process of this thesis at least, reached a point of saturation very quickly. This was not problematic in itself, but it did, as I suggested earlier (see 4.3), make explicit that opinions, perceptions, or any public displays or claims on what something might mean actually seem to be much more heavily informed by general social patterns connected to, for example, public policy, media framing, or economic discrepancies associated with or impacting the border rather than by deeply personal stances that individuals might have with it.

During the period in the field, from June to September 2016, 426 surveys were collected, with four questions with whose responses a general map of meanings was drawn. Eight Chuienses also took part in semistructured, in-depth interviews that came up to some thirteen hours of conversations during which a more nuanced view of the ways in which these individuals relate to the border was offered. The results from surveys and interviews were generally balanced with the field notes, which versed on the observable phenomena that took place during the period.

The first question of the survey asked respondents to declare themselves either Brazilian, Uruguayan, Mixed, or to offer an alternative identification. Responses to this question featured self-declarations of nationalities as, respectively, Uruguayan (~58.7%), Mixed (~22.3%), and Brazilian (~16%). The first implication of these figures was the disproval of the hypothesis that, due to Chuy's condition as a binational city, most people would declare themselves a mix of both self-contained categories of Brazilian and Uruguayan. Secondly, they raised questions as to the correlation between self-declarations and, on the one hand, the language in

which responses were given as well as, on the other, the language in which copies of the survey were originally distributed. There was not enough evidence, however, to corroborate either correlation despite the overall tendency to using Spanish across categories. Conversely, the firm conclusion to be drawn from these results is that the way in which Chuienses identify themselves is not derivative of any fixed characteristics, as in extensions to their national position, for example, but, rather, it is attached to the perception of the potential implications of whichever identification at the moment of asking. Furthermore, this question highlighted the predominance of linguistic duality over hybridity between Portuguese and Spanish that can be observed elsewhere in the borderlands between Brazil and Uruguay.

The second question in the survey asked respondents to compose a three-term free-association list of words and ideas that they associated with the term 'border'. Results showed a tendency in describing the border in terms of ideas related to diversity, shopping, and culture. Analysis of mentions of these ideas point to an inclination to situate the border in the intersection between the structural dominance of Chuy as a shopping destination and the expectation to describe the borderlands with slightly vague and idealised notions of cultural diversity. This latter aspect led to the proposition of a *normative border subjectivity* that is in operation in the region, something which demands, however, further investigation.

The third and fourth questions, respectively, asked people to dissert on the advantages and disadvantages of living in the borderlands. The intention was to contrast responses to each of these questions so as to highlight the tension between the strategic role

of the border as a mechanism of division and the tactical procedures that appropriate the border as a source of opportunities to take advantage of whatever was considered more beneficial from each side of the border as extensions of Brazil's and Uruguay's economic and social situations. In terms of advantages, there was a pattern in replicating responses to the second question, thus corroborating the hypothesis of a normative border subjectivity in operation.

In terms of disadvantages, however, there were two main areas of conclusion. First, the predominant negative aspects of living in the borderlands can be ultimately associated with the fact that Chuy is a small countryside town, with its usual infrastructural deficiencies, which are all the more heightened by the massive seasonal inflows of shopping tourists who visit the city. Secondly, there was a shared effort to rephrase the same ideas that were presented as positive as now negative aspects of life in the borderlands. The reason for this flip has to do with the identification of instances when the same elements that are generally seen as advantageous come to be understood as facilitators of practices that threaten the local population or that seem to exploit the city's condition.

This ambiguity was notably expressed through ideas of fluidity, which were often associated with ideas of shopping, culture, and diversity. The permissiveness that characterises and that enables these flows seems to be usually described in positive terms, but they are immediately turned into downsides under the circumstances described above. This finally confirms that there is no universal sense to the border, either positive or negative, even in the case of a community that appears to be marked by the ways in which it transcends the dividing line. There emerged, in other

words, instances of re-bordering that were as frequent as those whereby the border was rejected, pointing to the co-existence of strategies and tactics to a degree of interdependence rather than predominance of the latter, as had been originally anticipated.

Analysis of the interviews identified an initial tendency to reinforce the positive aspects that had been catalogued with surveys. However, they added layers of positionality that indicated that shared meanings of the border are activated less in accordance with their general appearance of positivity. The ways in which these meanings are ultimately observed point to a situated calculation of the potential gains and risks of whichever stance for the speaker. This highlights that, despite veering towards confirming the normative border subjectivity, Chuienses might comply with the idealised view of the borderlands as a space of cultural diversity as equally as they might, on the other hand, reject it or bring it to a halt depending on the possible implications that such a view might punctually have for their own lives in the city.

Finally, it is possible to propose two main derivative themes that need further investigation: the notion of *culture through consumption* and the conditions for *the mobilisation of meaning*.

The fact that mentions of culture and diversity were too often paired with ideas of shopping raised questions as to the perception of what constitutes the first two. If it is true that, in Chuy, people can buy products from many countries regardless of the side of the border where they are based, it was remarkably evident that the everyday consumption of products and practices alike does not forcibly lead to the suppression of the associations made between them and their traceable origins. In other words, frequent consumption of something that is known to come from one country is

not enough for it to be considered as part of the culture of individuals who might identify more strongly with the other country. This calls for a particular engagement with material culture with regard to the ways in which products and practices that are noticeable for their origin, and/or the associations made therewith, remain as outsiders to one's own sense of culture and local identity regardless of how pervasive their consumption might have become. Consequently, the notion of culture through consumption might assist in expanding the understanding of how ideas of multiculturalism and diversity, for example, might ultimately reinforce the very same processes of differentiation that they seem to oppose.

The ambiguity that was identified in contrasting the ways in which meanings were stated positively but in which they could, just as often, be made to imply the very opposite indicates that not only there is no universal meaning to the border, but also that what it is seen to represent can vary between extremes. The issue here would thus be to understand the conditions that need to be in place for that change to occur on a wider scale. That is, if there are significations that have come to be shared in one sense in Chuy, it is likewise possible to speculate that these meanings cannot only be altered conceptually, but also that they could be potentially manipulated within a process of mobilisation of meaning towards whatever political goals.

In this sense, if by focusing on stated meaning, the semiotic approach missed on whatever is not said, what escapes verbalisation, and what is felt around the border, conversely, this is now the ultimate methodological and theoretical contribution to perhaps studying other aspects of everyday life in the borderlands: it is not

all there in what is said, meant, or implied. Any future investigations on the topic could include much more fleeting and untamed streams of phenomena such as mood, feelings, and unconscious biases to avoid the hyper-formalisation of a typically semiotic approach to everyday life.

Alternatively, what the particular results of this thesis suggest for my future research is that, in everyday life, the border is not simply calcified by landscape tools such as markers, walls, and immigration control. The more trivialised it is, the more the border can be said to be an infraordinary element of everyday life, the more likely it is to be found in projections onto material objects that permeate such reality. In the case of Chuy, for example, this has to do with what can be acquired more easily on either side of the border and with how, despite their occurrences all over the city, many products are still associated with a traditional view of what each side is supposed to represent. I would be interested in knowing if this would replicate a bit farther away from the borderlands, for example, in big cities to see if their status between the local and the global is at all enabled or even dependent on the surplus of material objects that flow through these spaces, bringing along traditions of interpretations and associations set between those that these objects might meet in their places of origin and those that local users might already cultivate.

Or in conclusion:

The border is as meaningful as its uses.

EPILOGUE

This was a *día de huelga*, a strike day, I was told as soon as I got there. Yet, most teachers seemed to be working. Some of them were interested in my presence. Others, annoyed. Especially the teacher whom I might as well have been following around the school as that would be my third time interrupting her class. She sported her rosary tattoo on her wrist, which fired my guilt. I tried to hurry up: I spoke to the class, handed out the surveys, and asked them if they had any questions.

— *¡¿Cómo es Inglaterra?!*, one of the pupils shouts at me.

His question caught me off guard.

— *Normal*, I replied mindlessly.

Chuy, Uruguay/Brazil – 15th of August, 2016

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