"As Much American as a Canadian Can Be": Cross-Border Experience and Regional Identity among Young Borderlanders in Canadian Niagara

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Abstract: This article analyzes interviews with young people who grew up on the Canadian side of the Canada-U.S. border in the Niagara region, a major North American transportation and trade corridor as well as a tourist destination. The analysis reveals histories of everyday cross-border links combined with some hybridized, but more often differentiating and exclusionary, constructions of border space and identity. Possible implications of these findings for official cross border regionalism and the wider project of North American deep integration are considered.

Keywords: borders, Canada, Niagara, identity, class, race

Résumé : Cet article fait l'analyse d'entrevues réalisées auprès de jeunes ayant grandi du côté canadien de la frontière canado-américaine dans la région du Niagara, un important couloir maritime et commercial ainsi qu'une destination touristique. L'analyse laissent entrevoir des récits de liens transfrontaliers quotidiens mêlés à des constructions hybrides de l'espace frontalier et de l'identité, causant souvent, par contre, la différenciation et l'exclusion. De possibles conséquences de ces conclusions pour le régionalisme transfrontalier officiel et pour le vaste projet de profonde intégration nord américaine sont également mises à l'étude.

Mots-clés : frontières, Canada, Niagara, identité, classe, race

Introduction

The Niagara region is a major North American transportation and trade corridor as well as a tourist destination.[1] Regional business and political leaders from both sides of the border have promoted cross-border linkages as key to ensuring the area's competitive position within a restructuring and securitizing North America. In this article, I consider the relationship between these efforts and everyday Canadian borderlander experiences and identities vis-à-vis both the proximate American "other side" and the rest of Canada. Interviews with young people who grew up on the Canadian side of the Canada-U.S. border in the Niagara region reveal histories of everyday cross-border links combined with some hybridized, but more often differentiating and exclusionary, constructions of border space and identity. Possible implications of these findings for official cross border regionalism and the wider project of North American deep integration are considered.

Theorizing Border Experience and Identities

Despite "the partial unbundling of traditional territorial national borders and the formation of new bordering capabilities" (Sassen 2005:524), studies of international borders and border regions have challenged both "state-centric predispositions" and "facile assumptions about globalization and the imminent demise of states and their borders" (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999:598). An interdisciplinary border studies has been documenting how the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the EU and NAFTA, and the global securitization initiated by the U.S. so-called War on Terror, have been linked to changes in the functions and meanings of national borders rather than their disappearance (Newman 2006).[2]

Among the contributions made by anthropologists are ethnographic studies of border communities that focus

on "everyday life, and on the cultural constructions which give meaning to the boundaries between communities and between nations" (Wilson and Donnan 1998:4; see also Donnan and Wilson 1999). Drawing inspiration from such studies and Newman's suggestion that the collection and analysis of narratives are useful "if we really want to know what borders mean to people" (2006:154), this paper draws upon interviews conducted with young people who grew up in Canadian border communities in Niagara to explore the dynamics of everyday cross-border linkages and regional identities at this site.

Newman refers to the "classic" definition of the frontier or borderland (citing Martinez) as "the region or area in relative close proximity to the border within which the dynamics of change and daily life practices...[are] affected by the very presence of the border" (2006:150). The work of Anzaldua (1999) and Rosaldo (1993) on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands portrayed such spaces as sites of potentially transformative cultural hybridity, an approach that challenged older paradigms of the "binary absoluteness of cultural areas and identities" (Kearney 1995:557).

While border regions continue to be identified as potential "hotspots of hybridity and creolization" and "seedbeds" of cosmopolitanism (Durrschmidt 2006:246), grounded studies of borders and borderlanders have suggested that while border identities are often "shifting and multiple" they are still "framed by the specific state configurations which encompass them and within which people must attribute meaning to their experience of border life" (Wilson and Donnan 1998:13).

Some of the complexities of border practices and identities are suggested in two case studies useful to my thinking about Canadian Niagara. The first is Durrschmidt's (2002, 2006) work on the everyday border crossing and border reinforcing dynamics found among poorer East German borderlanders living in the German-Polish twin-city of Guben-Gubin. Durrschmidt describes how these borderlanders reaped material and psychological benefits through cross-border shopping (that allowed them to stretch their limited income and compare themselves favourably to Poles who were "worse off") while embracing an everyday "latent Europhobia" (because of their belief that EU enlargement to include Poland would lead to a decline in German living conditions). He also points out how this everyday Europhobia was in tension with the institutionalized "Europhoria" of a more "transnationally oriented elite" (2006:259).

Also helpful is Vila's (2003a, 2003b, 2003c) discussion of borderlander identities in the cities of Cuidad Juárez and El Paso at the U.S.-Mexican border. Like Durrschmidt, Vila finds both border crossing and reinforcing and uses interviews to reveal how national and regional identities articulated with other axes of class, race, gender and sexuality to produce hybrid but also more exclusionary identities and practices (2003a, 2003b). He also emphasizes the need to document "multiple readings of the border situation, where different narratives coexist in the same locale" (2003c:322). Both case studies are helpful in pointing to how border crossing may coexist with nationalized and other articulating identities and in directing attention to differentiated border practices, identities and projects in borderland spaces.

The Canada-U.S. Border

The fact that 80% of Canadians live within 160 kilometres of the U.S. border led Gibbins to describe Canada as a "borderlands society" and to suggest that "the border penetrates deeply into Canadian consciousness, identity, economy and polity to a degree unknown and unimaginable in the United States" (1989:2). Historical work on the Canada-U.S. borderlands has meanwhile been challenging exclusively national histories by emphasizing the "continual negotiation of the borderlands well into the national eras and the cross-border relationships forged by migrations of labour, capital, toxins, and trade to the present day" (Jameson and Mouat 2006:229). Ramirez, for example, outlines the history of extensive movement across Ontario-U.S. borders from the 19th century to the Depression, a period when "Canada was one of the leading contributors of population and labour to the United States" (2001:183; see also Bukowczyk et al. 2005).

At the same time, there is increased scholarly attention to the changing meanings and functions of a contemporary Canada-U.S. border within a restructuring and securitizing North America (e.g., Sadowski-Smith 2002; Gabriel and MacDonald 2003; Andreas and Biersteker 2003; Drache 2004; Pratt 2005; Sparke 2006). The changing Canada-U.S. border can be located within what Clarkson calls the "constrained hegemonification" of North American trilateralism wherein "political and economic pressure from the United States drives developments in each of its peripheries, but is limited by Canada's and Mexico's different responses" (2006:604). The "asymmetric interdependence" (Andreas 2005) of Canada-U.S. bilateralism, more particularly, has ensured ongoing debate about the degree to which the Canadian economy, sovereignty, identity and cultural distinctiveness are threatened by the power of the United States (Barlow 2005). In a discussion of post 9/11 developments, Nichol (2005:778-779) refers to divergent U.S. and Canadian "geopolitical narratives" vis-à-vis their shared border arguing that while securing the northern border against

the alleged threat of international terrorism emerged as central to U.S. discourse and policy, Canada continued to be preoccupied with facilitating cross-border trade while simultaneously constructing the border as "a line of defense" against U.S. domination.

The Niagara Border Region

The more macro-oriented scholarship on North American integration and the changing meanings and functions of the Canada-U.S. border informs this examination of everyday border life and identity in Canadian Niagara. This Niagara case study, in turn, offers insight into the lived working out of these processes and how local engagements may shape their future trajectory.

The Canadian Niagara border region is adjacent to the boundary line that follows the dramatic Niagara River running 55 kilometres from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. The isomorphism of the boundary and the Niagara River in this region contributes to a "naturalizing" (Donnan and Haller 2000:13) of the border that downplays its history and politics. The current borderline, a product of the 1783 Treaty of Paris and War of 1812 (Carroll 2001), is both longstanding and largely uncontested (but see Grinde 2002).[3]

Four bridges open to vehicular traffic and three railway bridges currently span the Niagara River. The Lewiston-Queenston Bridge links the two villages of Queenston, Ontario and Lewiston, New York. Two bridges (Whirlpool and Rainbow) connect the cities of Niagara Falls, Ontario and Niagara Falls, New York, while the Peace Bridge joins the town of Fort Erie, Ontario to the major urban centre of Buffalo, New York. The Peace Bridge is the second busiest Canada-U.S. border crossing (after the Ambassador Bridge linking Windsor and Detroit).

The border economy is shaped by wider patterns of economic restructuring and neoliberalism. Under Free Trade and then NAFTA, Canadian (and American) Niagara has suffered from de-industrialization involving layoffs and closures in the still dominant but declining manufacturing sector. The growing "new economy" in Canadian Niagara has been represented by the lower paid service sector, especially the seasonal agro-wine-casino tourist industry.

The regional economy is also affected by what Donnan and Wilson, in the context of the Irish border, describe as the "see-saw" effects of cross-border "differentials in state tax, consumer prices, and the currency exchange rate" (1999:119). In Niagara such effects impact the degree and direction of cross-border shopping, recreation and investment and residents have an acute awareness of the relative economic opportunities on each side of the border. Over the years that the cohort interviewed here were growing up, a confluence of political and economic factors favoured the Canadian side of the Niagara River producing a sense of advantage over the immediate American side (in contrast to a wider U.S. hegemony). At the same time, however, incomes in Canadian Niagara were significantly below the Ontario average and the region experienced youth out-migration (Niagara Economic Development Corporation 2005:18).

Official Cross Border Regionalism

Sparke has discussed how NAFTA "led many regional business communities on either side of...the Canadian-U.S. border...to reimagine their local regions as newly 'borderless' business gateways and development hubs" (2006:159). In the years immediately preceding September 11, 2001, reports from the Canadian newspaper, the *Niagara Falls Review*, reveal how local political leaders from both sides of the Niagara River were promoting cross-border cooperation in trade, transportation and tourism as a route to greater regional prosperity (see Meyers and Papademetriou 2001).

In 1999, for example, cross-border cooperation was identified as key to achieving the goal (voiced by the Mayor of Buffalo) of having "the cheapest, fastest border in North America" (Transportation Woes A National Crisis *Niagara Falls Review* November 2, 1999: A9). There was cross-border political focus on the need to improve the capacity of the regional transportation infrastructure (highways and bridges) to handle a doubling in bilateral trade since 1988 and to thereby strengthen the region's competitive position within North American economic space (Linking Of Trade Routes Beneficial to Canada, U.S. *Niagara Falls Review*, June 23, 2000: A6).[4]

The challenges of official cross-border regionalism were, however, apparent in negotiations over expanding the capacity of the Peace Bridge, the major border crossing in the region.[5] When the fraught process came to a complete halt in 2000 (and had to be subsequently restarted from the beginning), local business and political leaders moved quickly to reiterate the importance of a cross-border regional vision. Thus, for example, the General Manager of the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, announcing construction of a new truck lane at the Lewiston-Queenston bridge, reiterated the need to "keep the truck traffic in Niagara" and added "we have to start thinking and acting as an international zone: We can't afford parochialism" (L-Q Bridge Gets Third Truck Lane, *Niagara Falls Review* May 31, 2000: A1).

Similarly in the spring of 2001 the Canadian Consul General in Buffalo told the Niagara Falls Chamber of Commerce that "to attract tourism and more economic development, you need a thriving region. You need to get beyond the parochialism" (Business Groups Told Border Should Be Invisible, *Niagara Falls Review* March 1, 2001: A6). A related editorial plugged a "one region, two nations" model while reassuring its Canadian readership that cross-border regionalism did not mean that "we'll become Americanized, just that we'll work with our neighbours towards common goals" (They're Playing Our Tune, *Niagara Falls Review* March 2, 2001: A4).

Such efforts were evident in a plan to promote both sides of the Niagara River as a tourist destination under the rubric of the "Two-Nation Vacation" (It's Time For a Two-Nation Vacation, *Niagara Falls Review*, February 10, 2000: A6) and the subsequent creation of a Binational Niagara Tourism Alliance. The Mayor of Fort Erie described cross-border cooperation in tourism as the natural outcome of "a common history, a common language, a common culture and common values" while the President of Niagara Falls Tourism commented that borders "are put on a map so we know who picks up the garbage and who does the policing" but are less important to tourists "looking for a destination experience" (Cross-border Effort Puts All Niagara on Tourism Map, *Niagara Falls Review* June 23, 2001: A3).

A week before September 11, 2001, an article about the growing tourist industry of Niagara Falls, Ontario and de-industrialization of Niagara Falls, New York, quoted the Mayor of Niagara Falls, New York discussing her vision of placing customs outside of the two cities in order to create a borderless Niagara. She stated: "we're really one country—we're so much alike. It would be the country of Canada and the U.S.—a tourist area without the customs booths that clutter the natural beauty" (A Tale of Two Cities, *Niagara Falls Review* September 4, 2001: A1). The vision echoed her personal binationalism because as she explained: "I feel just as Canadian as I do American" adding that she had relatives in Canada who felt the same way. Significantly, however, the newspaper report suggested that neither country was likely to support the envisioned "Niagara Americanada." The idea seemed even less imaginable in the context of post-9/11 re-bordering.

As Wilson and Donnan point out, in the case of long-standing borderlines such as the Canada-U.S. border, while "the boundary line itself may not shift...relations across it as well as within it—between a border people and their political core—may be subject to repeated redefinition" (1998:21). September 11 marked a dramatic "redefinition" of this relationship in Niagara as everyday and official cross-border regionalism confronted U.S.-initiated securitization of the border and subsequent moves to implement a joint Canada-U.S. Smart Border Accord.

Faced with increased border crossing delays and a decline in cross-border traffic in the initial aftermath of 9/11, local political and business leaders worked to maintain the momentum of cross-border economic regionalism. An effort to accommodate the heightened emphasis on securitization within a "borderless" discourse was evident when the District Director for Canada Customs and Revenue Agency in Fort Erie, in the context of a ceremony with U.S. Customs Services to mark International Customs Day, stated that "when it comes to the protection of our communities, or keeping our streets and families safe, there is no border and there are no boundaries" (Border Co-operation Lauded: Customs Contributions Marked at Peace Bridge Ceremony, *Niagara Falls Review* January 30, 2002: A3).

There were signs however, that heightened securitization was also linked to more nationalized responses. As early as the end of October 2001, a *Niagara Falls Review* editorial was urging rejection of a proposed security perimeter around "Fortress America" emphasizing that Canada was an "independent country" and that the plan would "risk losing our own right to control our borders" (Don't Rush to Lock the Border, *Niagara Falls Review*, October 31, 2001: A4). A more concrete manifestation of a renationalizing of local border space was suggested when the Chief Inspector at the Port of Buffalo responded to concerns voiced by the Mayor of Niagara Falls, Ontario about bridge traffic gridlock, by saying "people have to realize they are coming into a different country" (Ease Border Restrictions: Thomson: Fears 10-Mile Traffic Backlog, *Niagara Falls Review* March 16, 2002: A1).

Efforts to distinguish bi-regional from national politics were, nonetheless, ongoing. In the spring of 2003 for example, the General Manager of the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, speaking at a luncheon organized by the Niagara Falls (Ontario) Chamber of Commerce, reassured listeners that Niagara border cities and bridges would "weather the storm" created by strained Canada-U.S. relations over the Iraq war, because their local cross-border relationship was based on a "personal 'people to people' relationship" rather than "heads of state or government" (Border Myths Addressed By Bridge Official, *Niagara Falls Review*, April 10, 2003: A3).

Early in 2004, however, a *Niagara Falls Review* editorial appeared to counsel acceptance of the new reality of a securitized border when it described holiday delays at the border (from a U.S. orange alert) as "the price we're

all paying these days to be kept as safe as possible from a potential terrorist threat" (Holiday Security Threat Status a Reminder of Price of Freedom *Niagara Falls Review*, January 2, 2004: A4). By mid-2004 (when the interviewing for this project was ending), a news report of a meeting of border mayors noted that they were addressing "the challenges of living along the Canada-U.S. border" by focusing on "infrastructure improvements, border security and bi-regional marketing" (Border Mayors Meet With Salci, *Niagara Falls Review* May 14, 2004:. A3). The inclusion of "border security" and the portrayal of border life as a "challenge," rather than an economic opportunity, reflected the impact of securitization on the pre-existing project of cross-border regionalism.

Interviewing Borderlanders

So how did the project of official cross-border regionalism and a changing cross-border political economy articulate with everyday borderlander experiences and identities in Canadian Niagara? Like other studies done in Europe (e.g., Hipfl et al. 2003; Jukarainen 2003), my discussion relies on interviews conducted with young people. From the summer of 2001 through to the summer of 2004, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with individuals who came forward in response to largely university-based recruitment efforts to locate young adults who had grown up in Canadian Niagara border communities.[6] Here I draw upon a sub-set of 42 interviews conducted with individuals who were born between 1976-85 and, at the time of interviewing, ranged in age from 19-27 years (with the majority between 19-21 years). For this cohort, the inception of the Canada-U.S. 1989 Free Trade Agreement coincided with their mid-childhood to mid-teen years (4 to 13), while the 1994 adoption of NAFTA corresponded with their late childhood to late teen years (9 to 18).

The interview phase of the project began (and two of the interviews included here were already conducted), prior to 9/11 but the shifting realities of border life in its aftermath affected the subsequent research design. In response to the fact that those interviewed post-9/11 invariably positioned their retrospective narratives of childhood and teenage years against a changing present of border securitization, the original focus on childhood and teenage years was expanded to allow for some exploration of post-9/11 experiences and perceptions.

Here I analyze interviewee responses to direct questions about everyday links to, experiences with and perceptions of the immediate other (American) side; open-ended questions about the significance of growing up in a border region; and more abstract questions about border identities. Like others who have explored borderland life through interviews, I am limited by the fact that experiences and views shared in the interview setting are not augmented with observations derived from conventional ethnography. As Donnan and Wilson note, "it is easy to ask people about their identities, but more difficult to discern how their actions and identities are related" (1999:65).

One of the other challenges of this project, was the need to work against apparently self-evident national boundaries and identities. In an attempt to counter the pitfalls of methodological nationalism, "the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002:302), interviews began with more concrete questions about everyday border life before moving to questions exploring a range of spatialized (local, regional, national, transnational) as well as classed, gendered and racialized or ethnicized identities. Even so, constructions of nationalized space, people and identity in the form of "Canadianness" or "Americanness" clearly dominated the interview exchanges.

At the beginning of the interview, respondents were invited to outline their family educational, occupational and cultural backgrounds. A combination of self identification and reported parental (or other guardian) education levels and occupations suggests that roughly one-quarter of the group came from upper middle class backgrounds, one-quarter from lower middle class backgrounds and about half from working class backgrounds. Several of the respondents in the latter two categories emphasized their status as first generation university students.[7]

Interviewee descriptions of their "cultural backgrounds" revealed that seven had a parent who was either American or a Canadian-American dual citizen (four held dual Canadian-American citizenship), a fifth had an American father but did not hold dual citizenship while the sixth and seventh had a father and mother respectively who were dual Canadian-American citizens. About 60% of the sample (26 out of 42) identified at least one parent (and many had both) who had grown up in the Canadian Niagara region. Four mentioned parents with French Canadian or indigenous backgrounds. Four had at least one immigrant parent and two had immigrated to Canada as young children. The majority of interviewees did not explicitly racialize themselves, but physical appearance combined with descriptions of "cultural backgrounds" suggests that most would be considered or consider themselves white with only the two who had been born outside the country likely to be considered or consider themselves to be non-white, non-Aboriginal "visible minorities."

Everyday Cross-Border Regionalism

Questions about border life began with queries about childhood and teenage border crossings. The responses revealed that these young people grew up with social and economic local cross-border linkages that produced an experience of "ordinary" transnationalism (Strüver 2005:326). As indicated for some, childhood and teenage experiences of border life were shaped by kin ties to the American other side. For four of the seven with a parent who was either American or a Canadian-American dual citizen, there were regular visits to American relatives located immediately across the river in Western New York. A fifth interviewee travelled across the river weekly with his family to attend what had been his American mother's church before marriage. In addition to these cases, another eight interviewees mentioned ongoing visiting with relatives living on the other side of the Niagara River.

Other kinds of trans-border social ties were forged by one respondent who had crossed the river daily as a child to attend an American elementary school and made many friendships in the process. Others got to know children attending Canadian schools from the American side. Two developed strong friendships with Americans who had rented summer cottages on the Canadian side and others maintained connections to transnational religious and cultural communities through trips to Buffalo.

Those without these kinds of social connections had histories of cross-border mobility linked to shopping and recreation. The childhood years of this cohort were marked by a relatively strong Canadian dollar as well as the introduction of a Canadian Goods and Services Tax that increased domestic prices and encouraged trips to the U.S. Interviewees recalled the frequency with which they travelled as children with family or friends to purchase items such as gas, groceries, clothes and shoes immediately across the river. Several also described attending major league hockey, football and baseball games in Buffalo and sports events at local U.S. colleges. Some crossed the border for children's sports leagues or competitions (for example soccer, lacrosse, dance etc.), while others attended schools with ski clubs that offered regular cross-border trips to American hills. Other cross-border childhood activities included trips to local U.S. amusement parks and accessing cheaper or more convenient flights from the Buffalo airport.[8]

That cross-border mobility for these latter activities was largely shaped by exchange rates was clear in stories about how such trips declined as the Canadian dollar weakened relative to the American dollar in the early to mid-1990s. While some continued to cross as teens (to shop, visit bars and clubs, attend sports events and concerts), the economic benefits were less clear. Those from wealthier backgrounds could still take advantage of goods and services on the other side but for most interviewees, border crossings became less frequent as they moved into young adulthood. The changing exchange rates, in turn, encouraged Americans to visit the Canadian side and many interviewees had the experience of serving American tourists in their first jobs as young workers in the tourism and retail sectors.

In the years following 9/11, a combination of increased securitization and other factors reduced cross-border traffic in both directions.[9] Many of the interviewees emphasized that their already reduced crossings became even less frequent due to the perceived hassle of longer lines, more prolonged questioning and new document requirements. That the deployment of new forms of "smart" border control and surveillance augmented already stratified mobilities and enclosures (Cunningham and Heyman 2004) was clear in the accounts of the two interviewees born outside the country who explained how reports of profiling at the border led them to curtail crossing into the U.S. altogether.[10]

Everday Border Identities

I now want to consider how histories of ordinary transnationalism and more recent developments were combined with borderlanders' descriptions of their positioning vis-à-vis the American other side and fellow co-nationals. I begin by discussing the more minor, but nonetheless significant theme that identified borderlanders on both sides of the river as "pretty much the same." I then discuss how this was often linked to a problematized "Americanization." I follow this with an examination of the more prominent claim that the two sides of the Niagara River were marked by nationalized difference and consider how this latter construction articulated with classed and racialized hierarchies and exclusions.

"Pretty Much the Same"

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the theme of cross-border cultural similarity was present in some of the accounts of those with cross-border kinship ties. One dual citizen who grew up in Fort Erie in a working class household with an American parent who commuted to work in the U.S., described how as a child the border crossing was "not a big deal at all...I didn't even really think of it as crossing into another country. I just thought we were going over to Buffalo" (46). Another son of an American father from a working class family in Niagara Falls, Ontario suggested that the other side "seemed like it was another Canada...

the only difference was that we had to cross this bridge to get there...the people all seemed the same, we all spoke the same" (45). A young woman from a similar class background, whose uncle and aunt were in a "mixed [Canadian-American] marriage," suggested that "they should just make Fort Erie [her home town] a Canadian/American town 'cause that's what it's like anyway" (19).

Such comments were not restricted to those with family ties to the other side of the border. A young woman from St. Catharines from a wealthier background who crossed primarily for shopping and recreation as a child also commented that at that time, "it didn't...register...sometimes that you were in a completely other country" (16). "The differences," said a young man from a lower middle class family in Niagara-on-the-Lake, "weren't really significant...a lot of things are just the same as over here...there shouldn't really be a border in that sense. We're all just people, we speak the same language [and] except for the currency we're pretty much the same" (37).

One young woman who spent her working class childhood in Fort Erie and crossed frequently for a variety of reasons which included shopping and attending events at a Buffalo aboriginal centre described how "when you go over it doesn't seem as if you are in another country" (38). When asked to elaborate, she acknowledged that crossing the border meant "being interrogated and stuff" but because the other side was "so close" and because "you have people over there that you talk to, [and have] developed relationships with, it doesn't feel like 'oh my God, I'm in another country.'"[11]

"Americanized" Borderlanders

Several suggested that cross border similarities were the outcome of an asymmetric cultural flow that resulted in an "Americanization" of Canadian Niagara border residents relative to other parts of the province and country. The respondent who described the other side as "another Canada" for example, also pointed to the Americanizing effect of the U.S. media on Canadian borderlanders when he stated that "we watch the same [television] shows as them [those on the other side]...we have all the American channels, I'd say we're as much American as a Canadian can be. So when they [from the American side of the river] come over [to the Canadian side] I really don't even notice the difference" (45).

Another male interviewee from a lower middle class background and with a dual citizen father, claimed that "living in Fort Erie, I don't feel Canadian...it seems almost like you might as well call it Buffalo sometimes." He went on to refer to the allegedly "Americanized" speech patterns of borderlanders on the Canadian side reporting his own experience of being teased by relatives living closer to Toronto who would say to him: "Wow, where are you from?" (35).

Several others also made reference to being told by others from outside the Niagara region that they sounded "American." Some described how they became increasingly conscious of their apparent deviance from a standard "Canadian" speech variety when they attended the regional university and students from other parts of Ontario made negative comments about their speech. A young woman from a working class household in Niagara-on-the-Lake, for example, described how "a few people from way up North...they're like 'you guys sound like Americans' and you're like 'no, no I don't sound like an American'" (15).[12]

As this comment suggests, "sounding American" was experienced as potentially stigmatizing. Indeed this individual added "I think that being so close to the States, we [border residents] don't realize it...but we...kind of become them [Americans]. Like our language is kind of like slang or whatever." Another interviewee with an upper middle class background from Niagara Falls described how students from outside the region would "tell me I'm American." The experience, she said:

> opened my eyes big time because I made friends with people from...all throughout Ontario and they just comment on how we [students from the border region] speak...they sound totally different from me and my family and they're just [saying], "you guys are so influenced by the American culture and you don't even realize it." [34]

This individual went on to suggest that these students had "more Canadian national identity" while she felt "like a mix, I don't know what I am." Experiencing this "mixture" as problematic, she was making efforts to remove her own and her sister's "twang" because, she explained, "I want that distinctiveness, I want to be recognized as a Canadian."

A corollary of being "Americanized" was a sense of being "less Canadian" than other co-nationals. The individual from Fort Erie whose father was a dual citizen described encountering university students from outside the Niagara region and thinking "man they're so Canadian" (35), while another previously quoted male dual citizen from Fort Erie also contrasted the border region and border life to more "authentic" Canadian spaces and practices:

> I went out east for a little bit, I went up north...and I mean, those are Canadians, you know what I mean?

> They watch the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation]...I didn't even know what the CBC was. I mean now I do obviously, studied it in school and everything, but...they listen to Canadian music, they watch Canadian TV, they're really Canadian. [46]

While these narratives of cross-border similarity might be understood as echoing the discourse of official cross-border regionalism, they were not explicitly linked to the project of greater cross-border economic co-operation. Only one young man from Niagara-on-the-Lake (who was from an unusually well off background) paralleled the more official discourse when he described both sides of the river as sharing "many important issues" such as international bridges, trade and cross-border shopping. In response to a question about the impact of a border upbringing, he also linked border life to a greater cosmopolitanism when he suggested that living at the border made one "more aware of international issues" and that Americans living on the immediate other side had "more awareness of Canadians and Canadian identity than people that live further in" (25).

While his account suggested a level (cross-border) playing field of "internationalism," other respondents offered a more commonly accepted view that an asymmetrical flow of information resulted in Canadian borderlanders knowing a lot about Americans, but (as one previously quoted young man from Niagara-on-the-Lake put it) Americans being "clueless about us...even though they live right on the border here" (37). This perception and the attribution of cross-border similarities to a problematized "Americanization" suggest a more complex relationship to official cross-border regionalism.

Cross-Border Difference: Nationalized Culture, Class and Race

While some emphasized cross-border similarities, a more prominent theme was that of cross-border difference that many argued was immediately apparent upon crossing the Niagara River. As one male respondent from an upper middle class background in Niagara Falls stated, "it just perplexes me as to how different the two sides are" (44). Sometimes this was discussed in localized terms as when a young man from a working class background in Niagara Falls, Ontario made a point of distinguishing the immediate other side from the United States as a whole. He commented that "the United States itself can be a nice country, it's just that particular city [Niagara Falls, New York] isn't great; they have a really high crime rate and there's a lot of poverty" (48).

More often, however, the cross-border difference was described in more nationalized terms. This was apparent in the account of the "perplexed" young man quoted previously. This respondent emphasized that as a borderlander he had experience with the different American culture across the river, and that this experience distinguished him from fellow Canadian students who had less exposure to Americans and were therefore more likely to "put them all in one group" (44). His experience with a different American culture, he suggested, did not make him Americanized; in fact he explicitly rejected the suggestion that he had an American accent. Instead he claimed that he spoke "normal Canadian" and that his border upbringing probably made him "more Canadian" than non-borderlander students. This latter claim was based on the assertion that as a borderlander he had a greater awareness of American culture and that such an awareness of cultural difference was a key Canadian trait. As he put it:

> I almost feel more Canadian living on the border. Because I mean, I met so many people this year [at university] that are from farther inside of Ontario. And I know they think they're Canadian, but really, to me, Canadian is being aware of other cultures and... embracing them. [44]

This respondent then simultaneously identified the border as a marker of cultural difference and positioned himself as a borderlander at the core of, rather than peripheral to, Canadianness (defined in terms of a nationalized cultural awareness and tolerance) because of his relationship to this difference (for critical analysis of the notion of cultural tolerance as national trait see Mackey 1999).

While many alleged contrasts between the two sides were discussed in the interviews, constructions of nationalized cross-border difference consistently included references to economic disparities. The male respondent discussed above, for example, while emphasizing the distinct "cultures" of Niagara Falls, Ontario and Niagara Falls, New York provided as evidence the visible poverty of the immediate other side. As he described it "as soon as you go across that bridge...you know you're in the United States because the shops are boarded up...It's a very different feeling...you go over and it's like you're in a ghetto almost" (44).

Another working class male from Fort Erie recalled his childhood memories of cross border shopping and how "every time you're over there [other side of the river], there's always people in the parking lot at Tops [store] asking for money and we always used to find that strange because you didn't see that over here" (13). One young woman who had grown up lower middle class in Niagara-

on-the-Lake linked poverty to danger in her description of how upon crossing the border she would "notice right away that it was a lot dirtier and less safe" so she would head "for the mall and then [get] out of there" (47). This respondent stated "I'm definitely glad that I grew up on this side. That's one thing I can say, just looking at the other side...they have no money. You can see the clear difference."

The alleged economic differences were clearly nationalized in the description of one working class male from Niagara Falls who recalled how when he walked across the bridge at Niagara Falls the evident poverty of the other side led him to conclude that "Canada has the advantage over the States, and you can visually see that upon crossing the river. Right off the bat, you can see that" (33). Another working class female respondent from Niagara Falls, Ontario also linked her experience of border crossing to a more generalized patriotism when she recalled the experience of "going over to the United States and seeing the poorer areas... I was always very proud to be a Canadian largely based on that" (22).

While less common than references to cross-border economic disparities, there were enough references to racialized difference by white respondents to suggest that this was also significant in local constructions of cross-border space. A working class male from Niagara Falls, Ontario, for example, recalled the "stark" contrast between the two sides of the border and thinking, as a child crossing into the U.S., "wow, there are a lot of black people who live here" (28). The son of a dual citizen who had discussed the issues of Americanization and the lack of any "culture shock" when crossing the border, also noted how the presence of "black people" in Buffalo contrasted with the "very white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant" make up of his home town of Fort Erie (35).

The role of class and race in constructions of the other side is illuminated in some of the apparently contradictory accounts of interviewees. A working class female from Niagara Falls who had relatives on the other side of the river, for example, suggested in one part of the interview that she did not think of the immediate other side as part of the United States because "they're just so close to us that they're kind of a distant part of Canada" (43). Later, however, she was discussing the "scary" experience of being in a "lower class area" on the American side, and how her parents "would lock the [car] doors... [because] being in a different country, you never know what could happen." Here the role of class in shaping the construction of the other side as an extension of the nation (i.e., a "distant Canada") versus a negatively experienced "different country" becomes clearer.

Similarly, a lower middle class respondent from Niagara Falls, Ontario in one part of the interview emphasized cross-border similarities describing how those on the other side "look the same, they talk the same, it's the same TV, everything's the same, except, you know, a little bit of an accent, but it's really the same" (3). Elsewhere however, she emphasized cross border differences including an observation that on the Canadian side "everyone" was white while the American side was "white and black." Likewise, a young woman from a wealthier background in Chippawa illustrated ostensibly nationalized differences between the two sides by contrasting the "middle class" neighbourhood with the "really seedy neighbourhood" in Buffalo where her family went to buy her some tap shoes as a child. She recalled the latter area being "like a different country... dirty and ... really scary." The presence of "more black people" on the other side, moreover, led her to "being a little intimidated" and feeling "like I had a Canadian stamp on my forehead" (9).

These comments demonstrate how attributions of cross-border difference by white interviewees invoked class and race in ways that produced nationalized constructions of "Canadianness" as white and (at least) middle class. The emphasis on the poverty of the U.S. side drew attention away from class disparities on the Canadian side of the river while constructions of a "white" Canada worked against recognition of a multiracial region (most strikingly the historic presence of African-Canadians in Niagara).[13] That nationalized, classed and racialized constructions of cross-border difference were hierarchized and exclusionary moreover was clear in the suggestion of one respondent from Niagara Falls quoted earlier, that (despite her own cross-border kinship links to the contrary) there was little in the way of cross-border dating or intermarriage due to negative "stereotypes" about those on the other side. As she put it: "it's a big stereotype or a big generalization, but the people over there? We just...don't associate with them, do you know what I mean?" (43).

As mentioned, the lived experience of this cohort was that of a shift from extensive cross-border mobility when they were younger to a situation of reduced crossing in the present, and some described their sense of positive difference from the U.S. side as something that had emerged more strongly as they got older. One young woman from a wealthier background in Chippawa suggested that while the two sides had seemed "blurred" during her childhood this was no longer the case and a wealthier male resident of Niagara Falls reported that the increased questioning at the border after 9/11 made the U.S. side seem more "foreign" than before.

Just as the regional elites were grappling with post-9/11 securitization that posed new challenges to the project of cooperation in trade, transportation and tourism, the everyday experience of reduced cross-border mobility combined with hierarchized and exclusionary social boundaries appeared to be linked to a heightened social distance from the American other side for these Canadian borderlanders.[14]

"American-Canadians" in the Canadian Borderland?

In his discussion of Mexican Americans living on the U.S. side of the border at El Paso, Vila notes that their (stigmatized) Mexican identity is both ethnic and national and affected by the fact that "the [Mexican] *source* of their difference is always present" (2003b:138). Several of the Niagara borderlanders with close ties to the other side also suggested that there were challenges associated with claiming an "American-Canadian" identity in the context of the Canadian borderland.

One dual citizen discussed earlier, for example, recounted how when he decided to attend university on the Canadian side after a period of study in Buffalo, he felt that this would require adopting a more exclusive (i.e., non-American) Canadian identity and told himself "I'm a Canadian. I was born in Canada. I have to lose this love I have for the States." Despite this resolution he described a struggle to contain the "strong influences" of his "American blood" especially when faced with what he felt was "anti-American feeling" at the Canadian university (46).

A similar lack of ease with an American-Canadian identity was apparent in the commentary of another dual citizen from a working class background who had spent part of his childhood on the American side and continued to visit family there. On the one hand, this respondent suggested that the Niagara border region represented a mixture of Americanness and Canadianness and as a result, he noted that "if they were to say 'we're now claiming Niagara region international,' it would not surprise me" (7). On the other hand, his experiences of being called "Yankee" on the Canadian side of the border, and "the Canadian" on the American side of the border challenged his attempt to understand himself in terms of a less exclusive binationalism. His inclination at the time of the interview was, in fact, to try to resolve a pervasive ambivalence about his national identity by moving back to the United States.

Not surprisingly, this latter respondent emphasized his particular enjoyment of an annual cross-border Fort Erie-Buffalo Friendship Festival (a product of official cross-border regionalism) because, according to him, at this Festival Americans and Canadians could be seen "hand in hand, putting away citizenship and just wanting to have fun." While for him the cross-border festival embodied a positive bi- or even post-national "togetherness," he contrasted the mood of the festival with the rest of the year, when he claimed people on the Canadian side would make negative comments about "those damn Americans."

These commentaries point to the ways in which Canadianness and Americanness could be experienced as being in tension with one another and even mutually exclusive by Canadian borderlanders with close links to the other side. The "awkward" even fraught positioning of these particular respondents reveals that Americanness was not constructed as an ethnicity in ways similar to other hyphenated Canadian identities (e.g., Italian-Canadian).[15] The inability to ethnicize Americanness is linked to the larger project of Canadian nationalism in which, as Mackey points out, "the constant attempt to construct an authentic, differentiated, and bounded [Canadian] identity...is often shaped through comparison with, and demonization of, the United States" (1999:145).

At the local level, zero-sum constructions of national identity articulated with constructions of inferiorized class and race in ways that further discouraged cosmopolitan claims of hybridity. This was clear in the comments of one young woman from a working class family who discussed why she did not publicly disclose her kinship links to the other side of the river. While denial of her American grandmother made her "feel bad," she explained that having heard her American relatives described as "hillbillies" she just couldn't "bring herself" to admit her connections to this stigmatized identity (40). A dual citizen from a well off background meanwhile described his sensitivity to what he experienced as anti-Americanism in the Canadian borderland. His example of how those on the Canadian side would say things like "well I might not have a job, I might not be doing very well, but at least I'm not like the blacks in Buffalo" (11) suggests again how constructions of cross-border difference were classed and raced.

These accounts point to how nationalized, classed and racialized hierarchies were mutually constitutive and how exclusions of the border region worked against claims to a positive hybrid "American-Canadian" identity. Those most eligible to make such claims felt pressure to emphasize a more exclusively Canadian identity that could be distanced from the locally stigmatized identities of Americanness, poverty and blackness.

Conclusion

Turbeville and Bradbury suggest that "as free trade and increased economic integration reconceptualize North America into a continental amalgam, it is in the borderlands where the greatest changes are taking place and where the success or failure of such economic policies will ultimately be determined" (2005:268). While this may overstate the significance of border regions, a case can be made that the everyday experiences and identities of borderlanders are significant for political efforts aimed at facilitating (or resisting) official cross-border regionalism and a broader North American deep integration and securitization (see Gilbert 2005, 2007).[16]

The material gathered from young borderlanders on the Canadian side of the Canada-U.S. border at Niagara parallels the findings of scholars such as Vila and Durrschmidt insofar as there are clearly multiple narratives of the borderland that include official cross-border regionalism and varied everyday constructions of cross-border similarity and difference. Despite histories of ordinary transnationalism moreover, the interviews also revealed more exclusively (classed and racialized) national identity than cosmopolitan hybridity. The limited space available for a hybridized "American-Canadian" identity (beyond the problematized identity of Americanized Canadian) in particular, was paradoxically, made most clear in the accounts of some of those with the more significant cross-border social ties.

This article supports anthropological and other border studies that emphasize the ongoing salience of nationalized and other articulating identities at state boundaries thereby challenging simplistic claims of a "borderless" world. The continuing strength of Canadianness (as opposed to an incipient "North Americanness") in a Canadian borderland which serves as a premiere tourist destination and major trade and transportation corridor for North America, raises important questions about the dynamics and limits of local engagement with official projects of cross-border regionalism and wider bi-and trilateral North American integration advocated by national and continental elites.

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Notes

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2 A growing literature documents everyday practices and identities at the "paradigmatic" U.S.-Mexico border (e.g., Alvarez 1995:449) as well as border life in the context of both the territorial expansion and deepening integration of the European Union (e.g., Wilson and Donnan 1998; Donnan and Haller 2000; Meinhof 2003; Stuver 2005). Related scholarship documents changing border spaces in the context of the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Soviet Union (e.g., Paasi 1999; Berdahl 1999; Pelkmans 2006) and there is growing work on borders and borderlands in Asia, Africa and South America (e.g., Cunningham and Heyman 2004).

3 Grinde notes that for the Iroquois, the Canada-U.S. border is an "unnatural notion" that impedes unity and "serves foremost as a symbol of their oppression by colonizing national governments that have sought to destroy and/or to ignore their existence" (2002:178). Aboriginal issues were highlighted in Peace Bridge protests and debates over its development (Native Group Seeks Role in Gateway, *Niagara Falls Review*, October 18, 1999: A5; Natives Plan Peaceful Blockade of Peace Bridge, *Niagara Falls Review*, February 3, 2000: A9). See also Williamson and MacDonald 1998.

4 A Continental One trade corridor linking Toronto to Miami through Niagara was promoted as a "vital link for the eastern seaboard in the free-trade era economy" (Pataki Pitches Federal Cooperation to Prop Up Border *Niagara Falls Review* June 27, 2001: A3) and politicians on the Canadian side have lobbied for a new mid-peninsula highway to facilitate this project (Linking of Trade Routes Beneficial to Canada, U.S. *Niagara Falls Review*, June 23, 2000: A6).

5 This process which involved the Bridge Commission, local, regional, state and provincial and national political leaders from both sides of the border, U.S. courts and various lobby groups, was being played out throughout the period that the interviews were conducted. For further background and an update regarding a new Peace Bridge project see http://www.peacebridgex.com/project_bg.html.

6 This paper is based on a larger project that interviewed people in Canadian Niagara about their childhood and teenage experiences of border life. Recruitment methods involved posting signs on a university campus and announcements in first and second year undergraduate courses. Signs posted in community libraries were less successful. Because the interviewees were self-selected they did not constitute a random sample. A total of 51 interviews were conducted from May 2001 to August 2004. Older interviewees were excluded to produce the sub-set of 42 interviews analyzed in this paper. The 42 interviews considered here were with 24 female and 18 male students who grew up on the Canadian side of the border. Eighteen had grown up in Niagara Falls, eight in Fort Erie, and eight in either Niagara-on-the Lake, Queenston or Chippawa. The remaining eight were from communities a little further away from

the border such as Port Colborne, Welland, Thorold, Fenwick and St. Catharines. The interviews analyzed here are numbered as follows: 3, 5, 7- 9, 11-13, 15-16, 18-19, 22-51.

7 Some described their class background (using phrases such as "low income," "working class," "blue collar," "low to middle" and "upper middle class") but for the rest I am relying on their responses to questions about parental education and occupation. My analysis suggests that approximately ten of 42 could be described as upper-middle class based on at least one parent described as having university education or an occupation that required such a credential; an additional 12 of 42 were from broadly lower middle class backgrounds (based on at least one parent reported as having some form of post-secondary education or training or occupation requiring such education or training); while the remaining 20 of 42 (reporting parents with partial college, high school or partial high school education or corresponding occupations) were from families that were broadly working class. Canadian Niagara is below the provincial and national averages in terms of university attainment (Niagara Economic Development Corporation 2005:18).

8 I discuss childhood border crossings in more detail elsewhere (Helleiner 2007).

9 Ongoing U.S. security alerts, SARS and "mad cow" scares combined with a stronger Canadian dollar, higher Canadian gas prices and uncertainty over border crossing document requirements to weaken the Canadian border tourist economy in the post-9/11 period.

10 For more discussion of stratified border crossings at the Canada-U.S. border see Bhandar 2004; Pratt 2005; Sparke 2006; and Helleiner In press.

11 Aboriginal status was significant to the experience of border crossing in other ways that I do not discuss here but see note 3.

12 For a local press report on linguistic research on border speech, see American Words Checked at Border: Canadians Along Border Retain Linguistic Identity, *Niagara Falls Review* May 5, 2001: A5.

13 The ways in which Aboriginal and "visible minority" borderlanders position themselves or are positioned within this construction of white–black racialized space requires attention as does the suggestion here of deeply gendered border experiences and identities.

14 A wider context for these findings is offered by surveys which documented an increase in Canadian anti-Americanism in this period (Pew Research Center 2005:15).

15 The challenge of American-Canadianness as lived experience in the border region was also apparent in accounts of border crossing itself. While dual Canadian-American citizenship was considered a potentially valuable economic resource, it was nonetheless described as a source of hassle at local border crossings.

16 Counter hegemonic cross-border activities "from below" require separate discussion but would include cross-border labour organizing and the activities of some anti-globalization, refugee, peace and First Nations activists in the Niagara region. See Bandy and Smith (2005) for discussion of cross-border counter-hegemonic movements.

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