(In)Hospitable Encounters in Chicanx and Latinx Literature, Culture, and Thought

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First published 2025

ISBN: 978-1-032-73350-0 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-73352-4 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-46379-5 (ebk)

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Dispatches from the Border

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003463795-5

The Open Access version of this chapter was funded by MCIU/AEI/FEDER, EU and the R&D Program of the Principado de Asturias.

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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Introduction

In *The Line Becomes a River* (2018), written and published during the Trump era, Francisco Cantú offers a particularly interesting vantage point to look at border necropolitics, with its attendant dehumanization and devaluation of migrants' lives, their disposability, dismissal, and erasure.[1] Unlike other Latinx authors who chiefly engage this issue from the perspective of their fictional immigrant characters and their ominous experiences on their way to, or upon arrival at, the US-Mexico border, Cantú provides a personal insight *from inside the system* itself, as he worked for the US Border Patrol, first as a field agent and then in intelligence, for four years (2008 to 2012). In his narrative, the author exposes border necropolitics and its fission strategies (Bauman 2017), in contrast to which he advocates encounter, human recognition, dialogue (Adloff 2019; Appiah 2007; Wise and Noble 2016), and a space of identification where convivial solidarities (Gilroy 2004) come into play, pointing toward commonalities beyond boundaries.

Writing has been Cantú's way of chronicling his own involvement with an institution that he acknowledges is largely indifferent to human life and an opportunity "to grapple with all the ways I had normalized the layered violence that is inseparable from border enforcement" (254), a violence that eventually alienated him from his own self. Cantú's narrative is not just an account of his personal involvement in the Border Patrol and his experience as an agent, it is also a philosophical, sociological, and historical account of how, and the extent to which, violence has impacted specific people, different locations—the borderlands in particular—and society at large, and how his job ended up wasting him as a human being. He intersperses references to articles, reports, film, and radio, as well as quotes from several works and authors—from Gloria Anzaldúa to Judith Butler, Carl Jung to Cristina Rivera Garza, Sergio González Rodríguez, or poet Sara Uribe—with his own recollections about his time in the Border Patrol workforce. On the one hand, these allusions help to contextualize the issue

DOI: 10.4324/9781003463795-5

at hand—violence, aggression, hostility—and, on the other, expand on and sustain his own view on it.

The Line Becomes a River lays bare the multiple ways in which different forms of violence ultimately generate human waste—in the most literal sense of the word through the thousands of migrants' deaths whose corpses are left to rot in the desert—or wasted lives, on a more emotional, psychological, and societal plane. It also shows that the author's partial healing of the moral injury that his involvement in the border war as a law enforcement agent had inflicted on him was only possible when he left his job for civilian life and fully embraced the idea of solidarity and hospitality. His evolution, as shown in the pages of his narrative, proves that "hospitality is a dynamic act of identity formation that finds growth through compassion and caring" (Hamington 2010, 26) and "has the potential for constituent transformations" (2010, 28). Since he left the Border Patrol, Cantú has sought to raise awareness toward and transform, in whatever small scale possible, the situation of (im)migrants/undocumented 'aliens,' people like the ones he featured in his 'dispatches.' For this purpose, as we can read on the back cover of the book, he is donating a portion of his proceeds from the sale of his book to organizations "working to end death, disappearance, and mass incarceration in the borderlands" (2018).

Hospitality and Hostility on the US Border

In the third article of *To Perpetual Peace* (1795), Kant developed his notion of universal hospitality and peaceful coexistence; there he defended the idea of a cosmopolitan *right*, and not just philanthropy, in the establishment of juridical policies on the part of the state in relation to the visitor/foreigner. This right to hospitality is, for him, what defines cosmopolitanism as a world political project where hospitality and peace go together in the making of a community of peoples; it is this sort of peace "that demands the protection of strangers" (Lazos 2018, 328): "In this sphere," Kant states, "hospitality signifies the claim of a stranger entering foreign territory to be treated by its owner without hostility. The latter may send him away again, if this can be done without causing his death; but, so long as he conducts himself peaceably, he must not be treated as an enemy" (2016, 137) and must not have their vulnerability increased.

Although the framework of (mandatory) hospitality developed by the German thinker in his philosophical sketch has been the backbone of most of the political and legal codes of hospitality in the Western world, the situation on the US-Mexico border contradicts his concept and his call to protect foreigners, given that the state itself, through its laws and security agencies, curtails the immigrants' civil and human rights, and that the conditions of their rejection often lead to their demise. In *The Line Becomes a River*, Cantú overtly refers to this kind of situation that he witnessed while

an agent in the Border Patrol: he recounts how his coworkers would often "scatter migrant groups in remote areas and destroy their water supplies without ever being held to account" (2018, 261); how they would slash their bottles and drain their water, dumping their backpacks and piling their food and clothes "to be crushed and pissed on and stepped over, strewn across the desert and set ablaze" (33). In the same line of action, he acknowledges that the agency's practices consisted in

> divert[ing] crossers through some of the most deadly and difficult-to-traverse terrain in North America in order to provide agents with every conceivable advantage over those seeking entry into the U.S., people they are made to understand as *criminals* in the same way that soldiers are made to understand those positioned against them as *enemies*.
>
> (2018, 261–62, emphasis in original)

These terms—and the practices that accompany them—clearly relate to a logic rooted in the dehumanizing rhetoric of war and evince that the political order has reconstituted itself as a form of organization for death (Mbembe 2019, 7).

Dehumanization and necropower underlie US immigration policies; they foreground a liberal framework of human ontology that establishes exclusionary, restrictive conceptions of what qualifies as human, or, as Judith Butler expresses it, "who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death" (2004, xv). And thus the precarious lives of the immigrants suffer "the violence of derealization" (2004, 33): their lives are not considered real lives at all and cannot be humanized because they fit no dominant frame for the human. This derealization of immigrants' lives was made openly manifest when Doris Meissner, commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service from 1993 to 2000, was asked by an interviewer to look back on the policy of deterrence (Prevention through Deterrence) in light of the stunning number of migrants' deaths: "I will be absolutely frank with you … The idea of abandoning any kind of strengthened border enforcement because of that consequence was not a point of serious discussion" (in Cantú 2018, 258). With these words, she was explicitly admitting that the sustained loss of migrant lives on the country's doorstep every year was not enough cause for the government to reevaluate policy because those lives had no social or political import. According to Cantú, her admission also revealed "the extent to which the desert has been weaponized against migrants, and lays bare the fact that the hundreds who continue to die there every year are losing their lives *by design*" (259, emphasis in original).

The examples above radically refute Kant's concept of hospitality and highlight the paradoxes underlying the theory and the practice of

hospitality, the conflict between natural right and juridical right, between the laws of conditional hospitality—with their limits, powers, duties—and the law of absolute, unlimited, or unconditional hospitality, in Jacques Derrida's terms (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000). It would be Derrida precisely, along with Emmanuel Levinas, who would move the discussion from the field of rights (politics) to that of ethics (humanity), or in Gideon Baker's expressive compound, *ethicopolitics* (2009). For Levinas, the foundation for political and social life is predicated on the welcoming and being welcomed by Others. Likewise, Derrida departed from the "categorical imperative"—that stipulates a conditional welcome—from which derives the Kantian law of universal hospitality—for his law of hospitality is absolute: it begins with an unquestioning welcome, an unconditional reception that requires that the host opens their home and gives place to the "absolute, unknown, anonymous other" without asking for reciprocity. Unlike Kant's notion of hospitality, the law of unconditional hospitality commands, according to Derrida, "a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 25). To the French philosopher, as to Levinas, hospitality is rather a question of ethics: in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, he affirms that, for the Lithuanian philosopher, "hospitality is ethicity itself" (1997, 50), and, in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, he claims that "hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethics among others … *Ethics is hospitality*" (2001, 17, emphasis in original). Hospitality is ultimately an ethical marker both for an individual and a country, a human virtue, and a part of the human condition.

Emotions and Necropower: The Other as Enemy

Although Levinas maintains that "hospitality precedes any hostility and that welcoming is prior to war insofar as the ethical call of the Other is constitutive of and precedes ontology" (Aristarkhova 2012, 164), various kinds of violence necessarily condition every action of hospitality, which derive from the host's exercise of power and sovereignty over his or her house or country,[2] a power that the US administration has upheld over migrants knocking on the country's doors. Consequently, in the southern border and beyond, the right to universal hospitality has been "sacrificed on the altar of state interest" (Benhabib 2004, 177). In response to the alleged insecurity threatening the well-being of Americans and the order of society, the unhospitable US state has increasingly securitized the border, creating a never-ending loop between cause and effect which proves Achille Mbembe's assertion that "the security state thrives on a *state of insecurity*, which it participates in fomenting and to which it claims to be the solution" (2019, 54). With Donald Trump's signature promise of building a "big, beautiful wall" on the border, the former president further

contributed to the dangerization of the Latinx immigrants, thus intensifying anger and animosity, which called in turn for more securitization and harder anti-immigrant measures.[3] Meanwhile, racism, xenophobia, and chauvinistic nationalism have built up on the dehumanization of incomers fleeing poverty and violence in their countries and seeking the chance of a better future.

Emotions such as antipathy, anger, hate, and above all fear are at the core of the negative reactions displayed by some US nationals against immigrants. In *Wasted Lives. Modernity and Its Outcasts* (2020/2004), Zygmunt Bauman applies Bakhtin's concept of 'cosmic fear' to the current migrant crisis. Bauman affirms that "vulnerability and uncertainty are the two qualities of the human condition out of which 'official fear' is moulded" (46) and "the principal raison d'être of all political power" (50). Consequently, anti-immigrant attitudes and policies proliferate as a safe outlet for the release of anxiety and apprehensions that stem from existential insecurities, from rising violence and fears for security, which have increased with transnational mobility, particularly of racialized, poverty-ridden outsiders. In this context of unknown, unforeseen, and uncontrollable forces, human vulnerability and uncertainty tend to move people to antipathy toward strangers and to build walls to protect themselves from the danger posed by "an ideal 'deviant other'," a target provided by governments for their "carefully selected campaign issues," which conveniently cater to the fears of society (56).

A theorist of emotions, Sara Ahmed has also dealt extensively with the workings of emotions and affect and their relation to personal and community/national identity: how both call into question the integrity of the subject, how they are involved in the very making of boundaries (2005, 102), and how they "work to align the subject and community in specific and determinate ways" (104): the privileged white body as the-body-at-home (105) versus the dark Latinx Other in the specific US context. Ahmed claims that it is through proximity and affective encounters that both subjects and objects are perceived as having attributes, certain characteristics that, on the one hand, give the subject an identity and, on the other, set them apart from some others: "It is through moving towards and away from others or objects that individual bodies become aligned with some others and against other others, a form of alignment that temporarily 'surfaces' as the skin of a community" (104). She affirms that it is the emotion of hate that aligns the particular white body "with the bodily form of the community" (104), an emotion that "functions to substantiate the threat of invasion and contamination in the dirty bodies of strangers" (105). The stranger's body is consequently reduced to and recognized as "the body out of place," the one that fails to inhabit the national ideal of a community "made up of other 'me's,' of others that are loved as if

they were me" (107). In line with Ahmed's statement, it can be argued that Donald Trump and his administration were actively responsible for exacerbating the emotions—fear, anxiety, hate, disgust—that pitted the American (mostly white) "me" and community of "us" versus the Latinx "them." As a result of the intensification of these destructive emotions, they increasingly criminalized Mexican and Central American immigrants both at the level of discourse and public representation—depicted as criminals, rapists, drug-dealers, an infestation—and were responsible for their effacement and denominalization[4] at a practical level; furthermore, by fomenting the use of violence as deterrent, the former president ultimately authorized necropower on the border, which often resulted in the actual annihilation of these Latinx "aliens."

Border necropolitics has ultimately contributed to a widespread instrumentalization of social relations as well as to transformations in regimes of collective desire and affects: the desire for a community without strangers, the desire to protect oneself from external danger, but also the desire for an enemy linked to the "anxiety of annihilation" (Mbembe 2019, 43); concrete walls, barriers, wire fences, and other forms of demarcation and separation are but an expression of such desire. Mbembe contends that "the brutality of borders is now a fundamental given of our time" (3). These borders and the wars—whether actual armed conflicts, or territorial, ideological, and identity-related ones—launched to defend them let loose "gruesome passions" that increasingly push our societies to be transformed into "societies of enmity" (3). Drawing on Foucault's notion of biopower, the Cameroonian philosopher defines necropolitics as the "power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live … constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes" and therefore "to be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (66). Hate movements, groups invested in an economy of enmity, of hostility, have contributed to a significant raising "in the acceptable levels and forms of violence that one can (or should) inflict on the weak, on enemies and intruders (anyone considered not to be one of us)" (54). In *The Line Becomes a River*, necropower is rampant on the US-Mexico border, where migrants are victims of the hostility and violence raged against them. Cantú alludes here to the growing number of militant vigilantes in the area who would buy property, albeit not to ranch it, but just so "they could hunt people along the border. They moved in and welcomed other men to join them, with assault rifles and night-vision goggles and bullet-proof vests" (2018, 90). They engage in deliberate forms of (illegitimate) aggression that may well be categorized as necropolitical actions. Therefore, the US administration, the Border Patrol, and the pseudo-ranchers-turned-criminals along the border all carry out the utmost expression of sovereignty by exerting their control

over the life/mortality of immigrant Others, considered as the 'enemy'—tracking them down and purposely driving them to their deaths or killing them themselves as if they were animals.[5]

Mbembe's reflection on biopower—the power to kill, to let live, or to expose to death—and its relation to the notion of sovereignty and contemporary politics considered as a form of war lead him to suggest the need to question "the place that is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular when it is wounded or slain)" and how these aspects are "inscribed in the order of power" (66). Cantú attempts to answer this question in his narrative, where he deals in a broad sense with what he calls the "naturalness of violence" (2018, 138), a violence that reaches far beyond the battlefield of war and "leaches out into proximate geographies and relationships, seeping deep into the individual and societal unconscious" (151). Through his own experience working for the dreaded *migra* for four years, the author examines how his participation—however naively contemplated in the first place—in the border war affected him as a human being, the trauma he suffered while battling his own combat as an agent-foot soldier, and his resultant "moral injury." Cantú borrows this notion from David Wood in *What Have We Done: The Moral Injury of Our Longest Wars* (2016), where the veteran war reporter defines moral injury, in the context of war, as the pain or injury felt by a soldier due to an action conducted during a war that damages their ethical perspectives; it is, Wood asserts and Cantú quotes, "a jagged disconnect from our understanding of who we are and what we and others ought to do and ought not to do … a learned behavior, learning to accept the things you know are wrong" (2018, 151). Cantú's de-linking from the Border Patrol allowed him to reflect on his traumatic experience and the extent to which the very nature of his work had upended his moral beliefs, how it had gradually made him betray his moral rules.

The author explains that he had joined the Border Patrol because, after four years in college studying international relations and learning about the border from books, he wanted to see and truly understand the reality of the place, and, from his perspective, there was no better way to do that than to be "on the ground, out in the field" (2018, 23). Although an American citizen born in Arizona, his Mexican heritage on his mother's side, did not hinder him from becoming part of a law enforcement workforce that ostensibly exerted violence on those who looked like him and came from the same places as his own family. Against his mother's deepest fears that his job in an institution with little regard for people would turn him into someone brutal and callous, he convinces her that not only would he not become someone else, but he would rather take this opportunity to be of service to immigrants: "At least I'm the one apprehending them, I can offer them some small comfort by speaking with them in their own language, by talking to

them with knowledge of their home" (25). True to his word, the author initially displayed significant gestures of hospitality and acted kindly to the immigrants he arrested: he asked them about themselves, about the places they came from, offered them help and advice, gave them his own clothes when they did not have any (45–46), and invited them to eat when they were hungry (46). In a scene with religious undertones, he helps a woman who has blisters on her feet:

> I touched her feet, turning them slowly in my hands … I cleaned her feet one at a time with a disinfectant wipe, swabbing the fluid from the edges of her broken blisters and smearing them with ointment … As I looked up, I saw that the woman had been watching me with her head resting on her shoulder. Eres muy humanitario, oficial, she told me. I looked down at her feet and shook my head. No, I said, I'm not.
>
> (154)

His moral injury was slowly setting in. Despite his best intentions and humanitarian gestures, the border war and the inhumanity of the system soon began to cause signs of distress in Cantú, who had to daily dissociate his duties as a field agent from his sense of compassion. With time, he became increasingly overcome with sorrow, remorse, grief, bitterness, and moral confusion, feelings that characterize moral injury, a wound that manifests in physical anxiety as well as in emotional responses such as doubts and dreams. Dreams are the way in which the mind thinks in a state that is less verbal and logical, more emotional and richer with imagery; they are, according to psychologist Carl Jung, "the guiding words of the soul:" "The dream describes the inner situation of the dreamer, but the conscious mind denies its truth and reality, or admits it only grudgingly" (in Cantú 164–165). Cantú's unconscious denial of his participation in the border war, his own moral injury, manifested in the form of recurrent, unsettling dreams of dead bodies, of his teeth falling out, and of a wolf in a cave. Understanding these dreams ultimately enabled him to trace his own doubts and unease about the work he was doing.[6]

Distress, loss of control over his own life, professional challenges, and a negative self-image are all expressions of the growing contradictions between the author's inner self and the person he was becoming due to his daily contact with forms of violence that were antithetical to him as a human being: "I had reached a point at which I could barely sleep, a point at which my mind had become so filled with violence that I could barely perceive beauty in the landscape around me" (129). One time he dreams of a cave littered with body parts—clearly symbolic of the severed body parts of immigrants he usually found lying in the desert—and a wolf circling in the darkness, its paws "heavy on my chest, its breath hot on my face" (117). The wolf evokes

the legend of the wolf and Cantú's namesake, St. Francis, where it stands for violence—it had been terrorizing the village of Gubbio and killing people, including children. It thus reminds the dreamer that violence is also a part of him, that he is not just a passive observer but an active participant in it, that he cannot exist within the system without being implicated in it and affected by its poison. When he awakes from the dream, he significantly stares in the mirror trying to recognize himself (117). Cantú must finally expose himself to "the animal impulses of the unconscious" (Jung, in Cantú 2018, 165) to begin a true reckoning with his inner situation. The wolf of his dreams represents the author's dark side, a darkness which he eventually had to come to terms with: "I wish to make the sign of the cross, to offer out my hand. 'Brother wolf,' I wish to say, 'I will make peace between us, O brother wolf'" (160). The wolf is a metaphor that stands for all that is rejected of oneself or of the society one lives in: in the author's conscious mind, he had always denied his truth and reality, not admitting his complicity with a necro-system that promotes hostility, violence, and death.

Encountering the Face of the Other

The author closes Part II with this plea to "brother wolf," an appeal that follows the most disturbing of all the dreams that Cantú intersperses throughout his narrative, a watershed moment that points to a turning point that is much needed in his life. In his dream, he is out working in the desert; he stops a vehicle, and a man and a boy step out of it; they walk toward him, the man holding a gun in his hand. Although the agent shouts at him to drop it, the man continues walking toward him. Eventually, the agent shoots him in the chest and then shoots him again over and over. Then the boy takes the gun and aims at the agent, who reacts by firing at him twice:

> I look at the scene before me and am gripped with profound panic. A crushing darkness washes over everything and I throw my gun to the ground, terrified that I have become forever looped in a crippling exchange of violence.
>
> (159)

When, in his dream, he walks over and stands above the body of the boy now lying on the ground, the youth is still breathing:

> I'm alive, the body gasps, looking at my face. Please kill me, he says, please finish it. I stand and look down at the boy in silence before finally turning to walk away. Upon waking, I sit up in my bed and weep.
>
> (160)

The agent's callousness and insensitivity before the boy's agony, his cold unresponsiveness even when the young one looks him in the face, are indicative of his ultimate dehumanization and need for an ethical life change.

This scene and its aftermath suggestively recall Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical theory developed around the 'face of the other.' In "Peace and Proximity" he states, "The face of the other in its precariousness and defenselessness, is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace, the 'You shall not kill" (1996, 167). Levinas understands that aggression is co-substantial to ethical struggles, as it seeks to repress fear and anxiety, and therefore ethics is "a struggle to keep fear and anxiety from turning into murderous action" (Butler 2004, xviii). For him, it is the figure of the 'face' precisely that communicates the interdiction on violence, that forbids us to kill:

> The face is what one cannot kill, or at least it is that whose meaning consists in saying, "thou shalt not kill." Murder, it is true, is a banal fact: one can kill the Other; the ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity.
>
> (Levinas 1985, 87)

As for Levinas, for Cantú the Other is at first part of the whole, an object that eventually somehow breaks through this whole precisely by its appearance as face; this face is not simply a form but a commitment, an appeal, an order to be at the service of this face.

Although Part III is the author's narrative of this service through his encounter with the face of the Other—epitomized in the undocumented José Martínez—through gestures of care and the practice of convivial solidarities, in Part I and Part II, he directs his attention to the precariousness of Latinx immigrants' lives and the processes of effacement, denominalization, and derealization (Butler 2004) that they are victims of in the border necropolitical order. These processes coalesce in the disappearance in desert crossings of bodies without names who can never be mourned. Cantú compels readers to view these deaths not as a number, even if a staggering one, but to reckon with each victim as an individual so that they do not dissolve into a stream of anonymity. However, this is the usual fate of immigrants who die on US soil; it is also what happens to migrants in general, who are discursively dehumanized and turned by political rhetoric into an undifferentiated mass, humans not recognized as such, derealized specters without a face, without an identity. Earlier on in the narrative, Cantú himself had proved to be a part—however unwilling—of these processes when he would ask the immigrants that he apprehended their names only to forget them soon (41), or when he "tried to look at" the face of one of them but "it was too dark" (31), thus symbolizing his growing

incapacity to see the 'face' of the Other, to contemplate the Other in all their humanity.

The author draws on British journalist Frances Stonor Saunders, who maintains that documents such as passports and visas are central components in how our society values and recognizes human life: "'Identity is established by identification,' Saunders affirms, 'and identification is established by documenting and fixing the socially significant and codifiable information that confirms who you are'." Those who possess such documentation also possess what she calls a verified self, "an identity, formed through and confirmed by identification, that is attested to be 'true'" (in Cantú 2018, 263). As residents of the 'first world,' Cantú observes, we are privileged in our possession of a verified self, which means "that our names are known to history, that our deaths will be recorded" (263), and that, ultimately, frees us from the fear that our lives might become defined by undocumented-ness and pervaded by the constant threat of arrest, deportation, and anonymity (263–64). *The Line Becomes a River* is Cantú's attempt to bestow a verified self upon some of these unregistered Others. Central in his account is therefore a politics of human recognition: putting a face, a heart, and a mind to the unauthorized Others who do not possess a verified self: speaking their name, seeing them, and hearing them, acts that may potentially be an antidote to the necropolitical logic of the system, its violence and dehumanization.

Emotions, Attachments, and Convivial Solidarities

In the conclusion to *Necropolitics*, entitled "Ethics of the Passerby," Mbembe warns readers against following the path of hostility, of radicalizing difference, and of seeking salvation "through the force of destruction" (2019, 184). He envisions a possible way out of this destruction in the 'passerby.' The passerby convokes the figure of the human who ties his fate "to those who welcome and recognize their own face in his, the face of a humanity to come … Becoming-human-in-the-world is a question neither of birth nor of origin or race" (2019, 187). According to Mbembe, this becoming-human-in-the-world entails journeying, movement, and transfiguration, which "demands that the subject consciously embrace the broken up part of its own life; that it compel himself to take detours and sometimes improbable connections" (187), to find a place that is inhabited not by virtue of one's belonging to it, but by the experience of encountering others. Transfiguration also entails becoming self-aware that one is not so much an individual as a fragment of a larger humanity (187). Mbembe thus counters the power of death-making that necropolitics opens up with its opposite—the idea of a life-making praxis, based on care and a commitment to articulating a common humanity.

This relationship between movement and attachment is also explored in Ahmed's theory of emotions. As she explains, both are contained in the Latin meaning of this word: emotion comes from *emovere*, which suggests "to be moved, to be moved out. So, emotions are what move us" (2005, 100). However, emotions are also about attachments, "about what connects us to this or that," functioning therefore as a "contingent attachment to the world" (2005, 100). Ahmed then explains that what attaches us, what connects us to this or that place, or to this or that other,

> such that we cannot stay removed from this other, is also what moves us, or what affects us such that we are no longer in the same place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the 'where' of its inhabitance but connects bodies to other bodies—indeed attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others. (2005, 100)

She concludes that emotions are consequently bound up with how we inhabit the world 'with' others, they are about "the intimacy of the 'with,' the intimate relations between selves, objects, and others" (100). Hence, the hope of a new start lies in working to find better ways of inhabiting the world with others, of moving toward those others "we have passed and passed by" (109). Cantú engages in this process of movement, attachment, and transfiguration by traveling to the world of the Other.

The Other is here personified in José Martínez, whose story, unfolded in a combination of third- and first-person narrative voices, comprises Part III of the book. José embodies the plight of Latinx undocumented immigrants, usually considered in the abstract, as numbers rather than as individuals. He is singled out in Cantú's narrative, where he functions as an exemplar who serves to put a human face to a general issue and to arouse empathy in readers. Although José has lived for over 30 years in the United States, where he has raised his family, his life is truncated by immigration laws and the legal system as he risks—and loses—his already precarious status when he tries to return to the United States after visiting his dying mother in Oaxaca. For José, this is the emotional trip of a son who wishes to be with his mother on her deathbed; thus, it is his love for her that eventually turns him into an 'illegal alien' and into a criminal in the eyes of the law. All his attempts to get across the border fail, and every single time he tries, he ends up deported, with ever fewer chances of eventually being granted legal status. As a result of his incarceration and consequent deportations, he is separated from his wife and three sons despite the hardships that his removal places upon the family. His heartbreaking experience makes him a victim of what Cantú calls "the thing that crushes" (222): a system that forces deported immigrants—loving and caring partners, parents, sons,

and daughters—to break the law once and again on trying to return to their home and families, so that in the end, as José complains, "the US is making criminals out of the best citizens" (237).

Cantú cannot fully comprehend why José and his story are so painful to him, why he grieves and mourns for him when, as he acknowledges, "there are thousands of people just like him". His mother gives him the answer:

> It's true … but it's also true that for his family, as for you, José *is* unique. Sure there might be thousands or millions of people in his position, but it's because of him that their situation is no longer abstract to you. You are no longer severed from what it means to send someone back across the border.
>
> (229)

Indeed, the author's old dreams about a wolf, his dark side, when he was an agent helping *to send* people across the border are gradually transmuted into dreams of him helping José *to get* across the border. In *Land of Strangers*, Ash Amin contends that any venture into new alliances and allegiances—including with the stranger—requires an affective link, "one that can be nourished by openness and fruitful exchange with the unknown and distant" (29). Friendship—like Cantú and José's—can be that affective link allowing new intimacies to be struck and sustained, "new worlds to be imagined and desired, through a relational dynamic of co-cultivation, mutual regard, and affinity" (29).

Affect brings Cantú close to José in his specificity as a human being; the author engages in an embodied dimension of hospitality in which "the 'I' is no longer the same after confronting the guest" (Hamington 2010, 26): he visits him in prison, supports the family emotionally, accompanies José's sons to see him, meets with the lawyer to prepare his case and with his wife to organize the documents he needs, actively listens to him, and dedicates his time and whole being to helping him. This kind of hospitality can, on the one hand, meet "the needs of its intended recipients" while at the same time it "positively transforms the would-be benefactor in important ways through a growth of knowledge-based respect for the other that sheds light on her [*sic*] own assumptions and habits" (Addams 2002/1902, 213, in Hamington 2010, 29): through José the author gets to know about the plight of undocumented immigrants from their own situated standpoint, and sees plainly what he was not willing to acknowledge when he was working for the Border Patrol. Knowledge about José as an individual, as a 'face' in Levinas' terms, and about his story—his life, his emotions, his motivations, his love for his mother and family, which compels him to break the law once and again—not only transforms the 'host,' but binds the two members of the dyad together: "This is what friends do" (194),

Cantú resolves when he wonders about his role and involvement in José's case after the latter is arrested and taken to court. "José. Brother" (213), he says to his friend when he visits him in the prison where he is confined, a word that instantly recalls the 'brother wolf' of the St. Francis legend. The difference lies in that now Cantú's dreams are no longer about the wolf, but of José returning to the United States and to his family: his sense of solidarity with him makes the author wish that

> I had the courage to smuggle José myself, to ferry him safely through the desert, past the sensors and watchtowers, past the agents patrolling distant trails … I wished that I could drive with him seated next to me, listening to him tell of his love for his dead mother.
>
> (228)

José and Cantú strike up a friendship when the former shares his breakfast with the latter every day at the *mercado* where they both work. According to Frank Adloff, lived and shared practices are of great importance for the development of conviviality (2019, 42). In the same line of thought, Leonie Sandercock suggests that participation and negotiation in the interests of peaceful coexistence "requires something like daily habits of quite banal intercultural interaction in order to establish a basis for dialogue" (2006, 42). Conviviality means forms of interaction in which people encounter people, and not mutual stereotyping, in which reifications and denigrative attributions of others are avoided. In his telling of José's story, Cantú draws a portrait of a man who radically differs from the stereotypical images of immigrants that are so pervasive in nationalist political discourse and the media. The author presents him as a kind, sweet, and considerate person, described by his employer as the best worker, one who has never asked for a raise or benefits. His good disposition and demeanor therefore contradict the widespread image of the parasite profiting from the hospitality of the nation-state, an image that has stuck deeply in the social unconscious.[7]

Cantú dismantles this fission strategy of stereotyping and develops a politics of bridging difference instead, where openings and recognition, encounter and understanding are key, and which is best put into practice through gestures or habits of conviviality (Noble 2013; Wise and Noble 2016). As small as they may seem, habits of conviviality, such as the sharing of breakfast that the author relates in his account, foster the "fashioning of relational proximities" (Amin 2012, 32), empathies, and solidarities, for, as he declares, it is small impulses and interactions that "have the power to lead us back toward humanity" (Cantú 2018, 268). Conviviality "emphasizes the affective side of the social" (Wise and Velayutham 2014, 407): finding spaces of identification, commonalities,

is therefore essential for the developing of new practical forms of peaceful coexistence that may be potentially transformative: to consider another—convivial—society means to consider new forms of the societal imaginary, to imagine and create "new social blueprints" (Adloff 2019, 42). In the context that Cantú writes about in *The Line Becomes a River*, it means that new capacities and interactions based on a common sociality must be developed as the basis for convivial coexistence; that the border and border relations must be humanized, redefined as a space of interpersonal and intercultural encounter, of restored social bonds and affective links to sustain an ethos of care for people and the world. Or, as Cantú puts it, "When we consider the border, we might think of our home; when we consider those who cross it, we might think of those we hold dear" (2018, 268).

Notes

1 The research carried out for the development of this chapter received financial support from the Spanish National R&D Programme, project PID2021-127052OB-I00: "World-travelling: Narratives of Solidarity and Coalition in Contemporary Writing and Performances", and from the R&D Programme of the Principality of Asturias, through the Research Group Intersections (IDI/2021/000101).

2 Significantly, the word hospitality (*hospes*) shares its root with hostility (*hostis*, stranger, enemy). With the suffix '*potes*', "having power," hospitality came to mean the power the host had over the stranger/enemy.

3 Dangerization is the attribution of dangerous characteristics to something or someone that is not (particularly) dangerous. Latinxs have been construed in right-wing political rhetoric and in public discourse as threats (i.e., criminals), thus building up on a pervasive Latinx threat narrative (Chavez 2008) that encodes language and images with a threat perception, highlighting the negative aspects of Latinx immigrants.

4 In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice* (2004), Judith Butler uses the term 'denominalization' to refer to the fact that in public grieving "certain names of the dead are not utterable, certain losses are not avowed as losses" (38), and therefore certain lives are not as grievable as others. To deprive the dead of their name deliberately by whichever form is just another form of violence: denominalization is thus aligned with anonymity and lack of recognition, with derealization and dehumanization. In the same line, Cantú contends in his work that "the downtrodden are indistinct and unnamable" (265); he powerfully writes against the anonymities that have come to define immigration crises, which imply a dismissal and erasure of the migrants' lives, as well as their ultimate anonymity in death. To combat this anonymity, he asserts, "we must begin by grieving their deaths, by *speaking their names*, by seeing them, hearing them, and amplifying their voices" (265, emphasis added). For denominalization in the necropolitical b/order, see further along in this chapter.

5 Dehumanizing livestock metaphors are widely used, depicting migrants as animals, persecuted prey who are hunted down by smugglers, law enforcement

agents, and vigilantes. Some of the most widespread of these metaphors cast migrants as "chickens and smugglers as chicken ranchers—pollos at the mercy of their polleros." Others depict enforcement agents "as humane shepherds tending to a flock," an allusion that "reinforces the humanity of the Border Patrol while it dehumanizes migrants by portraying the Border Patrol as 'saviors'" (Cantú 2018, 110).

6 Dream psychologists explain that dreams of teeth falling out are usually anxiety dreams, linked to psychological distress that the dreamer may be experiencing; they may also represent a loss of control over something that the person is trying to hold on to, when they feel that they have lost control or power over their life; major life changes and professional challenges that cause feelings of failure, unhappiness, unease, or uncertainty can also manifest into dreams about teeth falling out. This kind of dream may also reflect negative self-image and represent depleted energy and diminished well-being (PsychCentral https://psychcentral.com/health/meaning-of-teeth-falling-out-dream#psychological-meanings).

7 For more information about hospitality and the parasite, see Michel Serres (2007/1980).

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