

AGNIESZKA GONDOR-WIERCIOCH
Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie

Nomadic Sisters: Migrant Identity in Joanna Bator's *Cloudalia* and Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*

Joanna Bator and Sandra Cisneros published novels that respond to the phenomenon of contemporary migration. Both *Cloudalia*¹ (2010) and *Caramelo* (2002) concentrate on young heroines—Dominica Chmura in the former and Celaya Reyes in the latter—who leave their home countries, Poland and USA, in order to undergo an identity quest portrayed as a journey that makes them cross boundaries of geography, history, gender and culture. All these spaces overlap, so it is not easy to discuss them in separation; nevertheless, the aim of this article is to suggest the existence of the many borders they cross and to focus particularly on historical borderlands. At the same time, it is crucial to emphasize that the historical quest that Dominika and Celaya undertake is innovative because they discover secrets that were omitted in the official history of their countries and these findings function as epiphanies which influence the way in which they perceive themselves. Additionally, in both cases history is revisited in order to challenge old myths and stereotypes, often nourished by

1 This novel has not been translated into English, but the title *Cloudalia* is used officially by the author and literary critics and I am going to use it in this paper. It was first published in 2010. The same is true with Bator's other novels: *Piaskowa góra* (*Sandy Mountain*), and *Ciemno, prawie noc* (*Dark, Almost Night*) (they are considered a trilogy) and her memoir *Wyspa Łza od nowa* (*Tear Island Anew*).

communities revering a similar canon of literary texts. In my article I would like to demonstrate that Poland and Mexico have been trapped in a similar stereotype of Catholic patriarchal countries with a fixed image of a heroic past and doomed future. As a result, in both traditions there is a tendency to promote fatalism and martyrdom, accompanied by a refusal to accept other perspectives. I would like to argue that Bator and Cisneros have managed to open this historical Pandora's box in order to show how to counteract this legacy and set the new generation free.

Both novels tell the stories of young women living in the second half of the twentieth century: Polish Dominika Chmura, who has a chance to travel after the fall of communism in Poland, and American Celaya Reyes, who is free to move between the U.S. and Mexico, the country of her parents. At the beginning it is important to notice that even though Dominika and Celaya choose different directions for their journeys. Dominika leaves Poland to visit different European countries and the USA (the common denominator between these destinations is the Western culture that she was cut off from while living behind the Iron Curtain) and Celaya goes from the USA to Mexico. Both protagonists concentrate on the re-discovery of their countries of origin and realize how much their identity quest depends on being able to cast off the static images of the cultures that have shaped them.²

Since Poland and Mexico were geographical neighbors of states with imperial ambitions³ and they both have a long and violent history of fighting for independence, which explains the martyrologic traits in both countries as well as specific entrapments in the past, which have been reflected in canonical literary texts. There is insufficient space here to trace the whole tradition, but I can give two important examples which reinforce this image of fatalistic cultures trapped in the past.⁴ In the case of Poland such an inspiring force is

2 An interesting study of inherited Polish stereotypes can be found in Przemysław Czapliński's *Poruszona mapa*.

3 One might argue that these ambitions still prevail in some cases, e.g. Russia's annexation of the Crimean region in 2014 and the war with Ukraine in 2022.

4 There are obviously many other writers who supported patriarchal values in Polish and Mexican traditions, needless to say, not only in the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth century as well and it is difficult to find feminist voices both in Polish realist and modernist tradition and in Mexican regionalist, creolist, modernist fiction (including famous Boom writers such as Llosa, Fuentes, Márquez or Cortázar who are also criticized for not giving enough autonomy to their female protagonists). It is the last three decades when feminist fiction is flourishing; before we speak about exceptions, e.g. the works of Rosario Castellanos.

the Romantic tradition present in the novels of, among others, Henryk Sienkiewicz⁵ and in the case of Mexico one of the best examples is the portrait of Mexican culture from *The Labyrinth of Solitude* of Octavio Paz. Even though Sienkiewicz and Paz use different genres, the novel and essay, it is striking that they both present static images of cultures stuck in a specific time and place. It is true that they had different goals in mind—Sienkiewicz wanted to “uplift the hearts” of the Poles suffering during partition after several lost uprisings, and Paz yearned to wake Mexicans up after the trauma of the Mexican revolution; but still, surprisingly, they reinforce similar visions of their home countries. In the imaginary space created by Sienkiewicz and Paz, Poland and Mexico are predominantly Catholic countries cherishing patriarchal values, sacrificing women caught between the unattainable ideal of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and the fallen traitor biblical Eve (or Malinche in the case of Paz). Both writers populate their imagined countries with self-centered men (often with inflated egos) who are blind to ethnic diversity even though they inhabit the space shared with representatives of different cultures and religions. They are lonely characters convinced of their uniqueness and an exceptionality that often masks their blindness and inability to create community with anybody who is not the same as them (Janion⁶ and Rebolledo⁷). There is no denying that the Romantic ideals were also stressed in Polish WW2 literature, where many authors concentrated on the theme of Polish martyrdom and, as a result, the patriarchal tradition was really reinforced.⁸

- 5 Sienkiewicz's *Trilogy*, in particular, is an example of a set of historical novels with a Romantic character construction; the protagonists are members of the Polish nobility, cherishing heroic ideals and defending the Catholic faith against numerous invaders such as Swedes, Cossacks, Turks, etc.
- 6 In her canonical work *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna*, Maria Janion analyzes the ways in which the Romantics used female figures and it is striking how similar some of these ideas are to what Paz describes in his *Labyrinth of Solitude*. The Mother of God is an ideal promoted in both cultures (the impact of the Catholic Church is clear) and women are expected to be sacrificed not only because in the patriarchal models they are limited to motherhood but because they symbolize troubled and repeatedly-invaded home countries. Therefore, they are imagined as passive victims devoid of subjectivity.
- 7 Diana Tey Rebolledo studies, among others, the transformation of the Virgin Mary into the powerful Chicana feminine inspiration that is modelled on the Aztec goddess Coatlicue.
- 8 The impact of the Romantic model, reinforced by its later modifications, is also very important in the Polish cultural tradition because the Polish school curriculum has not changed much since the fall of communism in 1989 and school education is, in

Even though the female characters of Bator and Cisneros enter this imaginary landscape almost a century after the protagonists of Sienkiewicz and Paz, they have to face their legacy. This heritage is, first of all, present in the family legends that young women listen to. As long as they are just passive listeners, they function as hostages of this tradition and their liberation starts when they initiate their own projects of discovery.

It is important that, contrary to the heroes of Sienkiewicz and Paz, Dominika and Celaya discover history through re-constructing bonds with, first, family members and then with “extended families” of friends, so we witness not only a multi-perspective reconstruction of history but new community building as well.⁹ The starting point for both protagonists is the same: retrospection made possible through re-bonding with important matriarchal figures—Dominika learns to communicate with her mother Jadzia Chmura and Celaya gets in contact with the ghost of her grandmother, Soledad Reyes. Thus the hitherto untold stories of mothers and grandmothers become the stories of daughters and granddaughters in a Chinese box construction. Moreover, in the place of history, herstory emerges.¹⁰ What was the **history** in both cases? Dominika was told, for example, that her grandfather was a ww2 war hero, but in fact her real father was a Jewish doctor saved by her grandmother during the absence of her husband, who died in an accident after the war, not on the battlefield. Celaya was informed that her grandfather was a hero of the Mexican revolution and an ideal husband and father, whereas she finds out that his past was far from glorious; not only was his courage a family myth legend, but he mistreated his wife terribly and had an illegitimate daughter with an

the majority of cases, limited to texts that revolve around this legacy. In recent years the Law and Justice party, which controls the Polish Parliament, introduced education reform which even extended the Romantic reading list, because they consider it to be very patriotic, and they cooperate with the Catholic Church.

- 9 In Sienkiewicz’s novels, the only communal bonds are those created by men; women are figures waiting to be saved and are very often passive. Even if some female protagonists take the initiative, it is only temporary and they “get rewarded” by good marriages. In Paz’s *Labyrinth*, both men and women suffer from an inability to communicate and they wear masks which result in loneliness—his diagnosis of culture is utterly pessimistic compared to that of Sienkiewicz’s.
- 10 Robin Morgan is credited with the invention of the term (*Sisterhood is Powerful* 1970), but Anna Burzyńska introduces the term by referring to Joan Nestle’s *Living with Herstory* from *Women-Identified Women* (1984).

Indian servant whom he kept secret.¹¹ When one acknowledges these facts, one realizes, of course, that these male predecessors can hardly be defined as virtuous Catholics and examples to follow. Both Dominika and Celaya come from heterogeneous families and they are descendants of traumatized women who were made silent. What is worth emphasizing, however, is that these young protagonists refuse to become the hostages of tragic histories and nationalistic legacies, and they undertake the challenge of living in the borderland.

Borderland¹² means something different for both of them. For Dominika it is a space between Polish, German, English, American and Greek cultures. These countries become her temporary homes where she can re-examine her national culture from a necessary distance, often through the eyes of the Polish diaspora; these are also spaces in which she realizes that her identity is hybrid and appreciates constant border-crossing without idealizing or demonizing it. Bator rejects the utopia of full assimilation and her character evolves, even though every journey is accompanied by gains and losses. On her way, Dominika collects stories and creates a network from the local to the global¹³ and she becomes a kind of nomad who accepts her condition because she is open and ready to discard illusions (Brandotti 2011). She is also fond of independent thinking, which helps her to evade the trap of nostalgia so typical for many immigrants. Additionally, she is psychologically credible because Bator does not refrain from showing her protagonist's tragic choices (an affair with a priest for example) and weaknesses (sometimes one feels encouraged to interpret her constant wandering as an escape from responsibility and a sign of neurotic restlessness).

11 These plots are autobiographical to some extent; see Robin Ganz: "Border Crossing and Beyond."

12 I refer here to borderland as defined by Gloria Anzaldúa in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*.

13 Among such stories are those of Polish Jews who were forced to migrate from Poland during WW2. In Poland the stories of Jewish ancestors or neighbors are often secrets (like the story of Dominika's Jewish grandfather). In local Polish perspectives, Polish Jews just disappeared. When Dominika lives temporarily in NYC she works for an affluent Polish Jew, Eulalia Baron, who used to live in Cracow before WW2 and we get to know the story of her escape from Poland in a global perspective (first she found refuge in Japan and later in the U.S.); she never fully recovered from the war trauma and nostalgia. The story of Eulalia Baron becomes a subplot of the bigger story of migrants and nomads that Bator constructs in her novels (especially her trilogy) and it gains more significance because it helps us understand that migration is not only a process that accompanies humankind from time immemorial, but is almost always triggered by violent international and intranational conflicts. Cisneros conveys the same message in *Caramelo*.

It is an open question whether Bator idealizes travelling. The chorus of the novel is the opening of Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus does finally come home and it is not a happy return, so this could imply that for Dominika, a female Odysseus, this journey cannot be continued forever, especially since travelling weakens relationships with loved ones, even in the era of technological breakthrough. At the end of the novel, Dominika creates a sort of extended family on a Greek island with her boyfriend Dimitri, his adopted son, her mother and some of her friends, but she still dreams of leaving them to travel alone.

For Celaya the borderland is her American homeland, especially her Latino diaspora and Mexico, which she learns to love.¹⁴ Her trip to Mexico is portrayed not as one particular journey but as a series of border-crossing excursions that her family makes in order to visit ageing grandparents and show grandchildren the culture they come from. Thus, in the case of Celaya the reader also gets the impression that she is a kind of nomad and, similarly to the Polish protagonist, not only crosses geographical borders, but also cultural and historical ones.¹⁵ Celaya is restless and curious to learn her family secrets such as the violence in the Reyes clan, the rejection of an illegitimate child or the impact of the Mexican Revolution on the men in her family (later poverty forced her father and his brothers to migrate to the U.S.). Still, she does not want to learn Mexico only through others' stories and needs to set out on her own Odyssey to rediscover Mexico for herself. Similarly to Dominika, Celaya makes bad choices; for example, she falls in love with the wrong person and is almost miraculously saved from this toxic relationship. This event truly liberates her and lets her start a bigger journey of self-discovery as a woman, as a migrant and as an artist (Dominika also becomes an artist in Bator's novel). As Heather Alumbach noticed, this border-crossing might also inspire to create new narrative forms in which protagonists do their own excavation projects and make sense of the past (Alumbach 2010).

This comparison of characteristics would not be complete without noting the autobiographical motives in both texts. There are many hints in *Cloudalia* and *Caramelo* that suggest this correspondence: similarly to Celaya, Sandra Cisneros was raised in a family of six brothers and was the youngest child; and

14 Some scholars notice that this borderland may encompass Anderson's "imagined communities," e.g. in Vásquez, D. T. *Triangulations. Narrative Strategies For Narrating Latino Identity*.

15 On global and intercultural perspectives in *Caramelo* see Benjumea, *Caramelo, Journal of Latinos and Education*, 2(4), 2003 and Quintana, "Borders Be Damned. Creolizing Literary Relations," *Cultural Studies*, 13(2), 1999.

her father, along with his brothers and their families, took her for summer trips to Mexico city. Her family was poor and they lived in Chicago and later moved to San Antonio, Texas and, just like her literary “sister” or “daughter” Celaya, Cisneros was a talented and rebellious child.¹⁶

Joanna Bator also used true geographical and cultural references: just like her character, Dominika the novelist was raised in Lower Silesia by her grandmother and her mother decided to take her only for weekends for the first six years of her life (Bator 2020). Additionally, she was an only child and was not allowed to make friends with other kids, and her real family was traumatized by war like the fictional family of Dominika. What is more, Bator’s family was conflicted and she was cut off from her female cousins (she got in touch with them decades later even though they had been living in the same house as children and they did not know about their connection). This resulted in a sense of abandonment and unexplained grief; Bator explains in her autobiographical essay (Bator 2020) that she was always looking for her female doppelganger, and one can notice that this is also what Dominika does when she meets important women on her way (such as Grażynka, a family friend, who saves her after a car accident; Gosia, a high school friend who never fails her even when she migrates to live in London; Sara, her physiotherapist, who accompanies her on some of her travels; and, last but, not least, her mother, Jadzia, whom Dominika gradually learns to love).

It is tempting at this point to show that in Celaya’s life female doppelgangers also play a crucial role. The most important of these is her grandmother Soledad Reyes, and there are also her step-sister Candelabria, and Celaya’s mother who always supports her; after all the title and the most important symbol in the novel is *caramelo*, more specifically, a caramel rebozo, the scarf made inherited by women, expressive of their potential for weaving their own story and shaping their own memories.

As some academics have noticed (Domańska 2003), the term “autofiction” may be one of the interpretative keys to Bator’s novels. I agree with this conclusion and I propose to extend this observation to Cisneros as well, especially as there are at least several common topics that Bator and Cisneros include in their autobiographical texts, *Tear Island* and *A House of My Own*. Both authors recollect their life using the topoi of journey and home, or rather different homes they make on the way. What is interesting is that their memories are organized in the homecoming pattern. Finally, after her journeys and sojourns

16 Much biographical information is included in Cisneros’ *A House of My Own. Stories from My Life*.

in numerous countries, Bator decides to build her permanent home in Poland.¹⁷ Cisneros, after a similarly long though less exotic journey, decides to buy a house in Mexico. Bearing in mind that they are both “haunted” by these places—originally the homelands of their families, which literally pushed them out—this is an interesting conclusion. They were both born in poor families who cherished dark secrets in countries where one culture was favored at the expense of others. There is no denying that because they suffered social, cultural and historical exclusion, they felt the same impulse to seek their place outside of this oppressive structure. They had to redefine the term home and make it habitable for themselves, and in order to do this they had to answer the question of who they really are by including the elements of the heritage their families did not want to acknowledge.

Another important topic of their essays is a redefinition of womanhood. Women are not only migrants and nomads in a geographical sense, but in a spiritual one as well, and that is why both Bator and Cisneros decide to reinterpret the figure of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, turning patriarchal Catholic tradition into a more syncretic matriarchal form. Bator rediscovers the Virgin Mary when she combines the Polish tradition of portraying this figure with Ceylon’s version of the Mother of God, and the result is a new empowered goddess, not just a female addition to the male Holy Trinity. Similarly, Cisneros combines the Virgin Mary with the Aztec goddess Coatlicue, creating in this way a more powerful figure. What is striking is that in these combinations we again observe the duplicity characteristic of the female doppelganger motive discussed earlier and one might conjecture that some of these “cultural sisters” of the Virgin Mary are not dark equivalents (like Coatlicue, who is not as innocent as the Mother of God).¹⁸ This inclination of both Bator and Cisneros towards strong feminine figures is best explained in *Tear Island*, where Bator observes that she gives more space to women in her prose because the men in her family did not leave many memories and traces; the women were far more conspicuous, stronger (Bator 2020: 78). It is interesting to note, however, that despite this deficit of masculine traces, the families created powerful patriarchal myths (e.g. about false war heroes), which might be a continuation of the

17 Maciej Duda also notices this in his article on Bator (“Ciemne i jasne. Tożsamościowe zmagania strapatyzowanych bohaterki Joanny Bator”). On page 147 he concludes that the works of Bator lead from escaping to settling and that they are therapeutic.

18 Cisneros refers repeatedly to the Virgin of Guadalupe/Coatlicue in her other works, e.g. in the stories from the collection *Women Hollering Creek*.

Polish Romantic tradition in Bator's case or the legacy of Mexican *machismo*, well diagnosed by Paz, in Cisneros' case.

To complete her definition of womanhood, Bator further elaborates on her choice of the doppelgänger motif. For her the subject is not a monolith, but something "shaking and incomplete, afraid of its own shadow" (Bator 2020: 82–83). It is hard not to notice that this contemporary evolution of the doppelgänger is another way of addressing the question of migrant identity, which is always in the making, always becoming and always a hybrid (and always fluid according to Zygmunt Bauman).¹⁹ Bator notes that male authors have been particularly fond of the doppelgänger figure and she mentions not only Poe or Hoffman, but goes back to folkloric tradition suggesting the malignant presence of the "Dark Twin." This figure was reserved for men, she adds, because it emphasized their inner loss and splitting, and thus the complexity of them as subjects; and since women were denied subjectivity they did not have a chance to be problematized in this way. For Bator the doppelgänger becomes a "Dark Twin Sister" and she is no longer the source of fear, but an opportunity. When a women protagonist finds her doppelgänger they can save each other because they complement themselves.²⁰ For this they need the self-awareness made possible by historical reconstruction.

This project is especially important in the area where people were traumatized by violence and, as Bator says, "history got devoured by wars and forced relocations" (Bator 2020: 88). In the place of history "phantasmatic genealogy" (Bator 2020) is created and this blocks historical reconstruction. Re-writing history is sometimes possible only from a distance—both Bator and Cisneros were born as writers far away from their home countries: Bator in Japan and Cisneros in Greece.²¹ Bator explains that Polish culture is for her associated with the destruction of self-esteem, resulting in the often irrational fear of the Other, a fear that is grafted onto new generations. It is a closed culture focused on past trauma where ww2 is a catalyst of genetically transmitted fear. When she diagnoses Poles, it is important that she avoids complaining and concentrates on solutions. Bator postulates "letting inner monsters out instead of preserving them" (Bator 2020: 95) because endless projection of the fear outside does not help to get rid of it from the inside. Consequently, her stories of fictitious

19 This is the case in, for example, Bauman's *Liquid Fear*.

20 For an extended psychoanalytical reading of Bator's works, see Duda 2020.

21 According to their autobiographical statement in *Wyspa Iza od nowa (Tear Island Anew)* and *A House of My Own. Stories from My Life*.

families are intended to be a remedy for her real family, almost devoid of memory and narrative.

Even though Cisneros does not recall her family as being as traumatized and traumatizing as Bator's, there is no denying that her fiction serves similar purposes. The main character of *Caramelo* needs the ghost of her grandmother in order to understand her family, and because she learns of shameful secrets from the past, she is able to work out the trauma, which is not an easy task as getting access to hidden history often amounts to opening Pandora's box. When Bator writes about "letting the inner monsters out," one cannot resist the temptation to look at the protagonist of Cisneros called Terrible Grandmother, who is able to cast off her monstrous mask only when she shares her true story with her granddaughter. In fact, what both Bator and Cisneros perceive as a heavy cultural burden is hypocrisy and inability to communicate. The Mexican culture transmitted to Celaya is as problematic as Polish culture inherited by Dominika—both are based on fear and distorted memory. Border crossing is in both cases a condition that sets the characters free, but at a certain price.

Dominika and Celaya accept their status as homeless wanderers because they believe that it might save them from worse disappointment. Thus, their constant journey is not a mere praise of travelling that enables them to experience the world and its diversity, but a form of therapy that helps them to liberate themselves from their inherited fear. Absolute freedom does not exist of course, which is why their freedom is restricted by the journey, which is as exhausting as it is fascinating. What is crucial is that this experience involves them to such an extent that they cannot immerse themselves too much in the toxic past. Therefore, history does not become their obsession and they can see future and hope, though it is worth emphasizing that they actively refuse to be victims by discarding inherited myths and reworking traumas themselves. In this way, they can become free of the history that was such a burden for the generation of their parents and grandparents that it ruined the lives of some of them.²²

One should not forget about the cultural and historical differences between the protagonists: Celaya is attacked by the retrotopias (Bauman 2007) about Mexico spread by many members of the Latino community in the U.S., whereas Dominika is hounded by the atrocities of ww2. The nostalgia for the lost country and the war trauma have the same power of entrapping whole generations in

22 The question is, however, if we can make ourselves free from history and how long can we function as nomads; I will come back to this in the conclusion, looking at the arguments from Ugrešić's *Lis*.

history, making them experience their phantasms over and over again. To conclude, the journey of Dominika and Celaya is a painful, but necessary, therapy. It teaches them self-awareness and the acceptance of migrant identity, as well as enabling the reinterpretation or redefinition of inherited figures, roles and places (e.g. the Virgin Mary, woman, home).

Additionally, Bator explains (Bator 2020) that migrant or nomadic identity is a state of mind, open to metamorphosis not only in terms of the exterior landscape, but the interior as well. She reinforces this opinion in one of the interviews (Kurkiewicz 2010), concluding that nobody is ascribed to one place and one story and the story of a patriarchal family and crucified masochistic Poland has gaps that may accommodate a good story that belongs to her. Roman Kurkiewicz in "Saga na opak" explains how Bator achieves this through literary motifs and strategies, noting that in *Piaskowa góra* (*Sandy Mountain*) the prequel to *Cloudalia*, she deconstructs the family saga in order to make space for a new story. After all, the family saga in the novelistic tradition served more often than not to emphasize the durability of values by transmitting them to the subsequent generations, who built their identity on this legacy. In Bator's story, Dominika rejects these values after the accident (just as Celaya does in *Caramelo*, even though she does not need an accident for it). In fact Bator parodies the family saga when she constructs the motif of Napoleon's chamber pot, which was intended as a precious legacy from the Old World and ends up as a flowerpot at the flat of Jewish immigrant from Poland living in New York, Eulalia Baron. Kurkiewicz interprets this artifact as a symbol of memory and historical identity the value of which might be far from obvious. It is striking that family memorabilia are similarly redefined in Cisneros' *Caramelo*; Celaya learns to appreciate an old caramel *rebozo*, a symbol of Mexico's Mestizo culture, which was often shameful for her predecessors and has now gained a new significance.

Kurkiewicz concludes that Bator undertakes an anthropological project at the center of which we have such values as mobility and a willingness to understand the Other. In my research I have found evidence that this Other implies the outside and inside world (Bator's insistence on *doppelgänger* figure). What is more, for the novelist multicultural heritage does not need to be a biological legacy, which can be illustrated by the experience of Poles living in German houses haunted by Jewish presence, who start to feel heirs to this mixed tradition, just as Celaya recognizes the subtle legacy of indigenous people in her family, even though their blood does not run in her veins.²³ Perhaps there is wishful

23 Perhaps the discussion of the difference between the biological and cultural identity is not very heated in the Polish context, but it has always been in the American and Latin

thinking in these strategies, and both Dominika and Celaya are to some extent also the hostages of their illusions (or nightmares); it is tempting to remark that escaping from the prison of the patriarchal tradition may have brought them to another trap, that of a multicultural past which when cannot be founded on facts starts to be imagined. Still, we must not forget that in this way they also initiate a hopeful project of reworking the trauma of history and they do not concentrate on biological but cultural mixed-blood traditions in order to deconstruct the myth of the homogenous nation which drastically eradicates the indigenous part of Mexican culture and the Jewish part of Polish culture.

Bator seems to support this view (Bator 2001), noting that the faith in the monolithic Subject, free from class, race or gender restrictions, has been rejected in the face of the events experienced in the last two hundred years. Postmodern discourse teaches us to speak of human subjectivity in a different way, by exploring the otherness inside and outside of us and, in her opinion, it is probably the only legacy worth saving from postmodernism, a set of mostly recycled ideas.

This postmodernist project may be better explained when we consider the conclusions of Amaryll Chanady, who discusses the transnational aspect of migrant identity. She states that the value of the term “Trans-American” lies in the realization that it focuses readers’ attention on the fact that “American” should not refer only to the U.S. In her paper, Chanady proves that there is a growing need for the study of a trans-American imaginary. There is no denying that the works of Joanna Bator and Sandra Cisneros are transnational; the former calls for the examination of not only a Trans-European, but also Trans-Atlantic imaginary, and the latter of a Trans-American paradigm.

For Chanady, the transnational mapping of ethnicity has been made possible by increased mobility and mass culture, which she illustrates with the example of New York, presented in Latino/a fiction as a multilingual cosmopolis of the North, called by Rafael Sanchez “the capital of the hemispheric America dreamed by Bolivar” (Chanady 336). Looking at the cities portrayed by Bator (including New York, Berlin and London), one cannot resist the impression that they are portrayed in a similar way, but the map is bigger; here it is not only Hemispheric America, but the Global North.

Chanady rightly concludes that these changes affect the way in which we perceive the goals of comparative literature. It has changed from a study of different literatures and languages within one literature into “the study of

American tradition, which is connected with colonial, postcolonial and decolonial legacy and agenda.

literature across national, cultural or even disciplinary boundaries” (Chanady 337). The critic concentrates on the study of literary characters of outcasts, migrants defined by Bauman as “disposable human beings produced by globalization” (Chanady 337). Cisneros and Bauman also see this dark side of globalization, but their main characters are not reduced to the position of the poorest migrants (even though Dominika has been exploited for some time on a German farm). Celaya and Dominika turn their migrant experience imposed by historical and cultural circumstances (the mass migration of Mexicans to the U.S. in the twentieth century and the mass migration of Poles beyond the Iron Curtain at the turn of the twentieth century) into a nomadic lifestyle. They have choices, so obviously their fates are more optimistic. But similarly to the outcast characters described by Chanady, they become Trans-American (Celaya) and Trans-European/Trans-Atlantic (Dominika) subjects aware of “space in which national borders become blurred and the mapping of space becomes a palimpsest” (Chanady 337) and they need to deconstruct national boundaries which, on closer examination, consist of the geographical, historical and cultural walls that I have already mentioned.²⁴

To conclude, both Celaya and Dominika cannot be bound by borders and they fuse their original cultures, which they have so far experienced through the lens of the nationalistic perspective popular at the schools they attended and which were subconsciously promoted in their families, with the cultures of the places they visit or inhabit for some time. This project is demanding because it requires not only the stamina and energy necessary for extended travelling, but also the courage and maturity to re-shape the inherited picture of the past. There is a big temptation to revise history in a way that fits them, but both protagonists seem to be aware that such a creative attitude does not differ much from what they rebelled against. It is not difficult to replace the patriarchal utopia about the past glory of the homogeneous nation with an optimistic and naïve projection of a world of multicultural harmony. Both Cisneros and Bator avoid this trap by suggesting open endings to the stories of their protagonists. Their explorations are far from finished; their identities are not completely discovered. Neither of them has found a place that might become a new Promised Land, as America and Western Europe was imagined to be by each new wave of immigrants, but then they are not looking for them. Their quest is for different

24 In Polish academic research, a similar reading of Bator can be seen in the work of Wioletta Głowa (“Nomadyzm kobiecy jako wariant drogi do/ku wolności w powieściach Joanny Bator”), who interprets Bator’s protagonists as nomadic subjects interested in redefining themselves and developing new intercultural identity.

cultural universals which have a chance of becoming new myths—this time not patriarchal but matriarchal. One of them is a transcultural Mother of God figure that could be a lasting inspiration for the strikingly similar women they meet in different cultures: the overprotective mothers who, having been made silent by the patriarchal culture, can only communicate their love for their children by overfeeding them.²⁵ After all, these writers are also the daughters and granddaughters of such women, and they realize that they need to teach them to communicate their love through stories. The deficit of identity is so often rooted in the hunger of history. Last, but not least, it is important to notice that Cisneros and Bator populate their novels densely with different female figures because only in this way can they suggest that herstory is a multi-layered tale told by diverse narrators who, instead of just counteracting the patriarchal past with a feminist utopia, insist on revealing a broader human spectrum and a remapping of global spaces.

From a contemporary perspective, some ideas of Cisneros and Bator might seem too optimistic and it is important to acknowledge this. Dubravka Ugrešić is one of the important authors who writes about the transition from recognizing the potential of the nomadic existence to realizing the traps of such a project.²⁶ Recounting her trip to Naples somewhere before 2017 (the date when her book was published), she remembers the African refugees and immigrants flooding Europe who were not welcome anywhere and she sees the discrepancy between the academic theory and the real life. Can we still imagine the world as a place where nomads can develop their multicultural identities? Can we move freely in search of new places to live? In another chapter (on the house she got in Croatia), she speculates about the possibility of returning home after her nomadic life and she finds it extremely difficult, if not impossible. She also indicates that we learn nothing from history (when she observes growing xenophobia in Europe and the “re-writing” of history in Croatia that aims at turning the atrocious war into a necessary sacrifice). The question is, of course, if it is possible to distance oneself from history by reworking past trauma and if we can coexist despite cultural, historical, political differences. Has the dream of the multicultural Europe or the U.S. been only a temporary fashion of writers and academics? Several years after the publication of Ugrešić’s text, the world faces an even bigger refugee crisis as a consequence of the war in Europe. This is indeed a remapping of global spaces in the worst possible way and we can only

25 It is interesting to note that a similar sense of humor, based on irony, is present in both cases.

26 I refer here to the chapter 2 and 3 from her book *Lis (Fox)*.

hope that some of the projects of building intercultural bridges will survive because even though today they may seem naïve, at least they offered hope and tried to show the complexity of the cultures in the global context. Without them our world might be reduced to the polarization of the contemporary media discourse, which either presents the war and migrant reality in a catastrophic hysterical tone or tries to ignore it.²⁷

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27 I point to the contrast between the Polish media perspective, which, for obvious reasons, condemns the Russian attack and the Mexican one which, again for obvious reasons, portrays the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as inspired by the United States, which suggests a defensive character of Russia's actions.

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| Abstract

AGNIESZKA GONDOR-WIERCIOCH

Nomadic Sisters: Migrant Identity in Joanna Bator's *Cloudalia* and Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*

The article provides a comparative analysis of Joanna Bator's *Cloudalia* and Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo* with regard to similar identity construction of the main female characters. Both authors concentrate on young women (Dominika Chmura in *Cloudalia* and Celaya Reyes in *Caramelo*) who set out for a journey of feminist self-discovery, crossing the boundaries of geography, history and culture. The author of the article argues that, despite the obvious differences between Poland and Mexico, the protagonists rebel against the same legacy of the Catholic patriarchal

culture, reinforced by national visions of history and literary canon in the respective countries, and they gradually manage to rework historical trauma by reconstructing the doppelganger figure and creating new transcultural feminist paradigms. The arguments are reinforced not only by references to autobiographical motives in Bator's and Cisneros' fiction and diaries, but also by transnational identity studies of Zygmunt Bauman and Amaryll Chanady.

Keywords: Latino/a fiction, Polish contemporary fiction, feminism, migration, historical trauma, transculturation

| Abstrakt

AGNIESZKA GONDOR-WIERCIOCH

Siostry nomadki – tożsamość migrantek w *Chmurdalii* Joanny Bator i *Caramelo* Sandry Cisneros

Artykuł jest analizą komparatystyczną dwóch współczesnych powieści, *Chmurdalii* Joanny Bator i *Caramelo* Sandry Cisneros, uwzględniającą podobieństwo w konstrukcji tożsamości głównych postaci kobiecych. Obie autorki koncentrują się na młodych kobietach (Joanna Bator na Dominice Chmurze, a Sandra Cisneros na Celayi Reyes), które wyruszają w podróż umożliwiającą im feministyczne samopoznanie poprzez przekraczanie granic geograficznych, historycznych i kulturowych. Autorka artykułu udowadnia, że pomimo oczywistych różnic pomiędzy Polską a Meksykiem, bohaterki Bator i Cisneros buntują się przeciwko temu samemu dziedzictwu katolickiej kultury patriarchalnej w swoich krajach ojczystych, zbudowanemu wokół nacjonalistycznych wizji historii i kanonu literackiego. Stopniowo autorkom *Chmurdalii* i *Caramelo* udaje się przepracować traumę historyczną poprzez rekonstrukcję figury doppelgamera i wypracowanie transkulturowej tożsamości feministycznej. Autorka artykułu wykorzystuje nie tylko odniesienia do motywów autobiograficznych w prozie Bator i Cisneros, ale również transnarodowe teorie tożsamości autorstwa Zygmunta Baumana i Amaryll Chanady.

Słowa kluczowe: proza Latino/a, współczesna proza polska, feminizm, migracja, trauma historyczna, transkulturowość

| **Bio**

Agnieszka Gondor-Wiercioch (Dr hab.) teaches American, Latin American and Canadian literature at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, published two monographs; one on multicultural models in Louise Erdrich and José María Arguedas (2009) and the other on the roles of history in contemporary Native American and Latino/a fiction (2016) and many articles related to the themes of Contemporary Native American and Latino/a Fiction, transculturation and history reconstruction, identity search in ethnic literature, hybrid and heterogenous literature, dialogic identity, ethnic and post-ethnic dilemmas, comparative literature, transnational problems and the clash and convergence of contrasting cultural models.

E-mail: agnieszka.gondor-wiercioch@uj.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-8849-0942