
submitted: 5/9/2024 revised: 26/11/2024 accepted: 1/12/2024 published: 28/12/2024 pages: 1-11

BORDER CROSSING AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY IN *THE CIRCUIT*

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Abstract: As a land of immigrants, America is expected to provide an environment free of discrimination. However, many literary works highlight the struggles faced by Mexican immigrants, including *The Circuit* by Francisco Jiménez, which depicts the challenges experienced by Mexican-American families. This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the Mexican-American identity after crossing the border through Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory. The data in this study are in the form of sentences. The data was taken from *The Circuit* as the primary data source. The findings reveal Panchito's hybrid identity, negotiated between his Mexican heritage and the realities of life in America. Despite facing language barriers and discrimination challenges, Panchito maintains a connection to his cultural roots. This study offers a new perspective on identity negotiations in the borderlands by using *The Circuit* as a primary data source, which contributes to a deeper understanding of the Mexican-American immigrant experience.

Keywords: Anzaldúa, Border-Crossing, Mexican American, Panchito, *The Circuit*

INTRODUCTION

America has long been known as the land of immigrants, the land of opportunity, a place where prospective immigrants can achieve prosperity and upward (Abramitzky and Boustan 2017). There are at least four waves of immigration in America. The first wave occurred when the War of 1812, between Britain and the United States ended. The second wave of immigrants occurred when America began a period of rapid industrialization and urbanization in the late 19th century. Third, there was a lull in immigration from 1930 to 1965 after the enactment of The Immigration Act of 1924, limiting immigrant quotas and banning some countries from immigrating to America, increasing the number of illegal immigrants entering America. The fourth wave occurred when the quota system ended in the 1960s (Blau and Mackie 2017). When immigrant restrictions occurred during World War II in an attempt to solve the labour shortage, the United States allowed Mexican agricultural workers to enter the United States through the Bracero Program. This program was not the only agreement taken from both sides to reach an agreement. In 1848, the Treaty of Peace of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed to reconcile the war between the two sides.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo allowed the United States to take all or parts of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico and Ethnic Mexicans living in newly incorporated regions in the mid through late 19th century witnessed the radical restructuring of their lives along legal, economic, political, and cultural lines (Rodriguez 2022; Trist et al. 2022). More than half of Mexico's territory was ceded to the United States with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteeing, among other things, that the property rights and safety of Mexican nationals living in occupied territories in the southwestern United States were guaranteed, and American citizenship became a right for them.

Following the end of the Mexican-American war and as the 19th century went on, Mexico experienced many political events. It was supported by a growing economy in the United States that made emigration to the United States popular. The massive flow

of Mexican immigrants into the United States is good news for American employers who need more workers who can be paid cheaply. It led many American companies such as railroads and others to ignore immigration laws prohibiting the importation of contract labor and send recruiters to Mexico to convince Mexicans to emigrate to America (Blakemore 2023). As Mexican Americans are foreigners in America, they are not immune to the discrimination they have to endure in their new place. One of the things that has troubled Mexico's relationship with the United States is immigration, especially illegal immigration. But the large number of illegal immigrants is the result of U.S. policies and laws designed to produce that (Henderson 2022). This can be seen from the many literary works that recount the experiences of Mexican Americans in America, who often experience exclusion from Americans, both in terms of the language used in education and the scope of work. This is the reason for a researcher to examine how Mexican-American identity after crossing the border in the movie *The Circuit*.

The Circuit is a novel by Francisco Jiménez published in 1997. It won the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Fiction and the California Library Association's 10th Annual John and Patricia Beatty Award. The novel is autobiographical fiction, as it is 90 percent fact and 10 percent fiction (Thekkiam 2020). *The Circuit* tells the story of a boy named Panchito. Panchito lives in a small community in Mexico with his father, mother, younger brother Trampita, and older brother Roberto. The family works hard but is poor and lives in a small house with no running water or electricity. They still enjoy going to church and spending time with their extended family, and they are part of a friendly community. Papa decides to move them to California to give his family a better life. One day, they travel quite a distance to the border between the US and Mexico and manage to slip under the barrier without being seen. Once in California, here Panchito and his family began their struggle in the new world. Starting from getting discriminated in the world of work, education, and others.

Furthermore, in this research, the researcher used Anzaldúa's border (1987) theory to analyze *The Circuit*. Anzaldúa (1987) states that the borderlands are a mixture of two cultures that form into one. Whether you come from Mexico or live in the United States, it is a culture that takes the best and worst from both worlds. It is a constant struggle with the old and the new. He argues that the actual borderland is when someone is of a mixed race, or when two cultures collide and merge (Anzaldúa, 1987). This research aims to show the impact on Mexican identity after crossing the border into the United States using Anzaldúa's (1987) border theory. Because *The Circuit* is a work of autobiographical fiction, with almost all of the events and experiences depicted being real to the author, understanding *The Circuit* as a true narrative of the Mexican immigrant experience can shed light on the experience of Mexican-American identity, which is fundamental to the history of Mexican-American settlement in the United States.

Some previous studies have examined Mexican Americans, the novel *The Circuit*, and used Anzaldúa's (1987) borderlands theory in their analysis. For this study, the researcher examined the identity of Mexican Americans in the novel *The Circuit* by using Borderlands theory. The following are some previous studies that have similarities with this research. The first previous research reviewed was conducted by Kustinah & Sumekto (2021). Kustinah's research (2021) aims to look at Panchito's protagonist character in *The Circuit* using the content analysis method with an interpretative approach. The results show that Panchito's protagonist character provides strong and positive support in realizing his dreams, making a measure of morality that can be expansive in life's struggles. This research also uses *The Circuit* as the main data source, but this research will focus on Mexican American identity after crossing the border.

Several studies have examined the identity of Mexican American border, literary study, Anzaldúa's border theory as well as *The Circuit*, including those conducted by Dian Insani (2021), Ismail & Wulandari (2021), Elías (2022), López (2024), Nyman (2017), García (2022), Athawale (2017), Lennes (2016), Grum (2015) Rodriguez-Mojica and

Briceño (2018). The research was conducted with a focus on Mexican American border studies (Elías 2022; García 2022; López 2024; Nyman 2017), literary study (Dian Insani, 2021; Ismail and Wulandari 2021), Identity in Mexican American Literature (Athawale 2017), using the concept of borderlands from Anzaldua (1987) in conducting research and also the researcher who research *The Circuit* (Rodriguez-Mojica and Briceño 2018). Some of these studies are in line with this research. However, none of these studies have specifically examined *The Circuit*, focusing on Mexican Americans through the lens of Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of borderlands. As such, this study aims to fill that gap by applying Anzaldúa's (1987) borderlands to *The Circuit* to explore Mexican-American identity after crossing the border.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars studying the political and cultural relations between the United States and Mexico began in the 20th century. Postcolonial and cultural studies first developed the concept of border studies, which has since become central to discussions of border cultures. However, the study of "border culture" has begun to recognize the existence of distinctive border cultures that can be non-state or even anti-state (Heyman 2012). The idea of borders then broadened beyond topics related to racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Border studies examine and pay attention to the cultures that color the borders that develop on the borders. These communities can form unique and distinct cultural identities, which may be different from national or state identities.

Borderlands

Borderlands are not only physical, such as the border between Mexico and the United States, but they can also be non-physical. As Anzaldua (1987) mentions in her book, borderlands are places where two cultures meet and blend into a new, unique culture. Whether someone is from Mexico or living in the United States, the culture that forms in the borderlands takes the best and worst elements from both. Border culture is not static; there is always a struggle between the old and the new, between tradition and change. There is a dynamic in the borderlands, where people must constantly negotiate between two different cultures, aspects of both of which create a unique identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). Accordingly, borderlands are physical or geographical spaces and cultural and psychological spaces where identities are shaped and redefined by interactions and conflicts between two cultures.

Anzaldua's *Borderlands* (1987), exemplifies the articulation of the contemporary awareness that 'all' identity is constructed across differences and argues for the necessity of a new politics of difference to accompany this new sense of self. Borderland maps a sense of the plurality of self, which Anzaldua (1987) calls *mestiza* or border consciousness. This consciousness arises from subjectivity that is structured by various determining factors such as class and racial identities.

Anzaldua's *Borderlands* (1987) explains that identity is something dynamic and ever-changing. She challenges rigid and binary views of identity, such as 'race' being strictly defined as a category separate from others. Anzaldua (1987) coined the concept of 'mestizaje' or 'hybridity', which describes identity as a mixture of different elements (Anzaldúa 1987). Race cannot be defined or understood in isolation but rather through relationships and interactions with other aspects of identity, such as gender, culture, language, and life experiences. A person's identity cannot be separated into separate components but must be understood as a network that is interconnected and influences each other.

Living in a border area means being right on the border itself, crossing it, not from one side or the other, but at the gap, to overcome dualism and dichotomy and embrace existing values. To avoid rejection, people sometimes intend to adapt to other people's cultural values to be easily accepted (Anzaldúa 1987). Thus, cultural hybridization creates conflict between two national identities. Apart from the difficulties experienced

by immigrants when crossing national borders, they are also expected to be able to assimilate and adapt to other cultures, languages and cultural identities to be accepted and avoid conflict. Thus, physically and culturally crossing borders affects how individuals see themselves, interact with the surrounding society, and deal with the challenges posed by borders.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative in the field of American Studies. The researcher uses thematic analysis to analyze the data, which includes classification, analysis, and interpretation of literary works. Textual data can be analyzed using this qualitative approach. The main source of information produced is the researcher, who is heavily involved in the qualitative descriptive approach to data collection and interpretation. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research is a tool for investigating and understanding social processes. By using this approach, researchers can better understand the experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and activities of research participants and present a comprehensive and in-depth description of their study topics (Creswell 2018). The data in this research were in the form of sentences. The data are taken from *The Circuit* as the source of data. The data includes words, phrases, sentences, and conversations related to the topic of Mexican American identity after border-crossing written in the novel. The primary data is supported by relevant written materials such as books, theses, articles, and online sources.

In data collection, the researcher used document analysis. According to Creswell (2018), document analysis is a method for interpreting and understanding written or visual materials. It includes reviewing and analyzing texts such as books, articles, reports, or other documents that can provide insight into the research question (Creswell 2018). the researcher read the novel as a primary data source to understand the main ideas conveyed in the novel and find and highlight the conversations and behavior of the characters. Then, the researcher classified the data, wrote the data into a table sheet according to its classification, and then selected the data. Furthermore, the collected data was then prepared for analysis by the researcher. By using thematic analysis that involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns and themes in data (Creswell 2018), the researcher first described the data based on the context of the situation in each conversation that occurred in the data. Second, the researcher interpreted the data based on Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa 1987). Finally, the researcher drew a conclusion that explained the results of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Mexican immigration to America has a long history and along with their economic ties. It started in 1848 after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American war. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo changed the Mexican-American border with Mexico ceding more than half of its territory to America and becoming part of the Southwest United States, including the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and parts of the states of Colorado, Kansas, Wyoming, and Oklahoma borders, in exchange, United States government paid Mexico \$15 million to expand the country's borders. In addition, the treaty also offers blanket naturalization to an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 former Mexican citizens who chose to remain north of the new border at the end of the war (Berry and Kurz 2015; Faingold 2022). Following these changes to the US border, there was an increase in the number of Mexican immigrants in the US. Mexicans in the ceded territories were given the choice of either remaining in the territory they occupied on the condition of changing their citizenship to United States citizenship or remaining Mexican citizens and retreating to Mexican territory. Most of them chose United States citizenship, this was supported following the time that coincided with the economic improvement that occurred in the United States.

At the end of the 19th century, due to the discovery of gold in California and the scarcity of cotton due to the Civil War, cotton became a promising business, and many more things supported the economic improvement in America at that time. The rise of the American economy led to a higher demand for labors in the country. This was also good news for people who dreamed of better things even for those outside America. The first two decades of the 1900s saw the highest level of immigration the country had ever seen. As the increase in immigrants skyrocketed, those who felt threatened by the increasing foreign population that could bring their influences and ideologies issued anti-immigrant sentiments. As a result, The Immigration Act of 1924 was passed which placed a limit on the number of immigrants that could cross the border (Chishti and Gelatt 2024). These restrictions have led to an increase in illegal immigrants to the United States.

Physical Border

At the end of the 19th century, due to the discovery of gold in California and the scarcity of cotton due to the Civil War, cotton became a promising business, and many more things supported the economic improvement in America at that time. The rise of the American economy led to a higher demand for labors in the country. This was also good news for people who dreamed of better things even for those outside America. The first two decades of the 1900s saw the highest level of immigration the country had ever seen. As the increase in immigrants skyrocketed, those who felt threatened by the increasing foreign population that could bring their influences and ideologies issued anti-immigrant sentiments. As a result, The Immigration Act of 1924 was passed which placed a limit on the number of immigrants that could cross the border (Chishti and Gelatt 2024). These restrictions have led to an increase in illegal immigrants to the United States.

During the Great Depression, the United States faced a downturn with Mexicans being deported from the United States as one of the consequences. In the 1940s, with the onset of World War II, the increased need for labors led to an executive order called the Mexican Farm Labor Program implementing the Bracero Program in 1942. This program allowed millions of Mexican men to work legally in the United States on short-term contracts while ameliorating the previous depression-era deportations and repatriations that had unintentionally left the country (Walker 2018). Despite the longevity of the program in the United States, the need for Mexicans to go through official entry points to cross the US border in exchange for paying fees and undergoing tests remains a hardship for many Mexican immigrants that necessitates illegal entry. This is largely due to their inability to pay the crossing fees, as Hernandez said, "Entry fees were prohibitively high for many Mexican workers" (Hernandez 2017). As such, *The Circuit* is one of the works that tells the story of the Mexican American journey across the border.

The Circuit follows the experiences of Panchito, a first-generation Mexican American immigrant who illegally immigrated to America in the 1940s along with his Papa, Mama, and brother Roberto. Travelling to California by crossing the border was something Papa had always told him about when he was in the small Mexican village of Rancho Blanco in search of better job opportunities. When they crossed the border, due to lack of funds, they could not cross at the point where they were supposed to cross.

He pointed out that across the gray wire barricade was California, that famous place I had heard so much about. On both sides of the fence were armed guards dressed in green uniforms. Papá called them *la migra*, and explained that we had to cross the fence to the other side without being seen by them. (5)

The narrative above shows Panchito and his family travelling to the Mexican border with America. Panchito, who had heard stories about the greatness of California, was

finally able to witness California directly. Because he could not afford to pay the border tax, Panchito and his family were forced to cross the border illegally. As Anzaldua explains, physical borders are concerned with geographical issues and spatial segregation between areas where ethnic enclaves are located (Anzaldúa 1987). Mexican immigrants have to cross the geographical border between Mexico and America. In the same way, Panchito and his family crossed the Mexico-United States border to get to California. What Panchito did was a way of crossing the border illegally, which many Mexicans did at the time.

Mental Border

In addition to the physical border that Mexican immigrants in America have to face, they also have to face a mental border to be accepted and blend in America. There are several mental borders that Mexican Americans must face in order to facilitate adaptation and assimilation in America. In *The Circuit*, the mental borders that Panchito, his family and other Mexicans must face consist of the language barrier, stereotypes and prejudice, as well as the identity crisis.

Language Barrier

One of the consequences of crossing the border and becoming the other in another country is a language that is different from the language usually spoken in the country of origin. This leads to two things: the difficulty of communicating with people in other languages and the discrimination that must be faced because it is considered different from others. This was also felt by Panchito and Roberto. Roberto said that he was hit on the wrist by a teacher at his new school in his first year for not following instructions in class because Roberto did not understand what the teacher was saying because the teacher said it in English. Such discrimination and communication difficulties are most common for those who decide to cross the border.

Panchito's difficulties at school due to his lack of understanding of English were not lost on him, as he could not understand what his teachers and classmates were saying. The result of the different languages Panchito understands often leads to discrimination, making them question their own identity. It can make them feel inferior and can take away their ambition. That is what happened to Panchito:

All the kids lined up outside the classroom door and then walked in quietly and took their seats. Some of them looked at me and giggled. Embarrassed and nervous, I looked at the caterpillar in the jar. I did this every time someone looked at me. Miss Scalapino started speaking to the class, and I did not understand a word she was saying. The more she spoke, the more anxious I became. (19)

The feelings of inferiority felt by Panchito as a result of the form of racism he received from this school made it difficult for him to cross boundaries. This is one of the mental barriers that Mexican Americans have crossed. These borderlands are not found or are overcome by crossing California but by simply coming to terms with the things that make a person who they are with one's own identity. This border is increasingly difficult to cross, especially for children who do not have enough knowledge and experience to overcome this problem.

The tendency of Mexican American border crossers due to language differences leads to the choice to stick around people who speak the same language and can understand them. As Panchito does, he prefers to hang around Arthur, his Spanish-speaking classmate. Not only do they share the same language, but they also share the same movies and songs. This similarity is drawn from the background of both of them, who are descendants of Mexico. However, their happiness did not last long as their teacher, Miss Scalapino, reprimanded them and said "No!", "English, English," when he

heard Panchito and Arthur using Spanish. And finally, Arthur had to avoid Panchito when Miss Scalapino was around.

As Anzaldua explains, people of color have a tendency not to want to interact with white people (Anzaldúa 1987). In this case, Panchito chooses to stay in his comfort zone by choosing to mix and use Spanish with fellow Mexicans at his school. This can reduce his chances of adjusting more quickly in America. Always using Spanish in an American environment can also cause Mexican Americans to be ostracized and increasingly considered 'the other' by Anglo Americans.

At sunset we drove into a labor camp near Fresno. Since Papá did not speak English, Mamá asked the camp foreman if he needed any more workers. "We don't need no more," said the foreman, scratching his head. Check with Sullivan down the road. Can't miss him. He lives in a big white house with a fence around it. (73)

After the strawberry harvest season is over, Panchito and his family move to find other jobs to make ends meet. Because they do not have English skills, Panchito and his family have difficulty finding work in the United States. Few people are willing to hire workers who cannot speak English because they have difficulty communicating. As a result, only jobs that require more manpower are willing to recruit them, such as on plantations. Because the cotton, grape, or strawberry seasons do not last all year round, they must adjust to the harvest season on plantations willing to use their services. This method is used by many Mexican Americans who provide harvesting services.

In addition to the difficulties in education as experienced by Panchito, difficulties in the world of work must also be faced by Mexican Americans if they cannot adjust to learning English in the United States. Hence, to facilitate assimilation, Mexican Americans must try to cross the language as the mental border because by using English to interact in the United States, they will be able to live in society, such as getting a job as well as education. Language has also long been a tool to perpetuate injustice against marginalized groups and give power to oppressive institutions (Craft et al. 2020; Weidinger et al. 2021).

Due to the language barrier that often makes Panchito, as a Mexican-American, prone to racism, one way to reduce the unfair treatment that Panchito often experiences are to try to learn English. As Anzaldua (1987) said, "A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés* nor both" (Anzaldúa 1987). By trying to blend in by adapting to the language used in America, in this case, English, Panchito and other Mexican Americans can more easily adapt to their American environment and reduce the possibility of being treated as 'the other' in their social life in the United States.

Stereotype and Prejudice

Gradually, Panchito began to get used to his school routine and began to be able to use English. However, language differences were not the only problem Panchito and his family had to overcome in the United States. The well-being of Mexican-American workers is not always realized. Low wages, limited skills, and few industries willing to hire Mexicans mean they have to compete with other immigrants for jobs. Most Mexican immigrants who come with experience in agriculture generally work on plantations. One of the plantations that employed Mexican immigrants in the early 20th century was cotton plantations.

Cotton was the most important crop grown in the US during the war, even more important than corn and wheat, because cotton was so valuable to the military, including in tents, bandages, belts, uniforms, straps and more (Sumner 2019). Despite its many uses, cotton foremen will seek to profit most from its production. One way to make a profit was to pay workers minimal wages. The arrival of groups of Mexican

immigrants to America, especially those who entered illegally, became easy targets for cotton plantation owners. Many Mexican immigrant families depended on working on cotton farms. Panchito's family was one of them.

Working not only on the cotton farms, moving around was common for Panchito and his family. They worked at a strawberry farm in Santa Maria during the spring and summer, then picked grapes at various vineyards in the early fall, and picked cotton in Corcoran from late fall to early winter. This they did year after year, and because of the constant movement, their life was referred to as a 'circuit'. Such moves significantly influenced the shaping of their identity as Mexican-Americans. The hope of a better life in America often ends in the harsh reality of being an itinerant farmer in California, where working conditions are worse than in Mexico. When working on strawberry farms, for example, they live in tents in camps filled with Mexican immigrants. Although their labor is essential to the plantation owners, workers are often mistreated and underpaid. The plantation owners take advantage of this situation because Mexican immigrants, like Panchito's family, are in desperate need of work and fear deportation, as most of them have no legal documents or are illegal residents. The stereotypes often thrown at Mexico are also experienced by Panchito in *The Circuit*. As said, "The strong smell not only got rid of the ringworm, but it also kept my schoolmates away." Whenever I came near them, they yelled, "You stink like a Mexican!" and sprinted away from me, holding their noses (147).

Mexican Americans are often labelled as 'smelly' and do not maintain hygiene. This stereotype reinforces the negative view of Mexican Americans as a lowly or uncivilized group. This view can make it difficult for Mexican Americans to adjust to the environment in the United States. The stereotypes that are often directed at Mexican Americans lead them to face difficulties in getting jobs and also difficulties blending in with the American social environment.

Identity Crisis

As Panchito and his family continue encountering difficulties in the United States after border crossing, they do not forget the customs they believed in in Mexico. For example, when Panchito's sister is sick, Panchito and his family pray to Santo Niño de Cebú, and when their Mexican tent neighbor, Doña María, says, "Could it be the evil eye?" (36). Likewise, when Panchito reveals to Mama that he has red marks on his body, "The devil made these marks. That's why they're red" (147). This shows that even though they are already in the United States, their identity as Mexicans is always attached to who they are. This is what Anzaldua said that people crossing the border means they are mixing two cultures into one. Whether somebody is from Mexico or lives in the United States, this culture takes the best and worst of both worlds.

Panchito's biggest fear after crossing the border was his identity as an illegal resident of the United States. When Panchito was in social studies class at El Camino Junior High School in Santa Maria, a green uniform and a car marked Border Patrol came up to him at school.

As soon as I saw the green uniform, I panicked. I felt like running, but my legs would not move. I trembled and could feel my heart pounding against my chest as though it too wanted to escape. My eyes blurred. Miss Ehlis and the officer walked up to me. "This is him," she said softly, placing her right hand on my shoulder.

"Are you Francisco Jiménez?" he asked firmly. His deep voice echoed in my ears.

"Yes," I responded, wiping my tears and looking down at his large, black shiny boots. At that point I wished I were someone else, someone with a different name. My teacher had a sad and pained look in her eyes (136).

This illustrates how crossing the border affects Panchito's Mexican American identity. In line with how Anzaldua describes borderlands, Panchito's fear of his illegal status and interactions with the Border Patrol at his school lead not only to the threat

of deportation but also a sense that his identity as an illegal immigrant leaves him isolated and marginalized.

In Anzaldúa's (1987) borderland theory, borderlands are places where individuals are caught between two worlds through the ongoing exchange of cultural practices, values, languages, and identities, and this identity conflict often leaves one feeling incomplete on either side. Panchito, at the time, not only felt physically frightened but also emotionally and psychologically. He wished he had a different name, indicating his desire to let go of the identity associated with his vulnerability as an illegal immigrant. The feeling that Panchito wants to be "someone else" reflects the sense of split identity that Anzaldúa (1987) describes in the concept of *Nepantla*, a state of in-betweenness experienced by individuals living in the Borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987), a state where one is in uncertainty and ambiguity. Panchito feels trapped between two worlds, one that demands him to adapt and become "American", while the other pulls him back to his Mexican identity, which in this context is associated with stigma and fear. Moreover, Miss Ehlis's response to the teacher's display of empathy also shows that borderlands are not only about the boundaries created by the individuals but also by the social system around them. While the teacher may care, she has no power to protect Panchito from the fact that his immigration status makes him vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that crossing the border that Mexican Americans have to face is not only a physical border but also a mental border. As explained by Anzaldua, borderlands are places where individuals are caught between two worlds through the ongoing exchange of cultural practices, values, languages, and identities, and this identity conflict often leaves one feeling incomplete on either side (Anzaldúa 1987).

Panchito, like many other Mexican immigrants, faces various forms of struggles while in the United States, starting from having to face the border illegally, which makes them haunted at all times because of their status as illegal immigrants. They have to face language barriers that not only make it difficult for Mexican Americans in the world of education because it is difficult to blend in, but also they have difficulty getting jobs and enough pay for daily life. They also have to live in a country with negative stereotypes about Mexican Americans. Moreover, it leads them to an identity crisis because they are between two different cultures. In addition to trying to adjust to being accepted in the new place, Panchito and his family still maintain their Mexican customs, such as their belief in Santo Niño de Cebú and regularly praying to him when they experience difficulties. In this experience, a mixed Mexican-American identity is formed through alienation, marginalization, and maintaining one's identity as a Mexican devoted to Santo Niño de Cebú.

This research shows that living on the border not only affects the legal and economic aspects of Mexican immigrants but also shapes their identities in complex and layered ways that create hybrid identities. Panchito and his family, trying to find their place in American society, are constantly hampered by the challenges created by the visible and invisible border. They are caught between two cultures that become one. The choice between maintaining the old Mexican culture or accepting the new American culture accepts the best and worst of both.

Furthermore, in examining *The Circuit* using Anzaldua's theory, this study only focuses on Mexican American identity and the borders that Mexican-Americans must face in America by looking at *The Circuit* as a data source. Further research can look at gender roles in Mexican American immigrants by looking at *The Circuit* or other novels related to Mexican American immigrant experience using Anzaldua's theory, considering that gender roles are the main focus in Anzaldua's theory.

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How to Cite the Article (in *The Chicago Manual of Style 16*)

In-text Citation:

Puspitasari (2024, 5)

.... (Puspitasari 2024, 5)

Reference List Entry:

Puspitasari, Anggi. 2024. "Border Crossing and Mexican-American Identity in The Circuit." *Mahakarya: Student's Journal of Cultural Sciences* 5 (2): 1-11. doi: 10.22515/msjcs.v5i2.9887.



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DOI: 10.22515/msjcs.v5i2.9887