No lawn is an island, at least in America. Starting at my front stoop, this scruffy green carpet tumbles down a hill and leaps across a one-lane road into my neighbor's yard. From there it skips over some wooded patches and stone walls before finding its way across a dozen other unfenced properties that lead down into the Housatonic Valley, there to begin its march south toward the metropolitan area. Once below Danbury, the lawn—now purged of weeds and meticulously coiffed—races up and down the suburban lanes, heedless of property lines. It then heads west, crossing the New York border; moving now at a more stately pace, it strolls beneath the maples of Larchmont, unfurls across a dozen golf courses, and wraps itself around the pale blue pools of Scarsdale before pressing on toward the Hudson. New Jersey next is covered … But neither obdurate soil nor climate will impede the lawn's march to the Pacific: it vaults the Rockies and, abetted by a monumental irrigation network, proceeds to green great stretches of western desert (Pollan 65).

The image of a never-ending American lawn, as sketched by Michael Pollan, spreading across U.S. cities and states without having to stumble on fences, hedges, or walls, pulls us along in a journey that defies artificial borders, uniting people and places in a celebration of a borderless view of the world. The violent and arbitrary borders imposed by civilization succumb to the unstoppable force of nature (with some assistance from garden designers, lawnmowers, pesticides, and herbicides, so that it does not get too wild), which connects everybody's yard with the American frontier. Ultimately, the American lawn emerges as a democratic, egalitarian concept, "implying that there is no reason to hide behind hedge or fence since we all occupy the same middle class" (Pollan 71). It sounds ideal.
Almost. In fact, the borderless image of American lawn conceals an array of violent exclusions, which are at work, cutting and reaping, as the endless green carpet is being mowed each day. In order to sustain the uniformity and harmony of the landscape, Pollan tells us later, people are not allowed to deviate from the norm and allow their lawns to grow more than a few inches. Acts of negligence or civil disobedience that blemish the paradisal harmony of the suburban vista and break consensus carry a high price (literally): people are dragged to court and forced to pay huge fines for refusing to mow their lawns. As far as nature is concerned, the lawn is in fact a violent, authoritarian construct, creating a totalitarian landscape, “subdued, homogenized, dominated utterly” (Pollan 74). The grass is violently mowed over and again, prevented from showing signs of change, development, or self-determination. The image of the American lawn seems to hold a paradox: in renouncing boundaries, it becomes more violent and intrusive.

The approach to borders that is implied in the image of infinite American lawn subscribes to the contemporary commonplace ideal of a globalized world without boundaries. Boundaries are, more often than not, perceived as anonymous and immobile, given entities that supersede the individual. They are often treated merely as obstacles that could and should be eradicated. However, this vision is both utopian and deceptive. As the example of Pollan’s lawn indicates, proclaiming the disappearance of boundaries may bypass the unequal power relations that are at play, not only in the construction of boundaries, but also in their destruction. The contemporary notion of a borderless, globalized world only functions as such for a small, privileged fraction of the world’s population, simultaneously imposing more borders, exclusions, and limitations upon others.

A unilaterally dismissive vision of boundaries also becomes blind to their crucial functions as determining factors in the shaping of cultural spaces and the formation of identity. Boundaries are not violent by definition, but function in that way when they are treated as dividing lines with an unchanging status. However, since boundaries are constructions rather than essences or givens, they have a contingent, even arbitrary nature making them subject to contestation, and even radical change. Contrary to essentialist approaches treating them as dividing lines and thus fostering an oppositional relation between the two sides of the line, boundaries can also be examined as spaces with specific functions. This performative approach to boundaries is taken up by Inge Boer in *Uncertain Territories* (2006). Boer propagates an alternative vision of boundaries as rhetorical or cultural spaces, where “opposition yields to negotiation,” and where “the multifaceted reality of intercultural relations takes on more prominence than the mere demarcation of a binary opposition would allow” (3). Boundaries can thus be viewed as uncertain and therefore productive spaces, in which contrasting visions meet, and where fertile ground is created for acts of negotiation and contestation.

In what follows, I read two autobiographical works by the Caribbean migrant writer Jamaica Kincaid: *A Small Place* (1988) and *My Garden (Book)* (2000). My focus is on