

BREAKING DOWN BORDERLAND STEREOTYPES :  
THE BORDERLAND MINDSET AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

by

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This thesis examines three different texts, using borderland theories as a framework, to demonstrate that borderlands are not about physical locations but psychological states of mind. By studying three distinct texts, the following chapters break down various stereotypes associated with borderlands. The borderland mindset is one of ambivalence and uncertainty. In addition, borderland inhabitants are often concerned with safety and security while feeling as though they do not fully belong anywhere. A borderlander lives between two worlds and deals with intense emotions because of this state of being. It is easy to see the negative ramifications of living with a borderland mindset, but each text discussed in this thesis also reveals that the borderland mindset provides borderlanders with a unique perspective. When borderland inhabitants learn to find the positive aspects of their borderland mindset, they realize that they can accomplish amazing feats. A borderland mindset, or double consciousness as this thesis argues, is frustrating yet rewarding when used to provide an extraordinary perspective to the next generation or give voice to the voiceless.



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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Andy. He lovingly encouraged me to further my education and believed that not only could I do it but that I could do it well. His unconditional love, unwavering support, devotion to our family, commitment to God, and willingness to pick up the pieces when I let them fall are my lifeline.

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These guys are my rocks, and I am forever grateful to God for putting them in my life.

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## INTRODUCTION:

### AN INTRODUCTION TO BORDERLAND THEORIES

Maps delineate geographical borders, but they do not bear witness to the borderlands that encompass the borders, nor do they give credence to the idea that borderlands are not always about physical location. Borderland inhabitants exist throughout the world, but they do not all reside on geographical borders. Borderland theories put forth by Gloria Anzaldúa, Dean Franco, and Delia and Ferdinand Kuhns alert readers to the fact that borders are not just about physical locations but states of mind. This thesis relies on these borderlands theories as frameworks for close readings of three texts. Through these texts, it will become evident that borderlands are often more about a psychological state of mind than tangible borders.

Gloria Anzaldúa's work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, is an autobiographical account of what it means to grow up in a literal borderland. Anzaldúa grew up in South Texas at a time when U.S. military troops invaded Mexico and "forc[ed] her to give up almost half of her nation" (Anzaldúa 29). Her family chose to stay within the United States while other neighbors, friends, and relatives settled south of the U.S. border. Anzaldúa was made well aware of the isolation that takes place on a geographical borderland when one is estranged from half of her nation and ostracized by the citizens of the nation in which she lives. The author's early years were marked with pain and suffering, both physically and mentally. She recalls the torment of living between two cultures where at times it was "a gentle coming together" but at other times "a violent clash" (23). As a result of her struggle to negotiate the internal (and external) collision of two cultures, Anzaldúa set out to find herself, leaving her family and her culture in search of an identity that would better define who she was. This searching led to what Anzaldúa dubs the *new mestiza*, "a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness" (85). Her *new*

*mestiza* is a result of a life throughout which she has been between cultures, not fully belonging to either one. Anzaldúa's life was about a transitioning identity, an identity which does not relate fully to one side or the other. Anzaldúa's adolescence was spent in a literal borderland where she saw the colliding of cultures with her own eyes and felt it with her own heart. Her geographical borderland home plays a pivotal role in her writings and the development of her borderland theories. When people of the United States are asked about bordertowns, they immediately think about the U.S.-Mexico border, a geographic border, just like the one where Anzaldúa grew up, but Anzaldúa demonstrates that her borderland struggles did not disappear when she left her family's home. Instead, her internal negotiations continued because borderlands are not only about physical location.

Franco, though he focuses on the U.S.-Mexico border, puts forth the idea that border zones are far-reaching, stretching well beyond the land where two countries sit side-by-side. Dean Franco focuses on Helena Maria Viramontes's short story, "The Cariboo Café," and notes that in this story "we see that the border zone reaches far beyond the border, displacing people on the very ground they live on" (127). Feeling displaced while at home is the exact definition of a borderland mindset. Franco takes readers a step closer to borderland mindset in his theories as he demonstrates that borderlands are about displacement and the feelings of ambivalence and alienation that result.

Both Anzaldúa and Franco keep their readers within the realm of the U.S.-Mexico border, but Delia and Ferdinand Kuhns go beyond this familiar border by comparing six border regions in Southwest Asia. They find common characteristics among all six border regions, which can also be applied to the borders to which Anzaldúa and Franco speak. The theories and findings of each of these individuals are vitally important to the breaking down of stereotypes of

borderlands. They are the lens through which the books discussed in this thesis are read and understood.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a close reading of Francisco Goldman's *The Ordinary Seaman* (1997), a story about Central American immigrants who leave their home countries to work as the crew men of a ship docked off the coast of New York. This chapter focuses on Central Americans, who exemplify the stereotypical borderland inhabitant, but their borderland is not an ordinary borderland. Not only is it far from the border between countries, it is also a strange place to settle in, yet the men experience many of the characteristics of borderlands while on the ship. Goldman's borderland allows readers to look at the borderland experience through the proverbial microscope as it focuses on a small group of people in a very small space. A microscopic look at the borderland mindset aboard a ship breaks down the stereotype that borderland experiences occur solely within geographic borderlands.

The second chapter continues to breakdown stereotypes of borderlands by introducing a borderland within the state of California. Fae Myenne Ng's *Steer Toward Rock* (2008) narrates the life of Chinese immigrants who reside in San Francisco's Chinatown. Ng's characters very clearly demonstrate the characteristics of borderland inhabitants though they do not live on a physical border. The borderland attributes put forth by Delia and Ferdinand Kuhns provide the framework for this chapter. The Chinatown inhabitants exhibit each of these characteristics - separation from the central power of the home country, handicaps of colonial status, and exploitation of resources within the borderland by the host country – and, thus, a borderland mindset. Characters who possess a borderland mindset are greatly affected emotionally and psychologically by the implications of what it means to have cultures colliding within oneself, but, as each chapter demonstrates, the borderland mindset is not all negative. The characters of

*Steer Toward Rock* show incredible amounts of strength and resolve as a result of their borderland mindsets and experience.

The third chapter of this thesis furthers the idea of borderland as mindset rather than physical location by connecting borderland mindset to W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. A close reading of Edwidge Danticat's *Create Dangerously* (2010) shows how Danticat herself exhibits the underlying ideas behind double consciousness as well as borderland mindset. In *Create Dangerously* Danticat tells her personal story as a Haitian immigrant in the United States while intertwining stories of other immigrants she meets throughout her life who have similar stories to tell. She highlights the dangers of what it means not only to be an immigrant but also an immigrant artist. Throughout the book there are traces of her borderland mindset and double consciousness at work. As with the other books discussed in this thesis, Danticat's story is one of both sorrow and triumph as she struggles to cope with her borderland mindset and then finds beauty and strength in her double consciousness.

This thesis shows the immense struggles of immigrants who grapple with finding the balance within their borderland mindsets. It demonstrates the harsh realities of living with such a mindset, but it also reveals the incredible opportunities that exist for borderland inhabitants, whether literal or psychological. The following chapters break down stereotypes surrounding borderlands, but they also break down stereotypes regarding borderland inhabitants. Through fiction and autobiographical accounts, it becomes clear that borderlands are more about mindset than physical location and that the borderland mindset, or double consciousness, presents hardships as well as victories.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### THE UNORDINARY BORDERLAND IN FRANCISCO GOLDMAN'S *THE ORDINARY SEAMAN*

Gloria Anzaldúa's work regarding borderlands was pivotal in the development of borderland studies and a greater understanding of the minds of borderlanders. Anzaldúa and other theorists such as Dean Franco have developed various ideas of what it means to be a borderland inhabitant and how living in a borderland impacts people both physically and psychologically. Anzaldúa speaks to the ambivalence and uncertainty of life on borders, and Franco teaches about the fragmentation that occurs within borderland inhabitants both because of a change in geography as well as one's own self-perception. These theorists and others will be used in this chapter and throughout the thesis to show how borderland theories are not just about a physical location but a psychological mindset.

Upon hearing the word, "borderland," most Americans would immediately picture the U.S.-Mexico border and people from all over Central and South America. Men from Central America are the focus of this chapter, but their borderland looks nothing like the border town that most North Americans picture. For that reason, this chapter investigates the stereotype of Central Americans as bordertown inhabitants while also breaking down the perceptions of where borderlands are located.

In his book, *The Ordinary Seaman* (1997), Francisco Goldman tells the story of a group of men who have crossed borders and come together to pursue an opportunity as the crewmen of the ship, the *Urus*. The *Urus* quickly becomes a borderland for these Central American men. Borderlanders are defined by several characteristics, including but not limited to, the loss of protection and rights, the hybridity of multiple cultures, and the reinvention of identity. Using

these traits as a starting point, the *Urus* is clearly a borderland for the men who board the ship as crew. The men eventually realize that to stay in the borderland forever could be detrimental to both their physical and psychological health, but they are also aware that if they implement the invaluable lessons they learn on the *Urus*, they will become significant citizens regardless of where life takes them.

The men on the *Urus* are forced to find creative ways to care for their needs when their employers fail to provide food and basic essentials for living. When specific and basic human needs go unmet, significant psychological and emotional needs remain in the foreground and left untreated. These men cannot continue to survive under such devastating circumstances without severe breakdown of the body and/or mind. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs explains the phenomenon that occurs on the ship in regard to unmet basic needs. It is taken into account in this chapter as it relates to the crew and their predicament within the borderland of the *Urus*. This fact is seen throughout *The Ordinary Seaman*, but when Esteban decides within himself to find resourceful ways to meet the basic needs of the crewmen, a significant transformation occurs for most of the men on the ship, especially Esteban.

Borderlands can be found anywhere, even in the most unusual locations, because these areas are more about mindset than they are about location. Goldman's men hail from countries throughout Central America yet they embark on an adventure, which takes them far from their countries' borders and leads them far from the border of any other country. Goldman's protagonist, Esteban, and fourteen other men leave their home countries for various reasons but with the same goal – to make money. After landing in New York from their respective locations, the men take their seats in a van that will lead them to their new home, the boat on which they hope to earn a lot of money. The ship is berthed at a remote pier in New York City, requiring a

long van ride, which takes them past beautiful boats, further inflating their hopes of riches. As the van advances further and further beyond the docks holding numerous ships, the men begin to wonder if this was all a cruel joke, but they finally reach the “deserted and apparently defunct” end of the port (Goldman 19). The men peer from the windows, then descend from the van, viewing their new place of employment for the first time. Esteban is surprised to feel a sense of relief as he sets eyes on the massive sailing vessel and finds the *Urus* to be “a perfectly regular-looking ship, sturdy and capable” (20). He was previously unaware of an innate fear that the boat did not actually exist, so to have the ship within eyesight caused the decrepit watercraft to seem almost glorious in his eyes. Bernardo, one of Esteban’s crewmates and his future onboard roommate, however, is hardly impressed with the boat’s appearance, referring to the vessel as a “broken eggshell” as he looks on with disgust that he is expected to work on such a detestable excuse for a ship (20). Bernardo’s first impression of the boat is a keen foreboding of the months to come.

Immigrants leave their home countries in search of a new place in which to re-root, but when they depart their homes, they forfeit the rights, privileges, comforts, and protection afforded to them in their home countries. Though most of the men who have come to work on the *Urus* are still filled with hope and anticipation as they stand in front of their new home for the first time, they are quickly reminded of their strange and ambivalent position. The men eventually meet Elias, the captain of the *Urus*, as well as first mate, Mark, and they all board the ship together. Elias seems to sense the apprehension of some of the crewmen and attempts to alleviate their fears by explaining that he “wouldn’t have accepted [their] commissions...if [he and Mark] hadn’t felt confident about this ship” (Goldman 25). He continues his welcoming speech, ensuring the men that the *Urus* would soon be “a ship [they’re] all going to feel proud

of” (25). Elias’ speech continues to add to the excitement of the men, but then the captain explains to his men their position as crew of the ship. The men contemplate Elias’ words: “[O]nboard they were in Panama, contracted seaman protected by that country’s sovereign laws. Onshore they were in the United States, where, of course, for the next four days, until their seaman’s transit visas expired, they were perfectly legal” (25-26). The men are no longer under the protection of their home countries, and the host country, Panama, was nowhere in sight. As Michael Templeton notes, “...the ship is docked in a kind of non-nation in which the seamen belong to no one but the ship’s owner” (279). The men are immediately made aware of their lack of security and protection as they are forced to entrust their lives into the hands of a man they have just met. With the dream of wealth still within their minds, the idea of trusting their captain is not yet problematic. As Kirsten Silva Gruesz states, “stuck in the lifeless ‘eggshell’ of a ship without electricity, the crew at first cannot see the magnitude of their unfreedom,” but after only a week onboard the *Urus*, the men become more aware of the difficult and perplexing situation in which they find themselves (67). Templeton remarks on the confusion surrounding even the beginning of the novel: “From the beginning, the ship presents us with a highly problematic sense of place. Docked in New York City, registered in Panama, and adjacent to a dangerous part of the city, the migrant seaman are in an ambiguous and precarious position” (280). The men of the *Urus* find themselves in a precarious position full of ambivalence and uncertainty and lacking in protection. Even the location of the ship leaves the men with questions and doubts as to who is in charge and who could help them in times of crisis.

Uncertainty is a key feature of borderlands, and the *Urus* is no exception. Gloria Anzaldúa very poignantly sums up the struggle of fragmentation and confusion for borderlanders when she says, “Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest



reside there and death is no stranger” (26). Ambivalence is not simply a fleeting feeling in borderlands; it *resides* there. As time wears on aboard the ship, Esteban and Bernardo encounter dreams and visions from their past. They even struggle at times to differentiate between the real and the unreal as confusion becomes a part of everyday life, particularly because they no longer have the security and protection of any form of government. Elias attempts to persuade the men to feel at home on the ship. He uses the Panamanian flag as way to unite the Central American men and as a way to give them a false sense of protection while he takes advantage of them for his own purposes. The men venture off the ship and wind up in *los proyetcos* only to be beaten. Upon seeing their bruises and sores, Elias convinces the men that it is safer to stay onboard the ship, giving the impression that they are safe there and that they should feel at home on the *Urus*. Regardless of what Elias says, the men have no protection:

It is a cruel irony that the crew’s ‘protection’ is posed as a false sense of at-homeness in Central American space: before long, a frightening experience of the outside world lets Elias persuade them to ‘stay in Panama from now on’ (57) and remain within the purported legal safety of the ship. However, the crew eventually discovers that, without properly signed seaman’s articles, they lack even that thin blanket of protection. (Gruesz 66)

Viewing the *Urus* as a borderland adds a great deal of depth to the story Goldman tells through *The Ordinary Seaman*. By incorporating an unordinary type of borderland into his novel, Goldman accurately describes, among other things, the struggles of immigrants around the globe. The lack of protection evident in just the beginning portion of the book demonstrates just one of the immense difficulties faced by borderlanders. Goldman’s initial depiction of Elias leaves the reader with a sense of hope that this captain will take care of his crew, but as the novel

continues, it becomes evident that the captain's motives are less than pure. He takes advantage of his men, just as host countries take advantage of borderlanders the world over. Anzaldúa states, "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*," but in the case of the crew, they were not safe anywhere (25). Their captain took advantage of them on the ship, and off the ship they were beaten and at risk of deportation. Through Goldman's novel, it becomes less difficult to see the power differentials between the host and the immigrants when the reader becomes emotionally involved with a small, specific group of men. Goldman uses his characters' dreams and flashbacks to draw the reader into the story and develop a sense of sympathy as well as empathy for the men on the ship. Goldman's technique and style allow the reader to see these immigrants as individual people with a story. These men, who might otherwise seem foreign to the reader, become people with whom the audience can relate.

As readers are forced to delve into the inner thoughts of the crew members, they are given the opportunity to view the immigrants as humans with the same basic needs as themselves, not the least of those being security and protection. At first glance Elias' assurance of security through Panama while onboard the ship sets the men at ease, but it only takes a week before they begin to understand the full breadth of their protection-less situation. Each night a group of black men gather on the boat dock to smoke, drink, do drugs, and party. These men eventually notice the crew on the ship and use them as entertainment. They throw glass bottles at them and curse them, all while the men on the boat do nothing to retaliate because they have no means by which to enact revenge. The men below are on American soil, with all the protection that American law has to offer them. They have resources, such as guns and other weapons, at their disposal, whereas the crew members have nothing. They have no laws to

protect them, no one to back them up, and no weapons to use and their enemies know it: “los blacks’ seemed to know something about the *Urus*; it was as if they’d somehow figured out what the crew’s situation was” (Goldman 49). The crew is practically forced to stay on the ship at the mercy of Elias, in part because once they set foot on land they are illegal immigrants, but also because of their fear of “los blacks.” In many ways, “los blacks” act as unofficial border control, keeping immigrants from entering foreign land. Borderlanders throughout the world experience this same “us” and “them” mentality where a sense of security is absent. They feel as though they do not belong anywhere, and the fact that no one is there to protect them only heightens the feelings of unbelonging and the separation between “us” and “them.” In the case of the crew on the *Urus*, even “los blacks,” a group who would normally be categorized as outside of the hegemony, make up the haves while the Central Americans onboard the ship are clearly the have-nots. The only place the crew of the *Urus* belongs is on the boat. The only people with whom they can relate, at least at first, are the other crew members. For these reasons, the men build a strong bond and unify together. Once Esteban begins his nightly escapades in search of ways to meet basic needs of the men on the ship, he will eventually establish a relationship with “los blacks” based on the realization that both groups are considered have-nots by the hegemony. This bond provides a great sense of protection for the men on the ship, and “los blacks” are invigorated as they observe the crewmen’s willingness to fight for freedom and take a stand against the oppression they face on the *Urus*.

As previously mentioned, Gloria Anzaldúa’s writings about borderlands have played a critical role in the re-examination of what a borderland actually is. Among other ideas, Anzaldúa talks about the hybridization that takes place in borderlands as various cultures merge to form a new culture. On the *Urus* men from different parts of Central America come together to form

what Anzaldúa calls a “third country” (25). They find safety in numbers because safety cannot be found anywhere else. Men who knew nothing about each other a short time ago are quickly unified to create a new country. This is precisely how border towns work: various cultures fuse together to form a culture that has never before existed. A third country, their *Urus* borderland, becomes home to them all.

Within the third country found on the *Urus* the men establish a strong bond that is brought together through a mutual distrust and dislike for the captain, first mate, and owner of the ship. This bond grows even stronger when the men are gathered together for a barbecue after working tirelessly for three weeks without pay. Bernardo calls it “slave labor” and internally rebukes his crewmates for their gullibility (Goldman 58). The barbecue includes everything the men could want – steaks, corn, and cold beverages. They all sense, however, that the party does not come without a hidden agenda, and they are right. Immediately following the evening of delicious food and refreshing drinks Captain Elias announces to the men that “the owner was having a cash flow problem” (68). He attempts to disguise the lack of pay as a help to the men on board. He tells them that the owner’s inability to pay the men keeps them from wasting their hard-earned money on frivolous things in New York because if they do not have cash in their possession, they cannot waste it. Elias is unsympathetic toward the men. Instead of offering an apology for the “cash flow problem,” he attempts to portray the ship owner as a thoughtful man who has the crew’s best interest in mind when he fails to give them money. Captain Elias belittles the very men who are working around the clock to ready the ship for water while commending the man, the owner, who never shows his face on the boat and takes advantage of fifteen men whom he knows have no other choice but to stay on the boat and work for nothing. The crew decide to take matters into their own hands, appointing Panzon as the official

bookkeeper of the *Urus*. Panzon keeps a record of all the hours each man works and how much he is to be paid for those hours, even allotting for overtime pay. The ledger gives the men a sense of security and makes a glimmer of hope possible. They gain at least a small amount of control, even if only in their minds, of their third country.

Third countries allow the inhabitants a sense of belonging, but they also cause the immigrants to lose some of their individual traits and characteristics. Life in the borderland is difficult and demanding, and borderlanders are forced to constantly reinvent who they are, especially when the residential make-up of a transient society constantly changes. Without the comfort of protection from one's home country or the host country and a loss of belonging, borderlanders are left in a constant state of confusion and uncertainty. Ambivalence causes fragmentation within the men on the ship, particularly Esteban. Even the excitement of dreams of past lovers fades:

But even the most pleasing and arousing and seemingly reliable love scenarios become harder and harder to bring to life after too many visits – though these keep smiling invitingly as if nothing has changed, smiling as if they really wish nothing had changed and are maybe even denying to themselves that they've grown bored and just don't desire their lonely marinero's callused touch anymore... (Goldman 39)

The crew members find themselves in a borderland of intense confusion and fragmentation that causes even their most enticing dreams to become mundane and unwanted. "This is a scene of desperation, but it is also a scene that evokes the degree to which these men have become something else...the familiar dreams of love and pleasure have become dulled by a system of

enslavement that devalues human needs” (Templeton 281). The men’s deepest desires have radically changed, leaving them wondering who they are and what they have become.

Esteban and the other men lose themselves within this third country as they constantly reinvent who they are in order to survive. In fact, only a week into their time on the *Urus*, “nearly everybody already had a nickname” (Goldman 41). The nicknames were given based on looks or first impressions, neither of which adequately describes a person. At the same time, these new names provide a sense of empowerment for the men on the ship. They have all left behind lives of which they were at least somewhat ashamed. The men came to the ship in an attempt to provide better lives for their families or to start over because of a sordid past. These nicknames signify a new beginning. Their identities have changed, at least to an extent, but these new nicknames indicate a re-shaping of who they are. Loss of identity certainly occurs within borderlands, but seldom do borderland inhabitants remain in a state of lost identity forever. In much the same way that a caterpillar goes through the process of metamorphosis, immigrants lose much of their old selves but gain a new sense of self. This process requires mourning the loss of all that their former identities carried with them, but it also invites a celebration of transformation into a new creature. The men have been given new names to fit their new lives and personalities, which carries with it a sense of loss of the past as well as a sense of renewed hope for the future.

Borderlanders deal with what Dean Franco refers to as “a diasporic consciousness” (114). Franco explains that “diaspora is as much about geographical dispersal as it is self-perception” (114). This diasporic consciousness leads to fragmentation within borderlanders. They find it difficult to merge all of the cultures around them, and they do not completely belong in any of the cultures, not even their home cultures anymore because of all that they have experienced and

witnessed. Borderlanders change within as relocating for any reason brings about changes, both wanted and unwanted. Changes that occur through diaspora are not necessarily all negative, but any degree of change leads individuals to feeling as though they do not belong or, as is evidenced through Esteban, that they have vanished. Templeton explains that “the relations between people of different national origins are characterized by conscious redefinitions of themselves (e.g., Esteban must deny his role as a communist soldier in order to have any hope of legal status), yet there is an acute awareness of their origins” (284). Onshore, Esteban is relieved to find people with whom he can easily converse and readily relate, but it is also on land that he realizes just how much he has changed since he first set foot on the *Urus*. As he walks around New York, he thinks to himself, “I’m no one anymore...I’ve vanished” (Goldman 188). This is the exact mindset of a borderlander. A borderlander loses himself because he never feels at home. He is stuck between multiple worlds at once, and Esteban is clearly in this state of limbo. The men change, but they do not forget from where they have come and the people they have left behind. They deal with a constant inner struggle between then and now, which causes fragmentation and leads to feelings of loss of self.

Borderland inhabitants cannot thrive within borderlands forever. At some point they must be willing to take the lessons they have learned and seek a new life outside of the borderland, whether physical or psychological. Esteban grows weary of the ship and his role as Elias’s slave. He realizes that in order to escape this borderland he will have to do it on his own, hence his escapades into Brooklyn at night, in the cover of dark. At first he does not mention his nightly escape to anyone, but when he realizes that he could help his fellow third countrymen through his adventures, he lets them in on his secret. He begins to bring items back to the ship, starting with wood chips that prove to be useless, but other nights he brings back luxuries the

men had never been able to afford, such as shrimp from Honduras. The shrimp lift the spirits of the crew, giving them physical and psychological nourishment to continue to fight for their freedom. These men flew to New York to make money, yet they are stuck on a boat with no pay eating stolen shrimp imported from one of their very own countries. Dean Franco talks in detail of the borderland theory in regard to “The Cariboo Café” by Viramontes, but his description of the opening scene of Viramontes’s work could easily be applied to the situation of the crew onboard the *Urus*, especially as Esteban provides for the crewmen during the night: “[This scene] represents the underbelly of the American Dream, as seen from the perspective of the immigrant. Not entering by way of Ellis Island but ‘in the secrecy of the night,’ not as hopeful immigrants but as displaced people, people out of place who must dwell in the ‘meanwhile’ while striving for a ‘finer future’” (122). Dwelling in the meanwhile is the exact definition of a borderland. The men are stuck between two worlds not just culturally but emotionally, psychologically, and physically.

The “meanwhile” is precisely what Esteban is fighting hard to conquer through his journeys on land. He knows that he has no other way out of the borderland than through paths that he creates himself, both for him and the other crew members. Some of the men resort to sniffing paint thinner to soothe their pain and escape from their “meanwhile.” They fail to see a way out, but Esteban refuses to resign himself to giving up. Each crew member becomes a victim of the oppression onboard the ship, but Esteban’s willingness to find a way of escape from the slavery “marks him as exceptional” and could, arguably, exalt him as the hero of this story (Templeton 285). Esteban’s strength and determination are his keys to leaving the borderland of the *Urus*. Despite the detrimental side effects of slavery, as seen through the crewmen who turn to paint sniffing as a means of coping with their situation, Esteban rises above his current circumstances



to find a way out. It is psychologically and emotionally impossible to live in a borderland, the “meanwhile,” forever, without any negative side effects. The lack of a sense of belonging is damaging to a person’s psyche, and this confusion and homelessness is evident not just in fictional stories but in real life as well: “Indeed, even today Mexican Americans have an ambivalent relation with both Mexico and the United States, regarded by the mainstreams of both as cultural other, speaking an inferior dialect, with an alien set of values. This, of course, necessitates a critique of national in-betweenness...” (Franco 117).

In an article that attempts to educate psychiatrists who work with immigrants and refugees, Verity Buckley explains the extreme psychological and physical ramifications of living in what this paper considers a borderland: “The instability and uncertainty usually found in fragile states create a breeding ground for psychological problems and mental health issues, as well as risk of physical harm. Individuals that live in such environments are more likely to experience trauma on a scale not otherwise known by the rest of the world” (60). Instability and uncertainty are key components of borderlands and are extremely evident onboard the *Urus*. In addition, the reader quickly sees the impact that this psychological turmoil has on the crewmen, including dreams or visions of the past as seen through Esteban, hallucinations as evidenced through Bernardo, and risk of physical harm as was proved when the men were attacked in *los proyectos* and by “los blacks.” The paint-sniffing came as a result of the intense psychological harm of living in a borderland.

Buckley expresses concern for not only the psychological needs of immigrants but physical needs as well: “This period of uncertainty for the patient may coincide with difficulty in meeting basic physical needs that are higher up in Maslow’s Hierarchy and thus are still a priority” (61). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is used by mental health professionals, medical

workers, those involved in various forms of sociology, and even missionaries and pastors around the world. Maslow's chart explains that humans all have the same basic needs, but some needs are more profound than others. When those most basic needs are unmet, it is impossible for a person to even consider his/her other needs. As Abraham Maslow says, "...the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need" (370). At the bottom of the pyramid lie physiological needs: food, water, shelter. Unless a person has access to these basic necessities, he/she cannot focus on other needs, such as safety and belonging. Maslow remarks that when a person "is dominated by a certain need ... the whole philosophy of the future tends to change" (374). Every part of the person is concerned with acquiring what he/she needs to survive without the slightest consideration for a life of quality. If the most primal needs are met, he/she then realizes his/her need for safety and security. "Maslow thought that inadequate fulfillment of these needs might explain neurotic behavior and other emotional problems in some people" (Schmutte 165). The ambiguity within the *Urus* as borderland comes as a result of the lack of basic human needs, such as food, water, and shelter. Esteban and the other men did not feel a sense of security on the ship as they were cut off from the center of power of their countries and were not truly protected by the United States or Panama, but once they bonded together and even became friendly with "los blacks," this need for safety was at least somewhat fulfilled even if not completely. This leads to the next tier on the hierarchy: "If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs" (Maslow 380). As was previously mentioned, Esteban and the other men lost their ability to dream of lovers not long after they embarked on their journey as crewmen. Their physiological and safety needs were unmet; therefore, their need for love was no longer forefront in their minds. Esteban began leaving the

ship and bringing back basic needs for himself and the other men. He also established a relationship with “los blacks” and others onshore, which led to a greater sense of security. In return, Esteban’s need and desire for love and belonging reemerged. He sought out relationships on land, particularly with Joaquina, with whom he learned once again how to be vulnerable and courageous.

This leads to the fourth level on Maslow’s pyramid, esteem needs: “Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (Maslow 382). The men on the *Urus* were left without the most basic needs for survival, were offered no protection, and were constantly taken advantage of. The combination of these abuses deeply affected the men psychologically. It went beyond feeling that they were not worthy of respect; they were unable to even recognize their need for worthiness. Life had been stripped from them. Esteban used his war survival instincts to overcome the maltreatment he and the other men suffered, but other men did not have the same fortitude, which, again, led to using paint thinner as a drug to numb the pain and cause them to forget about their horrible circumstances.

At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of needs pyramid is self-actualization: “It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (Maslow 382). Esteban personifies this pyramid. At the end of the novel the Ship Visitor tells the story of the *Urus* to Ariadne, who calls the crew “complete dupes, people so incapable of helping themselves,” but Esteban proves her wrong (Goldman 379). He musters the courage to leave the ship, bringing back supplies that meet their basic needs. Then he establishes a camaraderie with “los blacks” and makes friends

with people on land, all of which raises his feelings of security. Next he allows himself to open up to Joaquina, establishing a relationship with her that causes him to feel as though he is loved and belongs somewhere. Fourthly, Esteban's sense of self-esteem is renewed as he cares for the men on the ship and finds community onshore. He has now reached the apex of the hierarchy of needs where he focuses on self-actualization and being the best that he can be. Not only that, but his ability to meet many of the needs of some of the other men fosters growth in their esteem and courage as well. As Anzaldua states, "Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado, mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (87). Esteban and other men reached the point where they were no longer concerned with their physical needs because they found a way to meet those needs. This allows them the opportunity to become aware of their situation for what it is. They find a way to rig the ship and finally make it move, if only a little. They were encouraged by this and proud of their ability to fight against the oppression under which they had been suffering for far too long. Esteban appears happy to see the men take pride in their work, but he is not content to let them stay this way, except for the drug addicts who express no desire to overcome their situation. When the Ship Visitor comes to the boat at the end of the novel, he asks Jose Mateo where everyone is. Jose replies, "They went with Esteban. They all decided to take a chance, and if it doesn't work, then they can still go home penniless later, no? He has friends in the city who've offered to put them all up for awhile" (380-381). As Esteban climbed the pyramid of needs, he brought others along with him. Esteban rose to the top of the needs triangle and began

striving to reach his full potential. He removed himself from the awful borderland of the *Urus*, where he was mistreated and malnourished, and he reestablished himself in a community where he felt as though he belonged and could flourish. It was necessary for Esteban and others to leave the *Urus* if they had any hope of thriving in life. His fortitude and perseverance allowed for his own escape as well as the escape of some of the other men.

The *Urus* acted as a borderland for far too long for these men. They were left without food and clean water, and they had no safety or security, which is true of borderlands. The men established a third country where their cultures hybridized for survival's sake. They put aside their differences and bonded together, a very typical approach in borderlands. The lack of basic needs and the hybridization led to loss of self in many ways. Fragmentation and ambivalence were daily struggles for the men aboard the *Urus*, as well as people who are in other borderlands, whether physical or psychological. The borderlanders of the *Urus* were fortunate to have Esteban alongside them as he fought for a way out of the torment in which they lived on the ship. He supplied the needs of the men and paved the way for their escape, reaching the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Goldman's *Urus* serves as a good reminder of the battles that immigrants throughout the world suffer every single day. Immigrants are doomed to a life of pain and agony due to the oppression and opposition they face, particularly within borderlands. Esteban made a choice to rise above the harsh treatment he received from his oppressors. He and most of the other men on the ship developed new identities, bonded together, and persevered to make better lives for themselves. Borderlands can be found anywhere, as is evidenced by the *Urus*. They are places of severe oppression yet great promise. Esteban's fortitude, strength, and perseverance allowed him to overcome the burdens of his borderland, particularly as he bonded together with his fellow crewmen. Once he found a way to meet the crew's very basic physical

needs, he was better equipped to recognize and find healing for his psychological needs as well. Goldman reminds his readers that all humans, regardless of race, language, or religion have the same basic needs, which, if left unmet, have severe psychological and physical ramifications.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### CHINATOWN AS BORDERLAND IN FAE MYENNE NG'S *STEER TOWARD ROCK*

Francisco Goldman's *The Ordinary Seaman* (1997) demonstrates the borderland theory through Central American figures located in a liminal space, the *Urus*, a ship docked off the coast of New York. From a North American standpoint, the stereotypical borderland is comprised of South or Central Americans. Goldman's novel, in some ways, added to this idea, while at the same time breaking down the idea that borderlands only exist on physical borders between two countries. Chapter Three will further the idea that borderland theory is more about mindset than location and will also dismantle stereotypes that Central and South Americans are exclusive inhabitants of borderlands.

Fae Myenne Ng's *Steer Toward Rock* (2008) serves as a beautiful depiction of life in a figurative, rather than literal, borderland. Her novel is situated in San Francisco, far from an actual border between two countries; thus, this work gives credence to the fact that the borderland theory can aptly be applied to the lives of immigrants who live in the middle of a country, rather than on a genuine, physical border. Ng's novel demonstrates that the borderland mindset is evidenced in immigrants, regardless of their physical location. Borderlands share a wide array of characteristics, but this chapter will focus on three distinct traits found in almost all borderlands as put forth by Delia and Ferdinand Kuhns: separation from the central power of the home country, handicaps of colonial status, and exploitation of resources within the borderland by the host country. Each of these characteristics psychologically and emotionally affects borderland inhabitants as they work through balancing inclusion and exclusion, displacement, fragmentation, and transitioning identity. These attributes are highly significant as they show the inner turmoil that takes place within borderland inhabitants while also demonstrating the strength

and resolve that borderlanders develop through these characteristics. The borderland discussed in this chapter demonstrates each one of these characteristics.

Borderlands have been thought to be literal places where two countries collide, but in *Steer Toward Rock* the characters are Chinese immigrants who live in Chinatown within the city of San Francisco, nowhere near a border between two countries. In the book, *Borderlands*, Delia Kuhn and Ferdinand Kuhn describe six border regions of Asia, demonstrating how borderlands of all kinds exhibit the same characteristics. They first reveal that borderlands are “cut off from the center or power in its own country” (Kuhn viii). When people are cut off from their own countries, whether by choice or not, they immediately develop a sense of unbelonging. They become borderland inhabitants who are faced with the distinction between “us and them.” Borderlanders then develop their own space, their “third country,” as Anzaldua has named it, and eventually learn to balance feelings of inclusion and exclusion (25).

The inhabitants of Chinatown in *Steer Toward Rock* are no longer legally tied to the laws and ordinances of China. The novel opens as protagonist, Jack Szeto, recounts his emigration to the United States and reminisces about his drive to the Department of Justice after first arriving in California. In order to immigrate to the United States, Jack forfeited his ties to his home country, buying a new name and becoming part of an immigration scheme: “I was admitted into the country as the blood son of Yi-Tung Szeto” (Ng 4). This leaves Jack without the laws of China, but it also leaves him without the safety and security that Chinese authorities could have provided him in his home country.

As Jack is left without the security of China, he becomes keenly aware of the fact that he no longer belongs to China, but he also does not fully belong to the United States. Jack is faced with learning to balance feelings of inclusion and exclusion. This balance is a daily struggle for



borderland inhabitants. Living within a borderland causes mental and emotional strain.

Borderlanders do not belong to the country to the south nor the country to the north, or in the case of Chinatown, they are not fully Chinese yet not fully American. Instead, they possess a sense of hybridity in the way that their two cultures coincide in everyday life. As Brunet-Jailly states, “Borders are not just hard territorial lines – they are institutions that result from bordering policies – they are thus about people; and for most settled territories they are predominantly about inclusion and exclusion, as they are woven into varied cultural, economic and political fabrics” (3). Borderland inhabitants are forced to balance the conflicting feelings of inclusion and exclusion.

Inclusion provides borderland inhabitants with a sense of belonging. They develop a camaraderie that only fellow borderlanders can understand. Relationships born as a result of inclusion are not always amicable friendships; nonetheless, these relationships do bring about the feelings of security for which borderlanders long after they cut off from the power within their home countries. Jack Szeto bought his name from Gold Szeto, a man involved in various illegal schemes, who is not afraid to lord his power over the people he has helped. Jack becomes the paper son of this cruel and crafty man, but in many ways he owes Gold Szeto for all he has done. They develop a give-and-take relationship that is very common within borderlands. Both Gold and Jack Szeto, as well as their co-workers, friends, family and neighbors, live in constant fear of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). They rely on each other to maintain the secret lives they have worked hard to establish. On the way to a meeting with Gold Szeto, Jack encounters Fourth Fong, a fellow Chinatown resident who works at Fong-Fong Brothers Ice Creamery. Fong repeatedly calls after Jack, but Jack tries to ignore him, revealing that the two men are not bonded by a deep friendship yet they retain the responsibility to take care of each

other. Fong informs Jack that the INS had come to his place of business inquiring after Gold Szeto. Fong relays to Jack that they had asked the same questions as usual: “Is Szeto his real name? Does he own the Universal? What’s his relationship with Jim Mulligan” (Ng 38)? Fourth answers the questions in the same manner in which he has always done in order to maintain Gold Szeto’s story, and Fong wants Jack to relay his loyalty to the powerful Gold Szeto.

Maintaining one’s legal identity is a struggle in Chinatown and borderlands as a whole. Gold Szeto goes to great lengths to keep his “legal” life intact, going so far as to leave a blank space on Jack’s immigration papers that would allow for the immigration of a Chinese wife for Jack. This wife, however, was never meant for Jack. She would be his wife on paper only, just as Jack is Gold’s son on paper only. The empty space was left to satisfy the desires of Gold Szeto to bring a male heir into the world. Gold Szeto organizes a wedding ceremony for Jack and his fake wife, Ilin, with numerous guests “believing their cooperation would insure his success” (Ng 73). The guests would be able to say, “*I went to the son’s wedding banquet, I toasted their hundred-year happiness. I was a witness,*” and thereby effortlessly uphold the “official story” (Ng 74). Occasions such as this magnify the fact that Jack, Gold, and the others are not officially members of US society. The exclusion is obvious. If they were fully included in US life, the breadth of effort necessary to maintain their identities would be unnecessary. These occasions also highlight the intense inclusion that Chinatown inhabitants sense toward each other as they work hard to protect one another and provide the security that is lacking as a result of their immigration.

The immigrants have a sense of inclusion because of their camaraderie with each other, but they have also established their lives in the United States and are very much a part of

American life. The complexity of the situation is that they feel excluded as outsiders within the United States while also feeling included as members of the US society. Jack and his neighbors go about everyday life in the same way that any typical American citizen would. Jack recounts one such ordinary day: “Near noon that Saturday, I headed to the bank to get change. It was still overcast and the flat light magnified everything. There was a rush and rest rhythm on Stockton Street...Trucks and cars and buses were packed in a line of exhaust fumes all the way to the tunnel” (Ng 159). Jack’s everyday life was just as normal on the outside as that of an American citizen born and raised on American soil. He, at least at times, feels as though he is very much a part of the culture that surrounds him.

Jack experiences the positive effects of inclusion, but he also is keenly aware of his position as an outsider. Though they live in the United States and receive many of the benefits of American life, Jack and his fellow Chinatown neighbors are not officially American citizens. This fact makes their lives extremely complicated in various ways, adds to the internal waging war of inclusion and exclusion, and causes immense confusion within the minds of these borderland inhabitants. Jack eventually meets Joice, who becomes the love of his life. For a time, they are inseparable, but one night, after a conversation where Jack tells Joice about his contract with Gold Szeto, Jack recounts, “Right then, I felt our roads dividing” (Ng 31). Their next encounter confirmed his feelings. Jack and Joice meet in front of the Waverly Arms where Joice says, “I have” (32). Jack immediately knows what she is trying to say yet he fails to fully understand why she cannot finish her sentence: “To have happiness is to speak of new life. But she left out the word *happy* and I felt empty” (32). Jack is elated with the news of their baby, and he immediately tells Joice that he will talk to Gold Szeto so they can marry and be a family. Understanding finally dawns on Jack as to why Joice could not finish her sentence to tell him

that she had happiness when she says, “I never said I wanted [marriage].... I’m not in love” (33). Jack is confused and hurt. He recounts his love life gone awry to his friend, Louie, who tells Jack that “maybe she’ll say yes if you are a true American” (Ng 45). Jack likes the idea, but he is also realistic and hates the idea of losing the \$4,000 he paid to Gold Szeto for his immigration. Nevertheless, he ponders the idea for weeks and months to come.

Living in Anzaldúa’s “third country” has created a deep sense of belonging for these characters, yet at the same time it has created a sense of not fully belonging to a legally recognized community. This “third country” has created complete confusion for Jack, even in regard to his relationship with Joice. The borderland mindset affects every aspect of life, as Jack Szeto demonstrates. After nine months, Jack receives word that Joice has given birth to their daughter but that she does not want to see him. He longs to see his daughter’s face, to know if she resembles him or not, and to hold her in his arms, but Joice wants nothing to do with him. Jack’s discussion with Louie is fresh on his mind, and he continues to contemplate the idea of becoming an American citizen with hopes of earning Joice’s love and respect.

Even if borderland inhabitants do become legal citizens of their host country, they are often citizens in name, not in mindset. They do not possess a strong sense of loyalty to either nation. Jack Szeto decides to confess to the government that his name was bought, but he does so out of a desperate attempt to entice Joice to love him. He does not confess out of a sense of loyalty or duty to the United States. Louie once suggested to Jack that he get naturalized in order to become a citizen, and Jack responded by saying, “What for” (Ng 46)? Jack does not have feelings of patriotism toward the United States, yet he does not act as a non-citizen either. He sends his daughter to school and contributes to the economy through his work at the butchery. He belongs in Chinatown. His neighbors are his brothers, but the people outside of his

borderland are not part of his life. Jack insists that his life feels like “a chicken cage” and that “from the Universal, [his] world extended only a few blocks in each direction” (Ng 8). Again, Jack has a sense of being both included and excluded.

In addition to suffering from the incessant tug-of-war between feelings of inclusion and feelings of exclusion, borderland inhabitants also struggle with the emotional residue of displacement as a result of being cut off from the center of power. Feelings of displacement are common for immigrants, particularly those forced to leave their home countries. A lack of belonging further enhances these feelings. Living within a borderland leaves its inhabitants feeling homeless and rootless: “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*” (Anzaldúa 25). Borderlanders live in constant fear, always watching over their backs. Because of this, “...an individual can be displaced while at ‘home’” (Franco 128). Many borderland inhabitants have been forced to emigrate from their home lands for one reason or another. Others have chosen to do so. Borderland inhabitants may emigrate their home countries on their own, with their families, or in large groups. Immigration to a new country may be out of necessity (war, famine, oppression) or it may be out of a desire to start a new life or be united with other family members who have immigrated. People may be forced to leave their home countries involuntarily, causing a mass migration or diaspora. Jews who fled Palestine after Babylonian captivity or Africans who were sold to various countries during the trans-Atlantic slave trade are familiar examples of diaspora, but any time a large group of people leaves their home country to immigrate to another country, it can be considered diaspora. Regardless of the reason for the re-location, diaspora and immigration bring immense amounts of needed change. Franco’s thoughts on diaspora were mentioned in Chapter Two, but they are just as relevant to *Steer Toward Rock* as they were to *The Ordinary Seaman* because both novels

present the struggles of borderland inhabitants. Franco's thought that "diaspora is as much about geographic dispersal as it is self-perception" can aptly be applied to Jack Szeto and his fellow Chinatown inhabitants (114). Borderlanders no longer know who they are. They must reinvent almost every aspect of their lives in order to survive in their new habitat. Franco refers to this mindset as "diasporic consciousness," a continual state of feeling at home yet not at home (114). Jack suffers from a diasporic consciousness. He chooses to make the confession of his illegal immigration to the United States and loses his arm when Gold Szeto learns of Jack's confession. He sends his henchmen to punish Jack for his disloyalty to him, the one who helped Jack immigrate to the United States. Jack is willing to sacrifice a lot in order to belong somewhere or to at least belong to someone, Joice. It could be argued that Jack decided to enter the confession program because of love rather than a desire to belong to a nation, but whatever his reasons for the confession, the fact remains that Jack lacks a sense of belonging. He is never fully at home in life or in his relationships.

Though a diasporic consciousness leads to uncertainty and confusion, it also enables a person to understand situations from various viewpoints. Jack's Chinese upbringing and his relationships with fellow Chinese in Chinatown cause him to understand the world through his Chinese worldview, but his desire to belong in the United States has caused him to learn American customs and traditions as well. His diasporic consciousness provides him with the unique ability to see the world from various points of view. A person's worldview acts as a filter by which they attempt to understand every situation they encounter. Jack is exceptional in that he sees situations through the eyes of his Chinese heritage as well as his learned American thought processes. Jack's daughter, Veda, learns of her father's personal history through Joice, and when her boyfriend decides to travel to China, Veda asks to go along. She wants to learn

about her father's past through her own eyes. Veda meets her father's birth mother, who gives Veda a book that contains the story of Jack's past. Jack's birth mother sold Jack to a woman who longed for children but was infertile. When Veda first learned of this through Joice, she was enraged and could not understand how a mother could sell her own child. The more Veda learns through the book, however, the more she understands the heart of her biological grandmother, and she realizes why her father was sold. Upon her return, Veda was "a woman on fire" (Ng 190). She yearned even more than before to see her father become a naturalized citizen of the United States. Jack contemplated her request: *Will I?* A new plant becomes naturalized to a new land. *Maybe* my daughter hopes naturalization will give me the safety to set root. *Maybe* my naturalization can give her a sanctuary in trusting that her father will not be deported (Ng 190). Chinese and American values are deeply entwined in Jack's thoughts. One of the core values of Chinese culture is that of face, "the positive public and self image a person cultivates in a social context. It is the extent to which a person measures up to a standard to which they hold themselves privately and publicly" (Chuah, Hoffman, and Larner 1204). Joice's telling of Jack's story to Veda was shameful to Jack. He said his story "was a story between lovers, this was not a story between father and daughter," yet, as is evidenced in his thoughts about naturalization, he was willing to put aside his pride and lose his face in order to bring about freedom, an American value, for his daughter (Ng 190). Another value within Chinese culture is that of collectivism, where individual needs are put aside in order to help the group (Chen 271). This group could possibly consist of co-workers or neighbors, but the most important groups in Chinese culture are family and friends (271). Jack Szeto is at a crossroads, and he chooses what he feels is best for his daughter, regardless of the personal cost to himself. Though he lives in the United States, he is still tied to his Chinese culture's values. At the same

time, he is well aware of the values of the country in which he and his daughter now live. Jack decides to reroot in order to give his daughter the security and the freedom for which she desperately longs: “My story is native to our history but it need not be our root. A naturalized plant is new life. So I hand over my story. Let her tell. Let her not. Let her find her way through the story so that it frees her” (Ng 191). Jack chooses freedom for Veda rather than saving his own face. In other words, Jack’s diasporic consciousness is in constant negotiation with his Chinese self and his American self. The way he weighs the values of his home culture against the values of his new culture in order to make day-to-day decisions, both big and small, reveals the balance of inclusion and exclusion in Jack’s life.

Balancing inclusion and exclusion and dealing with displacement are serious matters within borderlands that come about, at least in part, because the immigrant is cut off from the center of power of his/her own country as the Kuhns purport. The second characteristic of borderlands put forth by the Kuhns is that borderlands “share some of the handicaps of colonial status” (Kuhn viii). People groups which have been subjected to colonization by oppressors suffer grave effects of colonialism, including a loss of traditions and a watering down of the native culture. Colonial handicap is evidenced in Ng’s *Chinatown*. Towards the end of the novel, Jack’s daughter, Veda, mentions her obligation to attend “the dreaded Chinese School” with her best friend, Mimi, in the afternoons and weekends (Ng 225). Due to the diluting of Chinese culture within Chinatown, as it mixed with American culture, the younger generations are required to go to Chinese School to stay acquainted with their heritage, their traditions, and their language. Immigrants are keenly aware of the role of displacement in their lives. They must cope with their own inner feelings as displaced people while also trying to teach the next generation the ways of their home culture. Just as with Veda, subsequent generations of



immigrants do not inherently know their parents' language and culture because they are surrounded by a completely different culture and language. First-generation immigrants watch their children dismiss cultural practices, and even linguistic nuances. Fragmentation is already difficult for an immigrant but to be reminded of it through the next generation's lack of understanding of the family's home culture adds a greater depth to the sense of loss that occurs through fragmentation within the borderland.

Living day-to-day with the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion as well as a diasporic consciousness causes borderland inhabitants to lose their former identities in order to develop new identities which better coincide with their current lives. Fragmentation becomes a way of life. Ng employs specific techniques to provoke emotions of disorientation within the reader that allow him/her to experience some of the same emotions as the characters within the novel. One such technique is that of language. Ng's characters speak to each other in Cantonese, but Ng writes in English as if to translate her character's conversations for the audience. The reader, therefore, must become acquainted with certain Cantonese phrases in order to fully understand the story. For example, during an encounter between Jack and Joice in front of the Waverly Arms, she speaks two words to him, "I have" (Ng 32). Jack immediately recognizes what Joice is trying to say, but the typical reader would not understand. Ng clarifies Joice's statement through Jack's thoughts: "To have happiness was to speak about new life" (Ng 32). The reader comes to the understanding that Joice is pregnant. Ng's use of the Cantonese expression, "To have happiness," brings a slight sense of confusion to the reader. The audience realizes that a significant turn of events has just occurred, but the nature of the event is not immediately clear. Ng also uses Chinese characters to number each chapter of the book. In addition, the novel is divided into five sections and Ng chose to write each title in both English and Chinese.

Interestingly, the section titles are not written in both languages on the same page; instead, the front of each title page contains the name of the section in English and the back of the page contains the name in Chinese. Perhaps Ng chose to use both the front and back of the pages to demonstrate the fragmentation of the lives of her characters. Had the title been written in both languages on one side of the page, the dichotomy would not have been as blatant.

These characters are constantly trying to balance the duality of their lives, as if perpetually turning the page of a book. Louie, Jack's best friend, provides a prime example of this struggle when Jack asks him whether his Chinese wife, Yuenling, or his American girlfriend, Pegeen, is dearer to his heart. "Louie's hesitation spoke his pain" (Ng 91). After several minutes, he finally responds, "Pegeen understands my *heart-thinking*...But Yuenling is Chinese, and in the end, the ancestors must be honored" (Ng 91). This answer did not come easily for Louie. As Ng explains, "Then [Louie] sighed, as if defeated" (91). Louie's answer to Jack's question undoubtedly displays the dichotomy present in his life. It can be assumed that Jack, who also suffers a fragmented life, knew that Louie would find it difficult to answer the question.

The third, and final characteristic of borderlands according to Delia and Ferdinand Kuhn brings to light the fact that "each borderland has natural and human resources which its country as a whole can ill afford to neglect or squander" (Kuhn ix). Ng's Chinatown possesses resources that California, and, therefore, the United States, cannot afford to waste. Chinatowns across the country have become tourist traps. Veda speaks to this when she describes Chinatown after living elsewhere for several years. She says, "Home was a dump. Our street level was all commerce, beautified for tourists. True home was the second level, barred windows, laundry and potted plants on the fire escape" (Ng 224). She knew that their neighborhood was beautified for the purpose of tourism even at a young age. She recounts being mad at tourists and making a

game of tormenting them, although she never understood why she had so much anger toward tourists as a child. Now that she was an adult, she “was made at a tourist again and [she] knew why” (224). She looked around at the “rows and rows of souvenir shops” and found them to be “worse than the topless bars just a few blocks away” (224). Veda had grown tired of how her life and the lives of her fellow Chinatown inhabitants had become a tourist trap. The bottom levels were made to attract tourists and to earn money while their real homes were all but exquisite. The tourism industry called for Chinatown residents to take on a new identity in order to bring in money. The borderland inhabitants of Chinatown lost their identity not only because of being cut off from the power of the home country through immigration but also because they needed to present a certain image in order to make money through the tourism industry and taxes earned through Chinese restaurants.

The need for the formation of a new idea comes as a result of commerce but also as a result of feelings of inclusion/exclusion, displacement, and fragmentation that come from ambivalence and unrest. This transition is excruciatingly difficult for many, if not all, borderlanders. Camacho uses the word “violence” to describe the inner battles faced by borderland inhabitants. “The long history of border conflict inscribed its violence directly on the body, a mestizaje born of contradiction and ambivalence” (Camacho 262). The border conflict is physically, emotionally and psychologically violent. Perales also employs the word “violence” in regard to Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. “[Anzaldúa’s] words show that a history of violence presented new possibilities and modes of identification rooted in borderlands experiences. Hidden and misunderstood, these identities were real and people defined them on their own terms” (Perales 163). Borderland violence, both physical and psychological, calls for

the need of new identities. The inhabitants are no longer free to be their former selves; neither are they the same people they were before relocating to a borderland.

A new identity is almost imperative in the borderland as inhabitants have left behind former lives in search of new ones. Jack spent his adulthood trying to create a new name and a new identity. He entered the Confession Program to rid himself of the stench of his bought name, Jack Szeto, yet his confession did not bring his Chinese identity back to life. Instead, Jack was forced to give new meaning to his bought name. He worked hard to support Veda even when Joice wanted no part of their lives. He battled within himself to redefine who he was. At one point his inner aggression played itself out physically as Jack shook his daughter and yelled, “*Do you want my blood? Do you want my last breath? I paid everyone back. I lost everything. Where is my fair share*” (Ng 148)? Jack’s assault on his daughter was obviously about more than his frustration toward her for asking so many questions; he was frustrated with life in general. His inner turmoil of being a borderlander with a transitioning identity shows itself through violence. As Camacho explains in the previous paragraph, border conflict is wreaking havoc on Jack’s life. He is becoming “a mestizaje born of contradiction and ambivalence” (Camacho 262). His own words make it clear that he felt as though he had lost everything.

Jack’s identity struggles continue into old age. Veda and Joice convince Jack to become a naturalized citizen, and he excels in his interview, until the last question. He cannot answer the interviewer’s final question, “Which name do you want” (Ng 254)? Jack’s immediate response is, “Both. Both names are mine” (Ng 254). Herein the reader sees the result of borderland existence. Veda’s father is no longer fully Yuo Seen Leung, yet he is not solely Jik Moon Szeto. He has become a hybrid of the two names, and, therefore, is unable to choose between the two. His former identity as Yuo Seen Leung has been almost entirely lost along the way, but it will

forever remain a part of his identity, signifying from where and from whom he originally came. The identity he formed with the name Jik/Jack Moon Szeto defined, in a sense, the person he has become, but it in no way encompasses all of who he is. For these reasons, Jack wants to keep both names. Apart from each other, the identities cannot individually exist. In the end, it is Veda who must make the decision. After staring into her father's eyes to determine which name she should choose, Veda comes to the realization that "he always wore a face that could go both ways" (Ng 255). Veda recognizes that her father's life is due in part to both of his names, both of his identities, but she chooses Jack Moon Szeto. She "chose his fake name, the name he lived half his life with, the name he made with his own sweat, the name he surrendered for love, the name that made him true" (Ng 255). Veda knows that her father has given life and limb, quite literally, to create a new identity. She could not have chosen a more appropriate time to acknowledge all that her father has accomplished through suffering.

The borderland theory is evident throughout *Steer Toward Rock*. These characters each possess various characteristics of borderlands' inhabitants including the balance of inclusion and exclusion, displacement, fragmentation and a transitioning identity. It was once believed that borderlands only existed on physical borders, particularly the U.S.-Mexico border, but Fae Myenne Ng's work demonstrates that this is not the case. As Hämäläinen points out, "What earlier generations saw as a peculiarly American space has become a larger, globe-trotting phenomenon that drifts across borders, speaks new languages, and adopts new customs. What was once the marker of a particular place has become a way of seeing the world" (341). Borderlands exist throughout the globe and the physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of living in such areas, whether physical places or not, are intense.

Chinatown as well as lands on the U.S.-Mexico border can both be considered borderlands. Kuhn's insight into the marked attributes of borderlands - separation from the power of home countries, exhibiting some of the handicaps of colonial status, and being taken advantage of as resources by the host country - relate perfectly to the location found in *Steer Toward Rock*. The borderland discussed throughout the preceding paragraphs is home to many who deal with the characteristics, both positive and negative, of borderland inhabitants. The characters of this novel exhibited the emotional turmoil of feeling both included and excluded. They also developed a diasporic consciousness through displacement. Fragmentation, in addition to these other emotional states, led to the loss of identity for the characters in these literary works, which caused a hybrid identity where characters learned to see life through various worldviews. They left behind their former identities and established new ones. Often times this resulted in a hybridization of their cultures, just as in the case of Jack Szeto. He said that "Obligation and Obedience" were his "Confucian curse" and with that he was obligated to obey the Father (Ng 4). In the end, he merged his "Confucian curse" with his newfound identity as a hard-working member of society after his confession (Ng 4). Though Jack lost a sense of who he once was, he never fully lost his old self as it remained alive in the story that Veda continued to write with her own life.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND BORDERLAND MINDSET IN EDWIDGE

#### DANTICAT'S *CREATE DANGEROUSLY*

The first two chapters of this thesis discussed the borderland mindset in various locations. The first was a remote, isolated ship where unsuspecting South American crewmen became borderland inhabitants. The second was Chinatown in San Francisco. Neither of these locations is found on a physical border, but the characters within the novels exhibit the attributes of borderland inhabitants. This chapter will go a step further by linking borderland mindset with W.E.B. Du Bois's idea of double consciousness, showing how both phenomena carry many of the same inherent characteristics, with particular interest in regard to feelings of ambivalence, alienation, doubt, and guilt. The correlation between borderland theory and double consciousness is apparent in Edwidge Danticat's *Create Dangerously*, where she tells the stories of immigrant artists who create despite difficult pasts. In order to make a viable connection between these theories and Danticat's work, a brief overview of Du Bois's term is first necessary.

In 1897 W.E.B. Du Bois published an article entitled, "Strivings of the Negro People," in *Atlantic* magazine and later wrote a book entitled *Souls of Black Folk*, in which he included his article as the first chapter. Within this article Du Bois speaks of the double consciousness that African Americans experience, the dichotomy of being "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body..." (9). Though he was the first to use the term in association with African Americans, the actual phrase, "double consciousness," was not developed by Du Bois. In fact, as history professor Dickson Bruce points out, this term had roots in the medical before Du Bois used it to describe the inner turmoil

of African Americans (Bruce 299-300). The term carried over from the medical field into the field of psychology where it “was applied to cases of split personality,” and “by the late nineteenth century it had come into quite general use not only in professional publications but also in discussions of psychological research published for general audiences as well” (300). In addition, in 1843 Emerson used double consciousness “to refer to a problem in the life of one seeking to take a Transcendental perspective on self and world” (qtd. in Bruce 300). The idea behind Emerson’s thought is that the person striving for a Transcendental perspective is constantly caught between the divine and the natural. As Emerson wrote, “The worst feature of this double consciousness is that the two lives ... really show very little relation to each other ... the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves” (qtd. in Bruce 300). As the Transcendalist seeks to merge his/her worldly life with his/her spiritual life, a clash takes place as it is almost impossible for the two consciousnesses to merge.

A similar, yet different, idea holds true within Du Bois’s use of the term double consciousness. Emerson’s double consciousness is an inner conflict that occurs in the spiritual realm. People make their own decision as to whether or not to enter into this conflict. Du Bois’s double consciousness, however, is not one from which a person could choose to turn no matter how much they might desire to do so. Double consciousness, as described by Du Bois, is an internal battle that stems from external causes. He uses the term to explain how African Americans have no true self-consciousness because the world “only lets [the African American] see himself through the revelation of the other world” (Du Bois 9). African Americans, therefore, struggle to determine who they really are because they are constantly looking at themselves “through the eyes of others” (9). The “others” are the hegemony, the whites.



Skin color divides people who have the luxury of determining their own true self-consciousness and those who are at the mercy of other people's interpretations. Though immigrants of all races and ethnicities experience the collision of two worlds within them as they balance their home culture with their host culture, non-white immigrants battle yet another dimension of this inner war. Non-white immigrants face the inner turmoil of colliding cultures while also encountering a double consciousness as they see themselves through the eyes of the hegemonic gaze. These immigrants cannot hide from their heritage. Because of their skin color, immigrants of color find it impossible to blend into their new cultures without being subjected to stereotypes by the hegemony. White immigrants, however, may not experience the full extent of this idea of double consciousness. While they still must learn to balance the colliding cultures within themselves, they are not subjected to what could be considered a third consciousness as they see themselves as others see them. Mary Waters discusses this idea in her article, "Optional Ethnicities," and suggests that white people are able to choose the ethnicities to which they want to relate at any given time, whereas non-whites are not afforded such a luxury. She states,

White Americans of European ancestry can be described as having a great deal of choice in terms of their ethnic identities. The two major types of options White Americans can exercise are (1) the option of whether to claim any specific ancestry, or just to be "White" or American ... and (2) the choice of which of their European ancestries to choose to include in their description of their own identities. (97)

This idea of the ability to choose an ethnicity is "individualistic in nature and without real social cost for the individual" (99). Non-white Americans, however, cannot choose which ethnicity they would like to adhere to and which they would not because their skin color immediately

dictates that they belong to a certain ethnicity or ancestry. For white Americans, “ethnicity is not something that influences their lives unless they want it to,” but non-white Americans’ lives are influenced by their ethnicity regardless of their desires (99). Because ethnicity is not an option for African Americans, obtaining “self-conscious manhood” remains nothing but a longing (Du Bois 9). In this regard, double consciousness, much like the borderland mindset, can be seen as a burden to be carried forever with no reconciliation of the two consciousnesses. As the previous chapters have revealed, however, the borderland mindset can bring hope to immigrants. The same is true of a double consciousness. Danticat’s story is evidence of this fact. The road she and other immigrant artists walk is a struggle, but Danticat provides hope for those who find themselves on similar paths. She demonstrates both the intense responsibility and immense privileges of people who live with a double consciousness or a borderland mindset.

Danticat experiences the hardships of what it means to be a non-white immigrant. She left war-torn Haiti at the age of twelve and immigrated to the United States. As she grew up in this country that was, at least at first, foreign to her, she came to understand very clearly what Gloria Anzaldúa meant when she said that borders “are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*” (25). Danticat, as an immigrant as well as an immigrant artist experienced this distinction:

The immigrant artist, to borrow from Toni Morrison’s Nobel lecture, knows what it is “to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear” our company, hamlets that need our labor but want our children banned from their schools, villages that want our sick shut out from their hospitals, big cities that want our elderly, after a lifetime of impossible labor, to pack up and go off somewhere else to die. (17)

Danticat's experience as an immigrant is a real-life example of what the previous chapters have set forth through close readings of fictional stories. This quote shows how the United States took advantage of her and her family by capitalizing on the labor they were able to provide without the benefits of education for their children or rest for their elderly. This is exactly what Delia and Ferdinand Kuhns mean when they say that "each borderland has natural and human resources which its country as a whole can ill afford to neglect or squander" (Kuhn and Kuhn ix). The aforementioned quote from Danticat also shows her double consciousness. She is well aware of how the people around her perceive her and other Haitians. She knows that they are unwanted and considered lower class citizens, if not lower class human beings. The hierarchy of individuals in her new surroundings within the United States is obvious. She is beginning to see that she is not welcomed in this new place and that, just as Du Bois asserts, her soul is "measured by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (9). Danticat begins to view herself differently because of how she is viewed by others around her.

When immigrants, particularly non-white immigrants, cross a border, they are immediately aware of the differences between themselves and those around them. Even if they establish themselves in an area far from the border, they have a sense of living in a borderland, "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" where "the prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (Anzaldúa 25). Non-white immigrants, like African Americans, are looked upon as inferior individuals with little to offer the host society. In reality, immigrants like Danticat are people stuck between multiple worlds, people struggling to affirm their validity as humans to others as well as to themselves.

Two words often used in reference to borderlands, whether physical or psychological, are alienation and ambivalence. Interestingly enough, Harold R. Isaacs used the same words in

regard to Du Bois's article on double consciousness. He appreciated Du Bois's recognition that "Negro identity has remained blurred, obscured behind the veil of alienation, ambivalence, confusion, and duality" (qtd. in Reed 95). Those who possess a double consciousness as well as those who abide in borderlands exist within a lonely state of contradiction and confusion. This comes about because immigrants, particularly non-white immigrants, are no longer considered full members of their home culture yet they are not completely part of their host culture either. As was previously mentioned, Danticat was born in Haiti but emigrated to the United States when she was twelve years old. She and her work have come up against opposition by fellow Haitians. They no longer consider her one of them but rather "*diaspora*," one of the "hundreds of thousands of Haitians living in many countries of the world" (Danticat 49). Though the term, diaspora, typically refers to the dispersal of people to other countries for various reasons, Haitians used the term in a derogatory manner. They used *diaspora* as a way to distinguish "loyal" Haitians from those who fled the country during periods of strife. Friends and even family members use the term *diaspora* to silence Danticat when she expresses opinions counter to their thoughts. This reaction led Danticat to constantly question herself. She wonders: "Do I know enough about where I've come from?" (Danticat 18). She is unsure of her understanding of her home culture, yet, as is true of borderlanders, Danticat is unsure of her understanding of the United States as well: "Will I ever know enough about where I am?" (18). These are the words of someone wedged between two worlds. She belongs nowhere fully. She is a borderlander, possessing a double consciousness. She understands both cultures but knows neither completely. This is the same type of thinking that we have seen in the previous chapters of this thesis. It is, once again, what Franco refers to as a "'diasporic consciousness,' where no matter the physical location of a person, he/she lives both inside and outside of the border" (128).

Danticat is wavering between her two countries. She sees that neither Haitians nor North Americans perceive her to be a complete part of their culture. Danticat is unsure of herself in either culture because she has spent different periods of her life in each place. She is also unsure of herself in either culture because she knows that Haitians consider her a member of the estranged *diaspora* and those from the United States see her as a foreigner.

Within diasporic consciousness, double consciousness, and borderlands, there is an inevitable feeling of doubt. Doubt takes root whenever people are uncomfortable in their situations. Borderlanders doubt if anyone will protect them in periods of strife. Those possessing a double consciousness doubt if they will do the right thing in any given situation. As Danticat expresses, “Self-doubt is probably one of the stages of acclimation in a new culture” (19). Danticat, as an immigrant artist, has gone through periods of being unsure of her choice of career, wondering if she should have gone the route her parents wanted her to take: “It might have been simpler, safer to have become the more helpful doctors, lawyers, engineers our parents wanted us to be” (19). Danticat is an artist to the very core. She is, in many ways, defined by her choice of career because it speaks to her talents and her passions. For her to question one of the very things in life of which she is most confident shows the fragile state in which she lives. She sees her world “literally crumbling down” and says that at this point, she and other immigrant artists “tell ourselves how right they may have been, our elders, about our passive careers as distant witnesses” (19). Doubt seeps into every aspect of life for those with a double consciousness, those living in a psychological borderland where two worlds constantly collide. This doubt leads to an uncertain self-perception.

Doubt for the immigrant is not only internal; it is external as well: “In some circles – especially nationalist and right-wing circles – the existence of a diasporic community gives rise to deep

concern and suspicion about the community's double and divided loyalties...towards the homeland and the host country" (qtd. in Bolafi, Braham, and Gindro 75). Immigrants are questioned by the people around them as well as by the people back home. Citizens of each country wonder where immigrants' loyalties lie and whether or not immigrants can be counted on in moments of strife. This lack of trust leads to even deeper feelings of self-doubt, which further enhances a sense of alienation and ambivalence. Borderland inhabitants as well as people with a double consciousness do not have the guarantee of safety, security (in every sense of the word), and support. For this reason, "the borderlander, for his part, cannot hide his suspicion of the 'foreigner' who comes from the national capital as governor, tax collector, policeman, or soldier, and who often looks like a colonial master" (Kuhn viii). On the other hand, "the city men who rule the nation from a Western-veneered capital cannot hide their sense of superiority toward the people of the outlying regions" (viii). Suspicion is evident on both sides. This doubt leads to "little understanding of [a] sense of belonging to the same national community" (viii). Doubt is crippling, particularly when a person doubts his/her security within their own homes. Danticat begins *Create Dangerously* by telling the story of the execution of Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin, who emigrated to the United States in 1950 during the reign of the dictator Francois Duvalier. Fourteen years later the two men returned to Haiti as members of the group, Jeune Haiti. They and eleven other young Haitians returned to their home country with the hope of overthrowing Duvalier's power through guerilla warfare. Drouin, Numa, and their colleagues were unsuccessful in their attempt. Drouin and Numa were captured, and the government "wanted to make a spectacle of [their] deaths" (Danticat 2). The two men were tied to poles and became the prey of a firing squad that vehemently sent Drouin and Numa to their deaths with crowds of people looking on. This story made a lasting impression on Danticat. She calls it her

“creation myth” through which a passion for telling the stories of her people was birthed within her. Drouin and Numa were immigrants, but “they had abandoned comfortable lives in the United States and sacrificed themselves for the homeland” (7). Their desire was for their fellow Haitians to be freed from a dictator. In the propaganda leading up the execution of these men, Duvalier refused to call them Haitians; instead, “he labeled them ... foreign rebels, good-for-nothing *blans*” (7). Drouin and Numa were comfortable in the United States, but they were uncomfortable with the situation in Haiti. The dictatorship caused them fear for their friends and family still in Haiti, so they made the decision to try to put an end to the violence. This cost them their lives. This story is so important to Danticat because it shows the lack of safety her people experienced, but it also formed within Danticat a desire to tell truthful stories of immigrants. She considers her writing to be dangerous because “...it is creating as a revolt against silence, creating when both the creation and the reception, the writing and then reading, are dangerous undertakings, disobedience to a directive” (Danticat 11). If she and fellow immigrant artists could not be safe in life, perhaps they could find assurance in death that their stories would live on and might help others.

Danticat felt a deep loyalty and camaraderie with other immigrants, but outside of that, she felt alone. Living in a land where one does not feel a sense of community or solidarity can be devastating. Borderland inhabitants deal with this struggle on a daily basis, as do immigrants and others who live with a double consciousness. These people never feel at home, no matter where they are. This mindset “[displaces] people on the very ground they live on,” and alienation is seen once again (Franco 127). The difficulty with double consciousness and/or a borderland mindset, particularly in the United States, is that immigrants to the United States can adapt to the way of life around them, even becoming official American citizens, without

forfeiting their home culture (Bolafi, Braham, Gindro 79). Double consciousness, therefore, “is relatively unproblematic in a political sense,” but “from a psychological point of view the feeling of disorientation experienced by migrants can be extremely disturbing” (Bolafi, Braham, Gindro79). Danticat very clearly experienced disorientation and doubt as an immigrant. She knew the intense struggle of being between cultures, trying hard to belong somewhere yet never fully acclimating to one or the other. She was also well aware of how she was perceived by others in both her home country and her host country, adding to her doubt and confusion. Du Bois opens his chapter on double consciousness by citing examples of questions he is asked by white Americans in an attempt to minimize the proverbial elephant in the room. Du Bois has learned how to answer these questions, but there is one question to which he has no answer: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (Du Bois 8). Danticat’s awareness of her double consciousness causes her to feel like a problem not only to her new American culture but to her home culture and even to her parents as she questions the choices she made against their wishes.

In addition to doubt, immigrants deal with intense feelings of guilt. Danticat recalls “conversations or debates in restaurants, at parties, or at public gatherings where members of the *dyaspora* would be classified ... as arrogant, insensitive, overbearing, and pretentious people who were eager to reap the benefits of good jobs and political positions in times of stability in a country that they’d fled and stayed away from during difficult times” (50). Upon hearing these words, Danticat felt a sense of shame accompanied by guilt: “Shamefacedly, I’d bow my head and accept these judgments when they were expressed, feeling guilty about my own physical distance from a country I had left at the age of twelve during a dictatorship that had forced thousands to choose between exile or death” (50). Guilt creeps into the hearts of immigrants and borderland inhabitants as they reconsider why they left their home countries and whom they left



behind. Such a grave sense of guilt affects every aspect of a person's life. As renowned theologian, Max Lucado, says, "Unresolved guilt sires a gaggle of unhealthy emotions" (59). Danticat writes of a time when she confessed to her friend, one of the most well-known Haitian journalists, Jean Dominique, that she was envious of "the certainty with which he could and often did say the words, 'My country'" (49). What made her envious was the fact that he could call Haiti his country without wavering and without a sense of guilt for leaving. For Danticat, "My country ... is one of uncertainty. When I say 'my country' to some Haitians, they think I mean the United States. When I say 'my country' to some Americans, they think of Haiti" (49). Danticat straddled two countries. People in each country doubted that she belonged to either one, and this led to a deep sense of guilt for the author. She struggled to even identify herself with one country or the other because she no longer felt as though she belonged in either place, and neither Americans nor Haitians considered her one of them. The author has "come to critical consciousness by acknowledging that [she is] both citizen *and* non-citizen ... [inhabitant] of an in-between space" (Camacho 262). Danticat's guilt festers and brings about a new sense of doubt in her actions and cultural ties, particularly when she is constantly aware of how others perceive her. Danticat's doubt and guilt are founded not only on her internal struggle but also on the external pressures she feels from citizens of both the United States and Haiti.

Though the psychological ramifications of immigration, double consciousness, and borderland living are devastating, there is hope. Danticat vividly recounts another conversation with Jean Dominique regarding her position as *dyaspora*. Dominique told her, "The *Dyaspora* are people with their feet planted in both worlds" (Danticat 51). This chapter has focused on the doubt and guilt that people who live between worlds suffer, but Jean was not finished. He went on to say, "There's no need to be ashamed of that. There are more than a million of you. You all are not

alone” (51). Dominique saw the possibility of a deep camaraderie that could only be felt by members of the *dyaspora*. Danticat took this encouragement to heart, and her work became a means by which she could give voice to the voiceless. She used her position as an immigrant and her ability to think critically about the United States and Haiti as a way to “correct misconceptions while challenging hegemonic discourse” (Pulitano 40). She is able to tell these stories because of her double consciousness, her borderland mindset. In discussing Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness, Emmanuel Eze makes a profound statement, “The negro, rather than mere victim, becomes a revolutionary subject: a person with second sight, a sight that alone could see or bear witness to the truth of a hidden meaning of history” (888). Danticat possesses this second sight, and she uses it to dangerously create art that tells real stories and rewrites narratives. Du Bois’s idea of double consciousness asserts that African Americans can only long for their two consciousnesses to merge into one because unless society changes, double consciousness will never change. Du Bois, however, also makes it clear that even if this longing were to become reality, the African American “wishes neither of the old selves to be lost” (Du Bois 10). He says that the African American

would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (10)

This is the exact same frame of mind that Danticat learns to assume through Dominique. This mindset requires a great deal of fortitude and confidence. She realizes that the world will always

have its perception of her as an immigrant and a black Haitian, but she garners every ounce of determination she has to overcome this aspect of her double consciousness. Du Bois's longing for African Americans to be "both a Negro and an American," without the preconceived stereotypes, has yet to be realized in this world. Danticat understands that, but she perseveres as an immigrant artist because she knows that her borderland mindset and double consciousness can actually be a great asset to her art.

Danticat uses her position as an immigrant to undertake an important mission that could only be accomplished by someone like her. Eze explains that Du Bois' Negro was given a mission: "This mission, first, was to discover and make explicit the gift to the world that only the second-sighted could bring – the gift itself being fruits of wisdom from suffering, survival, and hope" (Eze 888). Danticat seems to take this mission to heart. She has been criticized for her double consciousness as one who exploits her own people in order to receive wealth and accolades. Her response is that she exploits herself more than anyone else throughout her work (Danticat 33). Her guilt leads her to write for her people, to create art that sheds light on Haiti. She desires to rewrite and reinterpret the Haitian people for the rest of the world. She abhors that Haitians are seen as inferior because of their race and their poverty, even at the risk of criticism to herself or offense to others. "Besides," Danticat says, "what is the alternative for me or anyone else who might not dare offend? Self-censorship? Silence?" (33). Danticat is willing to use her delicate and lonely position as an immigrant artist, with a double consciousness, or, as this paper argues, a borderland mentality, to break the silence of her people and, perhaps, even to save people:

Somewhere, if not now, then maybe years in the future, a future that we may have yet to dream of, someone may risk his or her life to read us. Somewhere, if not

now, then maybe years in the future, we may also save someone's life, because they have given us a passport, making us honorary citizens of their culture" (10).

Danticat believes that her ability to see beyond herself and her home culture's worldview provides her with the unique ability to relate to her readers in a special way. She repeatedly mentions the relationship between the artist and the audience and how important it is that the author be attentive to his/her reader: "Even without globalization, the writer bound to the reader, under diabolic, or even joyful, circumstances inevitably becomes a loyal citizen of the country of his readers" (15). Danticat's second-sight makes this possible because she can speak as one who knows and has experienced multiple cultures. She speaks two literal languages and two cultural languages, if not more. Her multi-lingualism provides her with insight that is only possible through a life like hers.

Danticat's life has brought her to a place of understanding humanity as a whole, not just her people and not just the people of another nation, but the greater scope of humanity. Throughout *Create Dangerously*, Danticat explores disasters in both Haiti and the United States. These disasters express the deepest emotions of all of mankind and establish a universal bond between people of all nationalities. She tells the stories of people who, though not American by birth, stood in solidarity with Americans after 9/11, even waving American flags, because as Farivar says, "We cannot be neutral in moments of crisis" (qtd. in Danticat 113). Borderland inhabitants find themselves stuck between two cultures, as do people with a double consciousness, whether through internal thought-processes or outside influences. They struggle to find footing in a world where they see with a kind of double sight. In moments of crisis, however, these people are quick to pledge allegiance to the country in trouble. In the end, the trials and joys of humanity are universal, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity. Danticat

superbly addresses this in *Create Dangerously* as she sees and shares the world through her immigrant eyes.

Danticat uses *Create Dangerously* to tell her own immigrant story as well as the stories of other immigrants. Danticat's friend, Dany Laferrière, is also an immigrant from Haiti. After the earthquake of 2004 that devastated Haiti, Laferrière was criticized for leaving Haiti to return to Canada in the wake of his home country's destruction. Danticat, however, says that her friend's role in that time was to "bear witness" (161). She goes on to say that "he did it beautifully, going on the radio and television and writing his essays of fifteen hundred words or less to add one more voice to our chorus of bereavement and paralyzing loss" (161). Laferrière compiled these essays in a novel that turns out to be "a love poem, a love song to a Haiti that no longer exists" (161). The author acknowledges that this novel would not have been the same had he stayed in Haiti: "What is certain ... is that I wouldn't have written like this if I had stayed there / Maybe I would not have written at all / Living outside of our countries, do we write to console ourselves?" (162). Because of his immigration, Laferrière sees the world, and even his own home country, in a new way. He even sees himself differently. This new perception brings about a creativity and passion he never before knew he had. Had he never left Haiti, Laferrière may have never penned a novel. His leaving brought about his creativity. This is precisely what Danticat expresses throughout *Create Dangerously*. The immigrant experience is dangerous and full of difficult emotions, but she and others have found their creativity and the importance of their creativity through their lives as immigrants. In an interview with Edwidge Danticat, Elvira Pulitano beautifully summarizes the powerful impact of the work of immigrants: "Such stories not only correct misperceptions while challenging hegemonic discourse but also empower the tellers by bringing cohesiveness and strength to entire communities. In some cases, stories can

save lives, too” (40). Double consciousness and borderland mindset allow for a unique perspective, as both Laferrière and Danticat express. Their double sight/site brings life to their creativity, which, in turn, may save lives.

Clearly, double consciousness and borderland mindsets go hand-in-hand. People who possess these double worldviews struggle with feelings of ambivalence and alienation. They deal deeply with doubt and guilt and never feel as though they belong anywhere. They are stuck between here and there, between their home culture and their host culture. It is a lonely place full of heartache. Edwidge Danticat is the perfect example of an immigrant who demonstrates the mentality of one with a double consciousness and a borderland mindset. In *Create Dangerously* she portrays the struggle of living as both citizen and non-citizen, but she also expresses the beauty she finds in her ability to think critically because of her position as an immigrant. She uses her double sight to break the silences of her people, even those who criticize and doubt her. Instead of harboring bitterness for the hand that life has dealt her, Danticat chooses to view her position as a borderlander as an advantage: “One of the advantages of being an immigrant is that two very different countries are forced to merge within you” (Danticat 112). Her optimism in regard to her double consciousness allows Danticat to write stories that resonate with millions of people around the world. Through her courageous work, Danticat overcomes her own personal challenges as an immigrant artist and brings hope to the millions of other immigrants who share similar joys and struggles. The borderland mindset and double consciousness are lonely places that could seem hopeless and pointless, but this mindset leads to second sight and an ability to see humanity as only people in this situation could.

## CONCLUSION

Borderlands are found on geographical borders. Stereotypical borderlands, as perceived by many within the United States, are situated on the U.S.-Mexico border and are meant to keep South or Central Americans at bay. Borderland conversations within the United States rarely include the U.S.-Canada border, thereby demonstrating that white privilege plays a role in borderland stereotypes. These stereotypical borderland inhabitants have little, if anything, to offer society and are an unfortunate byproduct of military invasion and property divisions. The previous chapters sought to break down these, and other, stereotypes of borderlands through close readings of three different texts that tell the stories of people, both fiction and real, who live in borderlands, either literal or psychological.

Francisco Goldman's *Urus* served as an unordinary borderland for its inhabitants. Esteban and the other crewmen on the ship experienced first-hand the negative impacts of living within a borderland. They suffered as their oppressors took advantage of them, and they were vulnerable on a boat where no powers could protect them from their captain or people surrounding the ship. Esteban and his fellow borderland inhabitants dealt with feelings of despair and hopelessness, but as they found ways to provide for themselves, they made their way up Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The crewmen who capitalized on the resolve that comes from having a borderland mindset, overcame many obstacles and found freedom from their borderland. Esteban's courage to help his crewmates came as a result of his fortitude and resilience in the face of oppression. The *Urus* acted as a borderland for these men who were in search of a better life through the wealth they hoped to accumulate as crewmen. Their lives did improve, but not as a result of financial gain. Once they grasped their borderland mindsets and the unique intuition they

possess because of their position as citizen yet non-citizen, the men overcame many obstacles and embarked on hopeful new journeys.

The *Urus* is an interesting type of borderland, thereby showing that borderlands can exist anywhere, but it still maintained the stereotype that borderlands are inhabited by South or Central Americans. Fae Myenne Ng's Chinatown, however, breaks both of these stereotypes. Jack Szeto's immigration from China with the help of Gold Moon Szeto leads to many confusing situations for Ng's protagonist. Jack establishes a life in Chinatown within San Francisco, but he constantly struggles with balancing his American identity with his Chinese identity. As he falls in love with Joyce, who becomes pregnant, the confusion heightens. Jack feels the push and pull of being at home, yet not at home. His home, Chinatown, exhibits each of the characteristics of border regions that Delia and Ferdinand Kuhns found in Southeast Asia. Living in a borderland forces Jack and the others to work through balancing inclusion and exclusion, displacement, fragmentation, and transitioning identity. Jack's transitioning identity comes to a head during his naturalization interview when he is asked to choose one of his names to put on his U.S. paperwork. This name would define Jack from that point forward, and Jack struggles to choose a name. He is no longer fully Yuo Seen Leung nor Jack Moon Szeto; he is both. Jack exhibits a borderland mindset where his two cultures collide within him. He develops into what Anzaldúa calls the *new mestiza*. Through his borderland mindset Jack and his daughter, Veda, find healing in regard to Jack's past and the fact that his mother sold him to another woman. Jack's borderland mindset allows him to relate to his daughter and her American values as well as to his Chinese heritage and values. As he finds a delicate balance between the two, he is at peace and his relationships bring him great joy. Jack's hybrid self is a striking example of what it means to find strength and contentment with a borderland mindset.



Esteban and Jack learn to find the advantages of the borderland mindset. The same is true of Edwidge Danticat. At the delicate age of 12, Danticat is forced to surrender to the idea that she will never again fully belong anywhere. This is, at first, very frightening and discouraging, particularly as her own people in Haiti disown her as one of their own. She almost expects this to be true in the United States, but to be left to the wayside by her fellow Haitians is almost too much to bear. Because of their shunning, Danticat begins to question herself. She experiences the hardships of W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness when she fails to see herself but through the eyes of others. Within Danticat it becomes obvious that the borderland mindset and double consciousness go hand-in-hand. The author suffers through many aspects of life as she straddles two cultures, neither of which fully accepts her. She deals with these challenges, seeking out advice from fellow immigrants, and learns that her double sight is a gift. It is a gift that not many would want to be given, but Danticat learns to see her double consciousness and her borderland mindset as an incredibly special way through which she can better understand the world and humanity as a whole. Danticat develops her ability to see the world through various filters and quickly realizes that her double sight allows her to speak to issues of Haitians and humanity in a way that not many other people can. She uses her gift to speak out against oppression and to give voice to the voiceless. Danticat, with the help of others, finds beauty in the hard life of an immigrant who lives with a double consciousness and borderland mindset.

These books defy the stereotypes of borderlands by demonstrating that people can live within a figurative borderland regardless of their physical location because borderland theories are about mindsets. The borderland mindset is referred to using terms of violence and battle because an eternal inner war takes place within borderlanders. Though this is a lifelong battle, it is not defined by defeat after defeat. As borderlanders develop their second sight/site and become

aware of its positive implications, they can use their unique gifts to tell stories of oppressed people. Their second sight/site gives them an impeccable advantage in the world because, like Edwidge Danticat, they see the world and situations through different lenses. They are not confined to the teachings and values of one culture because they understand the innate worldviews of various cultures. The borderland mindset creates a difficult journey for borderlanders as they figure out how to balance inclusion and exclusion, deal with feelings of ambivalence, and struggle through the emotion of guilt imposed on them by others, but it also allows for a keen understanding of the Other that would be impossible without this unique double sight/site. If borderlanders can find ways to become comfortable in their double consciousness, they will have a sense of belonging to the world, not just to one specific place. They will be at ease anywhere.

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