ALIENATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN *GROWING UP ETHNIC IN AMERICA*, *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA*, AND *THE DAY NINA SIMONE STOPPED SINGING*

by

Brittany Ann Long

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Director of Thesis: Dr. Richard Taylor

Major Department: English

This thesis examines the concept of alienation during adolescence as an influential factor in ethnic identity development. The negative effects of alienation are frequently explored, but I argue experiences concerning alienation cannot necessarily be described on a spectrum from negative to positive. Rather, alienation of an ethnic individual due to immigration, coming-of-age, family dynamics, or other situations results in a force which guides him or her to creating a unique identity. This identity is a result of the elaborate analyzing cultures from a more objective perspective. The development of an ethnic identity is a process in which a person grapples with morality, personal beliefs, and pressure from outside sources such as parental influence and religion. This thesis analyzes three primary texts: *Growing Up Ethnic in America* by Maria M. Gillan and Jennifer Gillan, *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa, and *The Day Nina Simone Stopped Singing* by Darina Al-Joundi. These texts feature first-hand accounts of alienation, the majority from the perspective of young women.

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Brittany Ann Long

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by

Brittany Ann Long

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF
THESIS: ______________________________
Richard Taylor, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: ______________________________
Seodial Deena, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: ______________________________
Andrea Kitta, PhD

INTERIM CHAIR OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH: ______________________________
Donald Palumbo, PhD

DEAN OF THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL: ______________________________
Paul J. Gemperline, PhD

To the memory of my mother, Lisa Marie Roberts Long. Thank you for filling my heart with love, my mind with wonder, and my spirit with joy.

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# Chapter One

## An Introduction to Self-Reflection Through Alienation

The development of an ethnic identity is a critical process in total self-identification. Ethnic identity is often influenced by cultural behaviors, traditions, and values recognized as the norm in a particular community. Although acknowledged as being socially constructed, ethnic identity provides an approach to articulate personal connections with culture. Individuals utilize ethnic identity as a way to make meaningful connections with others and create personal views about the world. Experiencing shared cultural aspects can lead to a sense of belonging and purpose: "If, however, positive ethnic group messages and support are not apparent or available to counteract negative public messages, a particular individual is likely to feel shame or disconnection toward their own ethnic identity" (Chávez 41). Negotiating cultural boundaries during ethnic identity development is often uncomfortable and stresses relationships. Individuals must evaluate cultural standards, some of which have been the norm for several generations. The process of ethnic identity formation begins with defining the self. An understanding of cultural framework as it pertains to oneself is crucial to connecting certain actions to deeply rooted values and beliefs.

Frequently, alienation is related to the development of ethnic identity. *Alien* as a noun is defined as "a person who is separated or excluded from a particular community, country, custom" ("Alien", *OED*). A person may be alienated forcefully or voluntarily. Alienation during ethnic identity development can lead to separation from the community throughout the analysis of personal cultural elements. Considering the intimate nature of ethnic identity, alienation can be a defining characteristic in the way an individual sees and interprets the world. Various multicultural and transnational texts discuss in depth the damaging effects of alienation and

isolation associated with ethnic identity formation. Consequences such as depression, disorientation, and a lack of cultural role modeling are commonly cited. Alienation can result from numerous pressures and experiences; therefore, alienation does not always refer to separation by physical boundaries. Alienation can be a personal choice to reinforce a meaningful journey towards a self-defined ethnic identity. The choice to be alienated from a group, such as religion or family, may stem from concerns with personal safety, ethics, coming-of-age, or other factors. Many times, choosing to be alienated stems from a deep realization that separation will enhance self-perception and advance knowledge of oppression. In my thesis, I will demonstrate how alienation, whether voluntary or forced, has a profound influence on ethnic identity development. Alienation allows for self-reflection, a more personal understanding of societies, and an independent outlook during cultural observation. The effects of alienation cannot be easily categorized, as individuals undergo a dramatic change in self-perception and reality.

My thesis focuses on alienation during childhood and adolescence. Already a turbulent time for most individuals, adolescence in conjunction with alienation produces an exceptional view of several cultural elements. "Identity is a major developmental task for adolescents, and the development of ethnic identity is a unique and significant developmental task for many adolescents" (Wakefield 147). The influence of alienation during younger years coincides with a more developed awareness of cultural paradigm. Awareness of cultures in childhood and adolescence is a result of a heightened attention to the motives behind traditions and beliefs. For the first time in their lives, young men and women are interested in why a culture expresses particular norm. In addition, adolescents are more likely to challenge tradition, make informed changes to ethnic identity, and objectively analyze the community. Without a separation from culture, thorough self-awareness is not possible.

In the first chapter, I focus on selections from *Growing Up Ethnic in America* in which children and young adults experience alienation by family, culture, or religion. These short stories portray the ways in which adolescence and ethnic identity development can be affected by alienation. In each of the selections, individuals question the norms of his or her society along with American influence, resulting in beliefs and values being challenged. In "The Rules of the Game," a young girl exposes restrictive qualities of her culture when she becomes a skillful chess player. A selection from *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* focuses on the connection between an adolescent girl's family and her views of gender roles. "Holy Toledo" is about a sibling duo who brainstorm how to escape from their suffocating family and past. Finally, "Drowning Kittens" depicts cultural changes amongst multiple generations of women.

Chapter two centers on Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, an autohistoria forcing readers to rethink the concept of borders and ethnic identity. Her work includes the history of the Chicano people and how continuous alienation of Chicano culture has lead to destructive outcomes. Divided into sections of prose and poetry, Anzaldúa confers her extraordinary ethnic identity and the process that brought her to a personal self-concept. Anzaldúa, a well-known writer in multicultural academia, often has her works analyzed along with the concepts of hybridity and feminist epistemology. However, in my analysis, I choose to focus on the ways in which alienation as an adolescent influenced the synthesis of Anzaldúa's true identity.

Chapter three focuses on *The Day Nina Simone Stopped Singing* by Darina Al-Joundi. The text explores the effects of several factors, such as war, sexuality, and culture on Al-Joundi's ethnic identity development. Growing up in a non-traditional Lebanese home, Al-Joundi

grapples to find a place in her society of which her father will approve. Thus, she finds herself repeatedly experimenting with boundaries and defying her expected role in society.

Being that alienation during adolescence is a common theme in multicultural works, I began questioning the connection between alienation and ethnic identity formation. In the three texts I chose for this thesis, the alienation experienced or chosen by the characters is a critical part in a more conscious and advanced identity. Though not all of the characters reach adulthood in the selections, there is an evident change of thinking in every individual; each character reflects on the way culture and identity are intertwined. The characters of younger ages, such as those in “Holy Toledo” and “Drowning Kittens,” arrive at the realization that family dictates behavior and personal views. Their ethnic identity is centered on this recognition of how family choices and norms influence ways of thinking and viewing society. In Anzaldúa and Al-Joundi’s works, the process of ethnic identity formation is visible over decades. The changes in self-perception and the analysis of cultural aspects are evident throughout the authors’ experiences with alienation and separation. Alienation manipulates the way in which a culture will be perceived by an individual. Due to the fluidity of adolescent minds, identity is a volatile concept, and perceptions can quickly change. It is the recognition of alienation and the choices made after this identification that lead to a truly unique intelligence of cultures: a place between the oppressor and the oppressed. The aspects of a culture an individual continues to accept and express exemplify the progression of ethnic identity.

My thesis demonstrates the multi-faceted effects of alienation during adolescence on ethnic identity formation without specifically concentrating on negative changes. Instead, I aim to expose several types of alienation and examples of those who decide that alienation will provide the truest identity and most favorable outcome rather than list the emotional effects of

alienated individuals. My thesis centers on what happens during and after alienation to the way a person views the world and cultures. My knowledge of alienation is applied to the progression of ethnic identity formation while analyzing shifting cultural perspectives during adolescence.

## Chapter Two

## Alienation During Childhood and Adolescence in *Growing Up Ethnic in America* (1999)

> [The] ability to travel between two worlds affords one the kind of perspective that is necessary for both personal growth and empathy for others.
>
> -- Jennifer Gillan, xvi

Through their collection of stories, Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan establish the fluidity of being American. Alienation from family, religion, or cultural standards challenges previous definitions of identity, therefore initiating the lengthy, and sometimes life-long, process of shaping an ethnic American identity. Gillan and Gillan include pieces which reflect the "many ways to be American" (ix). Selected authors depict accounts in which alienation during childhood and adolescence had a profound effect on ethnic American identity formation. Gillan and Gillan acknowledge the stages of merging an ethic identity with a personal definition of what it means to be American. In their stories, authors incorporate the influence of the media, stereotypes, and culture in America on this process. Stories reflect the complexity of managing the physical transitions of adolescence with the cultural and communal transitions of an evolving ethnic identity.

In "Rules of the Game" by Amy Tan, the narrator, Waverly, begins with memories of her mother's advice and her childhood home in San Francisco's Chinatown. Waverly's mother, Lindo, incessantly exhibits what she believes to be the wisest and most vital elements of her Chinese heritage. "An immigrant, Lindo is a proud repository of traditional Chinese values, which she nostalgically proclaims as superior to the values of the United States" (Vu 2). Therefore, seven-year-old Waverly dismisses Americans and tourists by playing jokes on them and taking interest in her own community. She reflects Chinese values and culture; she initially "didn't think [she was] poor" growing up on Waverly Place (Gillan 18). She is repeatedly taught

to be humble, appreciative, and observant. Lindo maintains her defense of Chinese people, explaining that they are “not lazy like American people” and even “do torture…best torture” (Gillan 21). However, Waverly begins grappling with her Chinese-American identity as subtle discrepancies between the two cultures surface. Once, while sitting on Santa’s lap in church, she is asked her age. “[She] was seven according to the American formula and eight by the Chinese calendar” (Gillan 21). Waverly answers Santa’s question with her birth date. Unable to carve out a separate Chinese or American identity, Waverly struggles with how to combine the two in order to represent herself.

Waverly and her family attend a church Christmas party, and her brother, Vincent, receives a chess set. Waverly is drawn to the game: “the chessboard seemed to hold elaborate secrets waiting to be untangled” (Gillan 22-23). Waverly’s mother interjects her concern with the American rules, metaphorically reflecting her opinion of everything American. As she independently learns the rules and advantages, chess becomes an outlet in which Waverly can explore both Chinese and American cultures. “She researches [chess] in the library, learning the moves and the powers of each piece” by reading books in English and utilizing American resources (Gillan 24). Drawing from her Chinese values, Waverly exercises silence, patience, foresight, and invisible strengths to become better at the game. She even befriends an old Chinese man in the park, Lau Po, who reinforces her interest in chess and its intricate details. Waverly’s alienation is lessened by her family, a family in which males are usually considered superior, as she becomes better at chess.

The coming-of-age transition and consequential identity formation are apparent when Waverly describes the knowledge she gains from Lau Po. The chess moves and rules of etiquette easily transfer to Waverly’s life outside the game, such as how to continue a relationship with

her mother. She is taught “never [to] hurl pieces into the sandbox after you have lost a game, because then you must find them again, by yourself, after apologizing to all around you” (Gillan 25). She is taught to avoid a hot temper and endure losses. Lau Po is a significant influence on Waverly, deviating from traditional Chinese culture to include her in his hobby while contrarily advising her to use Chinese values to win more games.

Waverly becomes quite good at playing chess, and she is invited to compete in community tournaments. Waverly fears “bring[ing] shame on [her] family” by participating so frequently in an American pastime (Gillan 26). Following her mother’s advice about biting back her tongue, she dismisses the invitation. Much to Waverly’s surprise, Lindo believes not playing in the tournament would bring more shame and approves of her daughter playing chess against strangers. Lindo watches Waverly at tournaments, brings her good-luck charms, and adores her trophies. “Now it is Lindo who wears a triumphant grin” (Vu 2). Waverly continues to win games against all of her opponents; Lindo’s pride overflows from the tournament sites into her own home. She begins adopting “new American rules” and releases Waverly from all chores, upholding her decision that Waverly’s brain power must be saved for playing chess (Gillan 28). Even though Lindo promptly assigns her sons the household duties, Waverly is still subjected to her mother’s scrutiny after each game. Her suffocating influence continues as Lindo chooses Waverly’s clothes, teaches her to “[pose] for the press” while playing chess, and hovers over her practices (Gillan 28). Waverly acknowledges her alienation from other children and the lifestyle she had before taking an interest in chess. She remembers playing in the alleyways of her neighborhood and a time when she did not feel the pressures of identity formation.

At nine-years-old, Waverly has almost complete control of her household. Sacrifices are made by all members of the family in order to keep Waverly playing at her best. However, Lindo

does not allow Waverly to escape being paraded around for all of Chinatown to see. “Sauntering through Chinatown, Lindo announce to everyone that her daughter is ‘Wave-ly Jong,’ the chess prodigy” (Vu 2). Waverly is embarrassed by her mother; she tells Lindo to become good at chess herself if fame is what she desires. Immediately, Waverly’s talent becomes no longer relevant, and she is shunned at the dinner table as a consequence of publicly humiliating her mother. She has a metaphorical vision, subsequently grasping the idea that alienating herself from her family is the only means by which to create her Chinese-American identity.

In “Rules of the Game,” Waverly must endure power struggles with her cultures, family, and identity formation. The story begins with a description of Waverly as naïve to how much American culture will influence her life and individuality; however, she discovers her partiality to some values and beliefs that differ from the traditional Chinese ones recognized by her family. Her ethnic identity becomes a process in which Waverly is actively choosing how she wants to be viewed by others. Although still exhibiting the immaturity of a child, such as when she takes advantage of Lindo’s favoritism, Waverly is quick to forget her preferential treatment in order to challenge the way Lindo has become a braggart. “Implicit in this mother-daughter struggle is a conflict contrasting Asian values, which emphasize familial and communal honor, against American values, which reward individual achievement” (Vu 3). Waverly resents her mother not only for bragging about her chess-champion daughter, but also because she feels that Lindo does not deserve the credit for her daughter’s achievements. In this way, Waverly makes a conscious choice to continue playing chess and in chess tournaments in order to pursue her own satisfaction of winning games; Waverly’s self-driven goals represent an American value.

Waverly’s chance encounter with her brother’s chess set triggers her to reflect upon her identity as a young Chinese-American girl. Her continuous wins give her a voice to which her

mother considers worth listening. Still, Lindo's influence on Waverly's identity is more complex than simply exerting her power over her daughter. Lindo sways between accepting American values and hostilely defending her Chinese ethnocentrism. Waverly identifies her need to set herself apart from her family as the next step in being extremely successful at her hobby. However, she is aware of her mother's power over her ethnic identity. "This double consciousness becomes synonymous with seeing what one's opponent sees—and hence constitutes a form of additional knowledge that can be turned to one's advantage, particularly as a way of subverting expectations" (Fickle 72). Waverly is intellectually aware enough to know what her mother believes and why she believes in such values. Consequently, Waverly knows the only way to form her own ethnic identity dependent of her mother is by overthrowing Lindo's power and alienating herself in a way that expresses her individuality, cultures, and personal interests.

In an autobiographical selection from *Recollections of My Life as a Woman* by Diane di Prima, she tells of a turning point in her adolescent identity development. Di Prima, born into an Italian immigrant family, was made well aware of gender roles in her household and culture. She recalls "receiv[ing her] first communications about the specialness and the relative uselessness of men" as a young girl (Gillan 307). The strong matriarchal influence on her household suggests men were of a completely different mindset and unable to "attend [to] the practical aspects of life" (Gillan 307). Men were concerned with politics, rules, and, ideals. Di Prima describes her grandmother, Antoinette Mallozzi, as ripe with wisdom and experience. She recalls Antoinette's hands and skin, artifacts proving that life continues through hardships and years of supporting a family. Although Antoinette expressed liberation in terms of her intellectual opinion of women's gender roles, di Prima was subjected to significant gender role separation: a person could not

assume behaviors of both male and female gender roles. Gender-normative behavior was strictly taught and observed, especially by her parents, though with specific value acknowledged in terms of each gender. Even with "strong" women in her life, di Prima knew roles and boundaries were not to be challenged. Against cultural norms, di Prima's grandfather forms a close bond with her; in the excerpt, he provides her with political awareness and exposes her to dark stories, such as those written by Dante. In a pivotal conversation, di Prima and her grandfather discuss philosophical outlooks on life. He tells her, "…you'll suffer like I suffered, and *in the end you'll find nothing*" (Gillan 310). Di Prima saw this as an opportunity to challenge her grandfather's ideology. She reveals the magnitude of his words: "I knew there was no turning back, and in fact, yearned only to go forward. To go forward, with him, into the darkness…*Not nothing, Grandpa*. It was a promise, a vow, I, Diane, age four or five, would make meaning in the world" (Gillan 310-311). This conversation with her grandfather guided di Prima to become an advocate against such gender-based imprisonment and apply these ideals to her writing. "She credits her anarchist grandfather with sowing the seeds for her subsequent rebellion against this confinement" (Blaha 2). Being aware and educated about inequality during her younger years led to di Prima's ability to develop a very personal definition of familial identity, explore her sexuality free of boundaries, and refuse the typical role of a female writer.

Di Prima grew up in the 1950s engulfed by sexual oppression, magnified by her Italian-American ethnicity. She was able to build upon her stereotypical identity of a young daughter of Italian immigrants through her tolerant and experienced grandparents. Her work "pushes the boundaries of Italian 'tribal' culture away from traditional norms of family and biological lineage through her unconventional content…" (Quinn 177). She expresses behaviors which deviate well from her family's culture and establish her support of gender non-conformity. In her

attempt to explore her adolescent identity, di Prima was forced to alienate herself from her parents and culture, especially in relation to her sexuality. Intimacy and marriage were never discussed in di Prima's family, adding stress to both the development of her adolescent and ethnic identities. Already faced with the teenage difficulties associated with sexual development, di Prima felt alone and confused; additionally, males in her life continued to be recognized intellectually. "Di Prima was familiar with the prevailing pattern of privilege for boys and the familial ethos: '*Una ragazza per bene non lascia il petto paterno prima che si sposi*. A good girl does not leave the paternal next before she is married' " (Quinn 178). Her family was not only secretive about marriage relations but also expected private familial matters to be kept as such, "this code of silence [being] a common theme in Italian American literature" (Quinn 178). Di Prima's alienation from her family and culture during her adolescent years directly influenced her involvement in the Beat movement, writing topics, and ability to detect sexual and academic oppression.

The cornerstone of di Prima's ethnic identity was constructed by exposing and abandoning what she found to be suffocating in Italian American norms. In response to feeling trapped in her culture, di Prima transitioned "into the world of permission to do, say, and be who she wants, and then to write about it" (Quinn 179). Di Prima began her transition through writing, prepared to take on cultural and gender-based criticism as a result of publishing. "Writing as an Italian American woman means an awareness of paradox: reading, thinking, writing, finding a voice; limping onto a tradition of active intellectual life which has no branch marked Italian American and female…[Italian American females] face all the obstacles women traditionally face, plus one: often, then have to leave the culture of their childhood" (Quinn 179). In the selection from *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*, di Prima writes of her acute alertness

of being different and valuing things outside of her cultural norms; she is told her grandfather is crazy, and her justification is, “If Pop was crazy, I well knew by then that I was crazy with him” (Gillan 310). It is di Prima’s ability to come to these realizations that allows her to continue redefining what it means to be Italian American. Gillan and Gillan write in the introduction “all [selections] are concerned in some way with reenvisioning American identity,” but for di Prima, her ambitions extended beyond this as she began her journey towards her ethnic identity without a vision. Her intentions included stripping her ethnic identity of stereotypical behaviors, lifestyles, and political involvement associated with her culture without a set outcome. Therefore, her rationale leads to truly autonomous lifestyle choices and an ethnic identity substantially influenced by her adolescent years.

Joseph Geha’s “Holy Toledo” concerns a family within an Arab American community and the process of ethnic identity formation alluded to at various stages. The story begins with two children, Nadia and Mikhi, and their grandmother, Sitti, searching their home for an amulet protecting against the Evil Eye, a malevolent spirit. Sitti comes to own the amulet after her uncle’s death, and it becomes a tangible piece of her culture. Although may not be worth very much, the charm derives meaning through it making the journey to American with Sitti, as well as being worn by her son while he is away in the navy. In the story, Nadia and Mikhi continue helping their grandmother in an attempt to “stop [Sitti from] groaning that way—achh—every time she bent over, every time she pulled open a drawer or leaned back her head against the dizziness” (Gillan 243). They sit in the living room, holding satin pillows from Uncle Eddie, “the American pillows, Sitti called them” (Gillan 244). Other women in the community envy Sitti for having such a loyal and caring son. Eddie is regarded highly by Sitti since “the children’s father did not care so much because he left” (Gillan 245). Being the eldest of Sitti’s sons, the children’s

father was expected to come back to his mother following his wife's death, but instead he stayed in his own home and abandoned his children five years after becoming a widow. The children are alienated by their only living parent, beginning their desire to form individual ethnic identities. Nadia ventures to Sitti's room, observing the clutter and thinking of her old home. She notes similarities between her old home and her new home in East Detroit, only a few blocks dividing the two. Nadia thinks of the American women who come to her neighborhood to "dressed up in hat and gloves to go shopping" (Gillan 247). Considerably shaping her definition of what an American woman should encompass, Nadia dreams of spending money and departing to the America these women know. "Nadia wished that she were one of them, returning with them into that huge strangeness, America, luring her despite the threat it seemed to hold of loss and vicious homesickness" (Gillan 248). She grapples with her ethnic identity as she is not sure which cultural values she supports and if she should follow in the footsteps of her father, alienating herself from Little Syria altogether as this has most likely provided him with some variant of happiness.

Nadia recalls several Arabic superstitions and beliefs, such as "never [eating] from a yellow dish" and "the ritual that old people had of kissing a piece of bread that had fallen to the floor" (Gillan 249). One of her few connections to her culture involved telling Uncle Eddie about Mikhi imitating the ritual about bread; he subsequently beat Mikhi for ridiculing such an action. This leads to thoughts of her father who her community considered "never [to be] a lucky man" (251). She continues looking for the amulet and must go downstairs to the basement alone, a task she is not eager to carry out. Mikhi calls to her as she comes down the stairs, and he confesses, "I'm going" (Gillan 254). She agrees to join him in escaping from Sitti's house; the two talk until Mikhi jumps up after hearing Sitti break something upstairs and fall. The children rush upstairs

to help Sitti to her feet, and Mikhi realizes that she is not sick or dying. He tells her she must just have gas, and she accuses him of giving her the Evil Eye. Later, Uncle Eddie listens to Sitti tell her story and prepares to punish Mikhi and Nadia with his belt, demonstrating his male and adult dominance. Nadia begins imagining what life will be like without abuse and alienation if she and Mikhi were to take ownership of their future. She pictures “the two of them luckless, free in Boston and Chicago and Holy Toledo, the rest of their lives lost in the American homesickness” (Gillan 258).

The children in “Holy Toledo” are subjected to various forms of alienation, the first of which occurs early in their identity formation. Nadia and Mikhi’s mother dies, and their father abandons them; the children lose all connections with their previous home. They are alienated in the Arab community because of their father’s actions. They are alienated in Sitti’s home, a consequence of her resentment towards their father. They are alienated by Uncle Eddie with the purpose that he can physically abuse them; they endure his anger and corruption associated with his time in the navy. For Nadia and Mikhi, connections to family, home, culture, and identity are nonexistent. Their only option is to escape from Detroit to “the vast America beyond these streets” (Gillan 253). Therefore, Nadia and Mikhi negotiate the life they know within their Arab neighborhood and the inviting aspects of the America they have not seen. They do not find solace in their culture or environment. Usually, “the [community] is central to the lives of Arab Americans, particularly those growing up in concentrated Arab neighborhoods…the shops themselves function as characters, serving as mediators among Arabs and non-Arabs, Old World values and American consumer culture” (Salaita 430 ). However, the marketplace provides a glimpse into the freedom Nadia and Mikhi desire, with reinforcement from their father’s

assumed success away from the Arab community. They are drawn to America outside of Little Syria as their father and the "college mums" seem to experience freedom and opportunity in it.

In Geha's story, "[the characters] face the problems of all new immigrants, namely, the struggle to survive and prosper; adjustments to a new and unfamiliar environment; the fight to preserve traditions; and the inevitable erosion of these traditions as children are Americanized and seek new values" (Suleiman 71). The ties Nadia and Mikhi have with their culture are rigid traditions and beliefs from the old country; they are unable to relate to their grandmother's Arab values and way of life. With such a generational gap between Sitti and the children, accompanied by the repeated alienation by several members of their family, Nadia and Mikhi experience a "clash between tradition and the American practice" (Suleiman 72). Developing an ethnic identity after enduring abandonment, abuse, and conflict seems impossible to Nadia and Mikhi without succumbing to the one aspect they can change: their environment. The two resolve to run away from their overbearing grandmother and uncle, physically and mentally crossing the border to an America that promises a better life and a path towards self-identification.

"Drowning Kittens" by Enid Dame begins with the narrator, Rita, telling a story about her grandfather's anger at the family cat when her mother was a young girl. Dinah, the prized Persian cat, rejects a purebred cat; her pedigree litter was supposed to make Rita's grandfather a lot of money. Instead, Rita recounts that Dinah "got herself pregnant by a striped, marauding tom with one ear missing" (Gillan 228). Becoming furious at the situation, Rita's grandfather, Jake, decides to drown the kittens as he did not approve of Dinah's mating selection. Renee, Jake's wife, makes light of the situation, first defending Dinah by saying that the purebred "isn't her type" and later "[lying] low in her kitchen, busying herself with saucepans and stove lids" while Jake throws a tantrum in the garage (Gillan 228). Their reactions are conflicting. Jake is

outraged by a female, even a cat, dismissing his carefully-chosen decision; Renee finds pleasure in the cat rejecting her husband's arrangement. The children find out about the planned murder, and Rita's mother, Annie, "is furious at her furious father" and "especially enraged at that elusive lady, her mother" (Gillan 228-229). Annie deems her mother an accomplice and becomes increasingly maddened at her passiveness. She alienates herself from the rest of her family, appalled at their behavior and "decides to stay mad at both parents. She will never forget their behavior" (Gillan 235). Rita continues the story with an account of how her grandparents met. Renee was engaged to another man, but "[Jake] had no trouble persuading Renee to marry him," despite his Jewish ethnicity (Gillan 231). Rita divulges that her grandfather loved watching fires, buildings burning to the ground, before she returns to the fate of the kittens. Jake fills up a washtub with water, and Annie rushes to her mother in a last-ditch effort to save the innocent creatures. Renee dismisses her daughter's concern, replying, "Sometimes things work themselves out" (Gillan 233). The family anxiously follows Jake as he struts to the tub. He drops each kitten in, and the kittens swim to the edge, upset that they are not feeding. Jake suddenly believes the swimming animals to be "talented cats" and suggests selling them to a circus (Gillan 235). Annie realizes that her mother believed the situation to develop as it did, and she becomes angry that Renee took such a chance. Rita's narrative moves to more recent times; she reveals that she was married, and Annie died in the last year. In a conversation with her mother days before her wedding, Rita remembers Annie strongly advising her to prepare for marriage. Annie also presents Rita with "a savings account, in [her] name, for $2,000" as Annie believes, " 'Every woman needs a little money of her own'" (Gillan 236).

Dame's story includes the ethnic identity formation of multiple characters. Renee characterizes her family as "com[ing] off as exotic" in the Midwestern United States because of

her Jewish ethnicity (Gillan 230). Although Annie uses her history and experiences during her adolescence to “define [herself], to locate [herself] within a heterogeneous society that both beckons to [her] and threatens to vitiate [her] traditional identities” (Kimmelman 103). She is by far the most extreme advocate of women’s rights, even cited in Rita’s story as becoming politically involved in her causes. Annie negotiates her ethnic identity through the alienation of her Jewish heritage, as does Rita. However, Annie is portrayed as outspoken and representing values against those of her more traditional mother. As an adolescent forming her identity, Annie sees her liberation as the only choice for her to experience equality. She fears oppression by men, even if she is clever enough to deflect male power. Annie does not applaud Renee for keeping quiet about the Persian cat and considers her “playing dumb” to be foolish. Annie continues promoting her feminist values and shares her beliefs with Rita, even though Rita seems confident that her soon-to-be husband “isn’t like Grandpa” (Gillan 236). Jake’s anger being accepted as part of his personality was inexcusable to Annie, regardless of the traditional values upheld by her Jewish ethnicity. Her adolescent experiences with his lashing out and eccentric behavior forced Annie, as the eldest child, to alienate herself from her siblings and parents as a commitment to herself. Although her commitment against this behavior left her struggling with being skeptical of men, her self-perception grew stronger and succeeds under her own conditions. Rita has also gained insight into her relationships and ethnic identity by observing the women in her family. She regards her fiancé as nothing like her grandpa and expects their relationship to be favorable to that of her grandparents’. Both Rita and Annie utilized aspects from their childhood during intense situations that directly led to a part of their ethnic identity formation. As a result, they were able to develop uniquely progressive Jewish identities in conjunction with maturing as young women.

In the selections by Tan, di Prima, Geha, and Dame, the authors and characters challenge previous notions of ethnic identity through incorporating personal experiences and beliefs. Ideas of cultural norms are weighed against values characters want to represent. The fragility of adolescence prompts an even greater expansion of ethnic identity formation because at a young age, individuals are more impressionable. However, being young while undergoing a transition of ethnic identity does not signify a lack of meaning or magnitude. The characters are pressured into a more informed alienation which ends up being an influential force in determining a desired persona.

For Waverly, the rather radical changes that are brought to her family dynamic after her success are not distinctively positive or negative. Rather, she questions why her mother is so forthcoming in her support of Waverly's new hobby and quick to dismiss her two brothers. She becomes more insightful of the specific qualities her mother possesses that parallel with her traditional culture; she also recognizes her mother's manipulation of cultural norms in order to control Waverly's identity development. At the end of the story, there is rift between Waverly and her mother. She must decide whether or not to cross the border dividing them and rejoin her mother in adherence to Chinese cultural norms or create a new ethnic identity based on the knowledge she gained while playing chess.

In the selection by di Prima, she provides an example of her grandfather's effect on her: "Without further touch or words, we shaped the prototype, the pattern for all my deepest loves to come" (Gillan 311). She acknowledges her "crossing over" from the dominant matriarchal influences in her family and uses the connection with her grandfather as a stepping stone to her ethnic identity. She builds upon their relationship to exert her independence during her identity formation and develop a foundation upon which her activist standpoints are based.

Nadia and Mikhi are perpetually negotiating their Arab culture in "Holy Toledo." They are alienated by both Arab and American culture, giving them a unique viewpoint during such instances. The old world of Sitti merging with Nadia and Mikhi's modern experiences leaves the two grappling with where their loyalties lie. They realize Sitti's suffocating way of life is alienating them from other promising opportunities. Therefore, escape is the only method by which Nadia and Mikhi can mesh Arab and American culture out from under Sitti's scrutiny and power.

For Annie, her choosing to become alienated by family is similar to that of Nadia and Mikhi. "Drowning Kittens" illustrates Annie's need to distance herself from her family's traditional Jewish values, especially those relating to gender roles. Even though her mother outwits her father, Annie feels that going to those lengths to hide an opinion or belief should not be required. Annie's ethnic identity development process is evident in descriptions of her as a woman; she is active in politics and hesitant about her daughter's marriage.

Gillan and Gillan's text focuses on the authors who "look back on their childhoods and realize that it was their difference from the norm that helped them to succeed" (ix-x). For the selected authors and characters in their stories, alienation during adolescent and ethnic identity development leads to an illuminating process towards a more certain awareness of self.

## Chapter Three

## Crossing the Boundaries of Identity in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)

> Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river-a process. Contained within the river is its identity, and it needs to flow, to change to stay a river-if it stopped it would be a contained body of water such as a lake or a pond.
>
> -- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Reader* 166

In addition to the authors in *Growing Up Ethnic in America*, Gloria Anzaldúa experienced alienation during adolescence which helped her to shape an exceptional identity. Like the characters Gillan and Gillan include in their collection, Anzaldúa expresses her dissatisfaction with the way in which identity is defined and instead suggests identity formation to include more than what a person is not.

> Anzaldúa models a flexible process for personal and collective identity formation, ethical action, and alliance building…Generally, identification functions through exclusion: we define who and what we are by defining who and what we are not. By shifting the focus from *exclusion* to *inclusion*, Anzaldúa invites us to reconfigure identity to open-ended, potentially transformative ways. (Anzaldúa, *Reader* 3)

Her influential work *Borderlands/La Frontera* identifies and connects numerous aspects of Anzaldúa's cultural identity. Her writing, "a socio-politically specific elaboration of late twentieth-century *feminist* Chicana epistemology, signals movement towards coalitions with other *mujeres* across the U.S.-Mexico geopolitical border" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 1). Anzaldúa defines her book as autohistoria, a genre she created to incorporate both history and culture particular to the author. "Writers of autohistoria-teoria blend their cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and other forms of theorizing" (Anzaldúa, *Reader* 9). Anzaldúa focuses on the development of her identity, the "new mestiza," which

connects her several modes of consciousness. Her creation of a new ethnic identity is motivated by adolescent alienation in various areas of her life, resulting in a growing disillusionment of her culture.

*Borderlands/La Frontera* begins with poetic descriptions of Anzaldúa's straddling of cultures. She writes, "I stand at the edge where earth touches the ocean / where the two overlap / a gentle coming together / at other times and places a violent clash" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 23). She refers to the geographic border of Mexico and the Southwest United States, a symbol of her being painfully split between two worlds. "This is [her] home / this thin edge of barbwire" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 25). The border is a metaphorical sliver where outcasts exist, where there is no stability, where a unique culture is born. Anzaldúa conveys the story of the beginning of her ancestors; the Indian inhabitants of Mexico were repeatedly plagued by disease, invasion, and political power. Consequently, "Chicanos, Mexican-American, … [a] race that had never existed before," emerged in the sixteenth century (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 27). Anzaldúa gives the timeline of *el destierro*, the lost land of her ancestors. She cites the intermingling of races as white American men came into Mexico searching for gold. Eventually, war breaks out, and *tejanos*[1] are forced from their land. "U.S. troops invaded and occupied Mexico, forcing her to give up almost half her nation, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 29). Mexicans in the Southwest United States become alienated from those living below the Texas border and isolated from the Americans stealing their land. "We were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 30).

Anzaldúa relates her family's first experiences to Anglo society; her mother and father struggled through a drought in South Texas with their children and extended family to support.

[1] *Tejanos* are Mexican-Americans native to what became Texas in 1836.

Many Chicanos fled to the newly-defined Mexico, but Anzaldúa's parents stayed to farm for Rio Farms Incorporated. The family lived in poverty while agricultural corporations in the area flourished. Already alienated from her history and people, a young Anzaldúa watched as the land she called home was stripped of life, zoned into squares, and irrigated, discrediting the traditional Mexican way of dryland farming. She writes about her observation of the harmful connections forming between Mexico and U.S. farming companies. Anzaldúa reveals the adversity faced by those attempting to return to The Homeland; even if a refugee successfully conquers the physical border, suffering through exploitation is inevitable. "Big farming combines…don't have to pay federal minimum wages, or ensure adequate housing or sanitary conditions" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 34). Women endure forced prostitution and sexual abuse. Language barriers, violence, labor exploitation, and the fear of deportation make migration come at a dreadful cost.

Anzaldúa begins the second chapter, "Movimientos de rebeldia y las culturas que traicionan," with a glimpse into her personal rebellion against her culture. She acknowledges the difficulty with leaving her family, the first to do so in six generations. "I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 38). Her choice to alienate herself from her culture came from several realizations as a young girl. She was stubborn, a free spirit, a rebel, and "nothing in [Anzaldúa's] culture approved of [her]" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 38). Her self-faith was constantly disputed. She identifies the Shadow-Beast, a part of her consciousness that dismisses restrictions and limitations. The Shadow-Beast clashes with cultural beliefs and norms that have been passed down through generations and reflect what is important to a society.

Anzaldúa explains her deeper challenge with her culture since "[it] is made by those in power—men" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 38). Therefore, women blindly follow, unintentionally

making hypocritical decisions and leading scripted lives. Anzaldúa argues that women had only three lifestyle choices as society's "other": prostitution, motherhood, and the Church. It is through the so-called protection of women in Anzaldúa's culture that allows for the alienation of women into specific roles. She describes mixed messages from women; sometimes, she was instructed that men only wanted thing, and women should never let men abuse children. On the contrary, she was told that women must listen to men. Anzaldúa outlines the hierarchy in Chicano culture as only a select group having respect and power. Anyone going against social rules is subjected to condemning by the community. Complicating Anzaldúa's identity was "[her] *choice to be queer*" and the lack of any progression in terms of Chicano sexuality beliefs (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 40). "The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore subhuman, in-human, non-human" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 40). Thus, Anzaldúa becomes alienated through gender, sexuality, and race since she does not fit into the socially constructed categories observed by her culture. She defines her life as "the spaces between the different worlds" and sees rebelling against what she finds abhorrent about Chicano culture while still keeping in touch with her roots as the only approach to a fulfilling life (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 42). Anzaldúa believes her own people have sold her out, betrayed her as a woman and Chicano. She ends the chapter with a reflection that in her rebellious solitude, she thrives.

Anzaldúa lays the foundation of her spiritual life and identity, remarking on encounters with snakes beginning in her childhood. Serpents are affiliated with several aspects of Chicano culture such as fertility, goddesses, and the soul. Anzaldúa remembers dismissing the occurrence of snakes in her life: "I allowed white rationality to tell me that the existence of the 'other world' was mere pagan superstition" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 58). Forming a spiritual identity was

difficult for Anzaldúa because of the safety in external reality and the stigma of the unconscious mind. However, she writes of her acceptance of the spiritual world and an open, meaningful connection between the soul and body. "People who inhabit both realities [external and spiritual] are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 59). Therefore, a hybrid consciousness must exist to make sense of "the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 60). Anzaldúa notes her heightened sense to danger, spirits, and emotions. This faculty is developed by those who have been oppressed; "this shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people…the break makes us pay attention to the soul, and we are thus carried into awareness—an experiencing of the soul" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 61). Anzaldúa acknowledges that various illnesses and psychological issues can bring about the break that commences a broadening of consciousness and spirituality.

For Anzaldúa, a split between her consciousnesses was evident almost her entire life. She recalls finding awareness through mirrors as a toddler, leading to insecurity about her mind and body. "There are many defense strategies that the self uses to escape the agony of inadequacy and I have used all of them" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 67). Anzaldúa depicts her reactions to alienation: rejection of herself and others, unwarranted blame, swelling anger, internalized anxiety. "In order to escape the threat of shame or fear, one takes on a compulsive, repetitious activity as though to busy oneself, keep awareness at bay" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 67). She analyzes her unconscious lack of awareness as ignorance, not denial. Anzaldúa explains that *Coatlicue*[2] must intervene to aid in the progression of the psyche. She sees images of the goddess frequently; for Anzaldúa, she symbolizes duality and arrives during changes in consciousness. "I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness,

[2] Coatlicue is the Aztec goddess of birth, death, cosmic processes, and Mother of the Gods.

escape ‘knowing,’ I won’t be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 70). After episodes involving *Coatlicue*, Anzaldúa is able to slowly piece her changed, autonomous consciousness back together.

Anzaldúa’s ethnic identity development involves an abundance of language shaming as a young child. Speaking Spanish at school was not tolerated, and oppression relating to her accent continued through Anzaldúa’s collegiate years. “Attacks on one’s form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 76). Anzaldúa describes such attacks coming from her own culture, as well. She remembers the duplicitous standards of her language in which the masculine form dominates, although Chicano Spanish initially aimed to separate a people from the domineering characteristics of English. Shunned by “purist” Latinos and manipulated by the pressures of adapting to English, Chicano Spanish fulfills a unique “need to identify [Chicanos] as a distinct people” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 77). Anzaldúa establishes the hesitation of her culture to use Chicano Spanish as a result of language terrorism; speakers of Chicano Spanish are characterized by the stereotypes associated with the language. Furthermore, language terrorism exists within the Chicano culture, where speakers “[try] to out-Chicano each other…to speak like Chicanos” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 80). Anzaldúa acknowledges the uncertainty of Chicano Spanish and the ramifications of doubt in one’s language. “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 80). Anzaldúa writes that she found comfort in the linguistic properties of Mexican movies and music but soon discovered the alienation associated with this part of her identity. She conveys Chicanos’ perpetual straddling of cultures:

> This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don’t identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don’t totally

identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 85)

Anzaldúa indicates the fluctuation of her culture and the importance of her commitment to the language. Each step towards defining aspects of the culture and language means a greater differentiation, an aspect that better represents the reality of Chicano culture.

In terms of her writing, Anzaldúa claims she has been a storyteller since childhood. She considers stories to be performances and closely connected to spiritual powers. “Whites, along with a good number of [Chicanos] have cut themselves off from their spiritual roots…” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 90). For Anzaldúa, writing involves recording images and events she sees in her mind while in a relaxed state. She believes herself to be the messenger of what she experiences, which becomes exhausting. “Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being queer—a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 94). Anzaldúa illustrates her writing blocks and instances in *Coatlicue* states as having a critical purpose in her journey as a writer. “The painful periods of confusion that I suffer from are symptoms of a larger creative process: cultural shifts. The stress of living with cultural ambiguity both compels me to write and blocks me” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 96). During these times, Anzaldúa believes a transformation in her cultural identity is worth the temporary vulnerability in her consciousness.

The new consciousness, the one Anzaldúa experiences while preparing to write, she calls the consciousness of the *mestiza*, the mixed race; “it is a consciousness of the Borderlands”

(Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 99). This consciousness does not come without frustration and uneasiness.

> The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The *mestiza's* dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness…la *mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another…the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to? (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 100)

Straddling cultures involves more than speaking two languages or being of two races. Anzaldúa reminds readers that culture dictates thought and how individuals see the world, their reality. Frequently, cultural norms and beliefs clash, and the *mestiza* is left with unappealing choices of how to challenge the alienation that comes from splitting a consciousness between two cultures. For Anzaldúa, the new *mestiza* is a method of developing her own "psychological borders" and allows her to "stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 101). Tolerating ambiguity and acquiring plurality are pivotal in evolving a third element, a *mestiza* consciousness. By not belonging to any culture or country, Anzaldúa is able to define her ethnic identity according to her own consciousness and through her creation of an identity which deconstructs previous paradigms. At the heart of shifting to the *mestiza* consciousness is the issue of hierarchical male dominance. Anzaldúa identifies Chicano males as "suffer[ing] from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 105). The concept of being macho infiltrates all types of relationships, and Anzaldúa advocates that macho behavior, such as sexual abuse, cannot be tolerated. Women

must support each other in order for men to take action in equality. “The struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one “(Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 106).

According to Anzaldúa, men are only familiar with traditional gender roles, and for oppression to cease, men must change the concept of masculinity. She provides an example of an oppressed group to which she belongs: homosexuals. “The *mestizo* and queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 107). Another dominant force Anzaldúa analyzes is white society. She explains how white society needs to acknowledge other cultures and the fact that many believe minorities are lesser. Anzaldúa describes how white culture will continue dominating America unless Chicanos and other people of color inform society of their identity. “Ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 108). Anzaldúa writes that being aware is the first step in a societal change; she describes a vision of Chicano culture where men and women can be themselves. “I seek new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 109).

The second half of *Borderlands/La Frontera* includes short essays and poems relating to the dominant themes of the prose section. Anzaldúa first writes of past experiences on the ranches of her childhood. In one particular entry, Anzaldúa conveys her grandmother’s alienation through sexuality and gender roles. “Immaculate, Inviolate: *Como Ella*” portrays Anzaldúa’s grandmother as migrating between different houses in the family. “She’d stay two weeks with one, two with another / back and forth in her black dress” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 131). Upholding the role of the traditional Chicano woman, her grandmother labors over the fire,

cooking food and caring for the family. Anzaldúa asks Mamagrande if she has ever had an orgasm, and Mamagrande explains her obligatory role in the bedroom. Papagrande would do what all men do while Mamagrande "prayed / he would finish quickly" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 132).

Sexual abuse arises again in "We Call Them Greasers" as a young woman is raped by a white man. The violence and domination in the poem parallels to the figurative raping of Anzaldúa's culture by white power. In "Creature of Darkness," a state of consciousness delineated by a visit from Coatlicue, Anzaldúa outlines her experiences with deep depression and distrust. One of Anzaldúa's last entries, "To live in the Borderlands means you," outlines an extensive list of contradictions and struggles experienced by those divided by cultures. She explains how in the Borderlands, "you are the battleground / where enemies are kin to each other; / you are at home, a stranger" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 216). Anzaldúa instructs the people of Borderlands to live without borders in an attempt to embrace hybridity.

Anzaldúa is the embodiment of a cultural straddler; her ethnic identity is a mosaic of experience, language, emotion, and spirituality. Her encounters with alienation began early in her life, and the effects are evident in her writing. Anzaldúa's identity-based issues initially stem from a lack of security in terms of a homeland; she titles her first chapter "*El otro M éxico*," a reference to the geographical borders that have alienated her Chicano culture. Alluding back to the eighteenth century, she notes the hardships accompanied with the disruption of Chicano living in what is presently the Southwestern United States. Her people were severed from a land they knew and respected. She is born into a community already dominated by white culture, therefore immediately having to affiliate with the Other. "Nothing is more difficult than identifying emotionally with a cultural alterity, with the Other…one has to leave the permanent

boundaries of a fixed self, literally 'leave' oneself and see oneself through the eyes of the Other" (Anzaldúa, *Reader* 114-15). In her family's attempts to succeed under white oppression, they lose land and money. They are backed into a corner, and working for Anglo agribusiness corporations becomes the only option to survive. She becomes alienated because her family does not protest or escape to Mexico, instead being exploited by whites. At a young age, Anzaldúa's ethnic identity generates feelings of inadequacy and isolation. "[Anzaldúa's] sense of her own wholeness is cut and fragmented by the social categories used by others to politically situate her" (Bastian 156). The only benefit resulting from Anzaldúa's childhood years is the cookbook she mentions in which her mother's recipe was included.

Without the comfort of a homeland, Anzaldúa's ability to "move within and among multiple, often conflicting, worlds and refuse to align [herself] exclusively with any single individual, group of belief system" begins to develop (Keating 15). This unique characteristic of her ethnic identity allows her to be extremely metacognitively aware and gives her a perspective of openness that most people do not possess. She recognizes the compelling influence of culture, characteristics which are not frequently challenged by those who believe or exhibit them. "Gloria move[s] within, between, and among an extremely diverse set of personal, political, and professional worlds" (Keating 15). Anzaldúa is able to identify the imbalance of male and female control in Chicano culture; her experiences with Anglo alienation allow her to write of how Chicano culture is framed by the white, heterosexual male. Further, she explains the changes that must occur intraculturally and interculturally, how culture is studied and perceived. Changes must occur in the environment and within people.

Anzaldúa commits the "ultimate rebellion" against Chicano culture by being lesbian (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 41). She admits to having characteristics of both sexes, another aspect of

her duality. “Her writings challenge the conventional views that lead to stereotyping, overgeneralizations, and arbitrary divisions among peoples and open new spaces where innovative, sometimes shocking connections *entre mundos* can occur” (Keating 16). Anzaldúa’s embracing of sexuality condemns alienation as a result of sexual oppression and discrimination. “She brings to ask the oppressive nature of Chicano-Mexicano culture and its relation to gays and lesbians, and she advocates a new consciousness for the Chicano community, one that would lead to a loosening of the strictures imposed on Chicana sexuality” (Herrera-Sobek 269). Her rejection of labels contributes to her objectivity in understanding the consequences of division on her ethnic identity. Anzaldúa associates with numerous groups—LGBT, Latinos, writers—while never fully committing. She reflects “the limitations in the labels and the flaws in the various forms of group” (Keating 15). However, since she identifies with groups while refusing their rules, she retains an extraordinary cultural viewpoint. This viewpoint also applies to her straddling of English and Spanish while defending the language of Chicano people. “Analogous to the loss of place, space, and history for the Chicano people residing in the Magic Valley was the loss of language” (Herrera-Sobek 267). Anzaldúa refuses the assumptions associated with Chicano Spanish; she defends the challenge of remaining bilingual while experiencing linguistic terrorism.

For Anzaldúa, alienation did not end during her adolescence. The oppression she suffered in terms of her race, language, writing consciousness, spirituality, Mexican identity, gender roles, sexuality, and health  resulted in a holistic view of culture and ethnic identity. Through the new *mestiza* consciousness, Anzaldúa applies her knowledge of alienation and reveals that discrimination learned through culture is extremely influential.“[Anzaldúa] argues that the false dichotomies offered by traditional models of identity split or fragment complex identities into

discrete social categories, which consequently restrict the way we feel ourselves to be connected with the different aspects of ourselves and with others" (Bastian 152). Cultural oppression is directly related to accepted and practiced social paradigms. By crossing and negotiating borders, Anzaldúa was able to affirm her ethnic identity in her own transformative reality.

## Chapter Four

## A Personal Liberation in *The Day Nina Simone Stopped Singing* (2011)

> True, life was beautiful, but from very early on my sisters and I were aware that we were not like the rest.
>
> -- Darina Al-Joundi, 20

Darina Al-Joundi's quick-paced memoir bluntly depicts the influence of several factors on her cultural and ethnic identity. Her eccentric father and unorthodox childhood serve as the cornerstone for Al-Joundi's eagerness to live within her own belief system and challenge the traditional Lebanese way of life. As a child, Al-Joundi was encouraged to question cultural norms and sustain her loyalty to personal values. Consequently, she was subjected to constant alienation. Al-Joundi was alienated as a child because of her aggressive demeanor; she was not the typical submissive, well-mannered girl. She was alienated religiously because she was "liberated," not Christian or Muslim. She was alienated as a female in a culture overridden with male domination. In *The Day Nina Simone Stopped Singing*, Al-Joundi illustrates how she was able to achieve personal liberation in conjunction with a self-defined ethic identity as a result of her alienation, especially during her adolescence.

The text begins at the funeral of Al-Joundi's father, a man who she revered as he was the springboard to her liberation. Al-Joundi disrupts the service to the annoyance of her sisters and mother, turning off the Koran cassette tape traditionally played after death. Her alienation from family and friends is apparent; Al-Joundi deliberately withstands the wishes of men at the funeral. She describes her father as "an odd bird" but still having an exceptional impact on her life (Al-Joundi 10). He finds pleasure in Al-Joundi's quirky, rebellious personality. Al-Joundi summarizes her childhood as "a perpetual clinking of arrack glasses and [her] father's laughter shaking the walls" (Al-Joundi 15). She describes her experience at Catholic school and fascination with Christian religion. Al-Joundi cites many examples of hostility towards her

sisters whom she characterizes as either authoritative or gullible. Her house is continuously full of visitors, and her parents always serving alcohol. When Al-Joundi turns eight, her father initiates her progression towards womanhood with her first glass of wine. Amused by Al-Joundi's drunkenness, her father declares that she is liberated.

Al-Joundi illustrates the beginning of Lebanon's civil war with only slight changes to her life but soon remembers "realiz[ing] that this war was going to transform both executioners and victims into something worse than wolves" (Al-Joundi 32). Her family takes precautions, preparing the house and learning to take shelter. Al-Joundi's parents flee to Baghdad; the girls shuffle back and forth between Beirut and Baghdad. Al-Joundi notes her family's physical alienation because of the barricades and the discontinuing of the radio. She tells of her experience being cast on a TV series and how it brought her fame in the community. She details the turbulent years of moving, job hunting, and dodging violence. "Poker games were often interrupted by rockets streaking through the living room, and in the end we hardly paid attention to them anymore" (Al-Joundi 50).

Highly involved in her sexual development, Al-Joundi's father brings her flowers and tampons the day of her first period. She consults with her father about intercourse and the lack of intimacy with her first boyfriend. The changes of adolescence bring about disagreements between Al-Joundi's father and his daughters; Rana and Al-Joundi plan to kill him numerous times without success. Almost achieving their wish, Al-Joundi's father is shot and remains in a coma for months. He is released from the hospital with physical limitations, but he is mentally unharmed. Al-Joundi reveals her enjoyment in seeing movies, listening to music, and dancing to keep her mind off of the war. She finds comfort in the self-alienation produced by entertainment in Beirut, a way to escape the violent reality."The city had become a wasteland" (Al-Joundi 65).

She details the escalating bombings and attacks, eventually referencing the Israeli army's invasion of Lebanon. "The Israeli army had surrounded West Beirut. Their ships filled the sea, their military vehicles the mountain, and their planes the sky…Confronted with such a merciless machine of destruction we had nothing" (Al-Joundi 70). Al-Joundi and her family isolate themselves in their basement shelter while the battle continued inside the blockade. Following aid from American envoys, the sisters become nurses for the Red Cross. The city is deserted, yet Al-Joundi feels a sort of freedom and equality for a short time. Lebanon receives a new president, and Israeli soldiers slaughter entire cities, to one of which Al-Joundi travels as an aid. She sees destruction and death; curfews are set and her family makes changes to cooperate with Phalangist occupation. Al-Joundi illustrates her family's struggle to find food and stay safe. Al-Joundi's identity becomes entangled with the war.

She meets a young man, Maher, and gains extensive sexual advice from him. A homosexual himself, Maher gives Al-Joundi valuable information about the way Lebanese men view women. She shares her knowledge with peers in the community, charging five dollars per hour (Al-Joundi 94). Al-Joundi becomes involved high-risk behaviors; "I was convinced that I was going to die at any moment, so, hungry for everything, for sex, drugs, and alcohol, I doubled my efforts" (Al-Joundi100). Still an adolescent, Al-Joundi defies her oppression by grasping for any defining, autonomous behaviors of which she can participate. Against her father's wishes, Al-Joundi decides to marry Abed, a war photographer. He quickly becomes abusive, and Al-Joundi pregnant and ridden with infection. Her only way out is divorce, which she obtains through death threats to Abed. Al-Joundi becomes increasingly reckless. She marries again to "an emotive actor, frail and jealous" named Adel but leaves him for Beirut when the peace accord is organized (Al-Joundi 114). She sees the eagerness of Beirut's people to put the war

behind them. Again, Al-Joundi marries, this time to Dany. He is not able to bury Al-Joundi's documentation problems as she hoped, and their divorce promptly follows.

Al-Joundi is lost, unable to form an identity without the war buzzing in the background of her life. On a quest to find answers about her identity, Al-Joundi decides to have a sexual encounter with a woman; however, this does not bring her closer to self-definition. Her father dies, and Al-Joundi decides to go out in Beirut after his funeral. She is attacked by seven men, one of which was at her father's funeral, who believe they are "reeducating her" (Al-Joundi 127). The bar patrons do nothing to aid Al-Joundi; she is dragged out by the hair while the bystanders pretend not to see. After enduring a brutal beating, Al-Joundi is taken to the hospital where her injuries are diagnosed. Later, she is transported to a mental facility for women. "I saw [these mad women] and understood that I was paying the price for my insane female liberty in this country of madmen" (Al-Joundi 131). She quickly understands the required behaviors and tolerance to abuse in the facility. "Al-Joundi describes her experience in [the] Beirut mental institution run by sadistic nuns, which confirms the importance of not overstepping one's bounds when she is committed…" (Benenhaley 43). Alienation from society brings doubt to her mind; she wonders if submitting will result in insanity. Al-Joundi hopes the release back to Beirut will bring her something other than physical freedom, but instead, she feels nothing for her homeland. "As I came out that day I didn't have the slightest feeling for, the slightest attachment to this place that no long existed in my eyes" (Al-Joundi 138). She boards a plane for Paris the very next day.

Al-Joundi's ethnic identity is shaped by "pack[ing] as much experience into her Lebanese youth as possible" ("Darina"). Therefore, the alienation that came along with particular experiences in her childhood and adolescent years is directly tied to her self-defined ethnic identity. Her personal awareness and analysis of Lebanese culture, gender roles, and the effects

of alienation during wartime are products of her free-spirited upbringing. Al-Joundi knew at a young age that she was raised in a way which deviated from her culture. "True, life was beautiful, but from very early on my sisters and I were aware that we were not like the rest" (Al-Joundi 20). Her thinking is sophisticated for a seven-year-old; she is not simply spoiled or ignorant to the ways in which her family clashes with other Arab families. The societal alienation experienced by her family allows Al-Joundi to notice her parents' objections to anything prohibiting liberated thinking and behavior. Her mother and father go out together; "[her father] never hid his wife the way most Arabs do" (Al-Joundi 15). Due to her parents' disapproval of traditional norms, Al-Joundi is notably open-minded. She also trusts her father wholeheartedly. "Al-Joundi and her sisters grew up in a freewheeling household at a time when religious fundamentalism of all sorts was running rampant throughout the country" ("Darina"). The self-inflicted alienation of Al-Joundi's family was praised and embraced in her home.

The malleable quality of Al-Joundi's ethnic identity arises in her love for catechism and her Catholic school. She questions her exclusion from particular classes due to her assumed religious practices, begging a nun to allow her to hear readings and attend mass. However, she is alienated after being categorized as Muslim and denied access to catechism, calling the decision an "injustice" (Al-Joundi 27). Her ethnic identity did not previously include spiritual factors at the persistent opposition of her father; however, it changed to incorporate the isolation inflicted by Al-Joundi's teacher, therefore linking her school, religious affiliation, and ethnic identity. Unable to properly characterize herself because of her father's Syrian refugee roots and her mother's Shiite denomination, Al-Joundi applies the nun's response to the knowledge of her cultural background.

At age eight, Al-Joundi notes numerous military attacks on Beirut. She observes the barricades alienating her city from the South. “We were cut off from the world, the car radio no longer worked” (31). Interestingly, Al-Joundi repeatedly finds solace in being isolated in Beirut, although she does travel to her grandparents’ home in Arnoun. She enjoys the familiar sounds of war and the excitement of living day-to-day. The barricades provide Al-Joundi with a few instances of concern, such as when her grandmother’s body cannot be returned to the South for burial due to the occupation of the Israeli army. However, Al-Joundi’s comfort in her alienation comes from the inevitable consistency resulting from a lack of change, not from lack of violence. She is left pondering sophisticated questions of loyalty and justice throughout her adolescence. She asks, “ What right does anyone have to forbid someone to be buried in her own land?” (Al-Joundi 57). Such philosophical questions are part of Al-Joundi’s ethnic identity and her advanced ethnic awareness during her younger years.

Al-Joundi’s ethnic identity is significantly impacted by her father. “He introduces [the girls] to American and European influences…exposing them to a multitude of influences and allowing them the autonomy to explore their femininity and sexuality in a culture which largely dictates that ‘only men are free’” (Benenhaley 27). He continuously advocates for their liberation. He and Al-Joundi are particularly close as her actions during his funeral depict. He truly encourages Al-Joundi’s alienation from whomever and whatever is necessary in order to find herself. He does not exhibit judgment, instead frequently offering advice in all aspects of Al-Joundi’s life. Therefore, Al-Joundi reveals to him the most private of information. Upon Al-Joundi’s onset of puberty, she asks her father to take her bra shopping. He initially declines, but Al-Joundi does not want to alienate herself from other women, including her sisters, in this way. Later, Al-Joundi realizes her preference to go without a bra; her father’s role in such a milestone

foreshadows his effect on Al-Joundi's attempt to define her sexuality and progress in her journey towards womanhood.

During the times when Al-Joundi seeks to "avoid seeing the war, [she] explore[s] the galleries, bookshops, or Hamra's movie houses" (Al-Joundi 51). Although predominately a comfort due to its chronic influence, Al-Joundi fears and resents the war for hurting her father and making the type of life she pursues more difficult. Alienating herself to movie theaters, Al-Joundi  spends her time adoring songs by Lionel Riche and Diana Ross. The theaters provide isolation from the war-stricken Beirut, sounds other than shells and explosions, scenes other than those filled with grey smoke and dying civilians. Usually physically alienated to the family's basement, Al-Joundi is enthusiastic about physical alienation from the reality that is Beirut to a world of entertainment, noting that she "go[es] to the movies by [her]self" as a means of comedic healing and distraction (Al-Joundi 64).

Before the blockade is lifted by Israel, Al-Joundi reflects on the peacefulness of Beirut as the Palestinian soldiers exit. She relishes in a sense of belongingness and the benefits of staying loyal to Lebanon.

> Hamra was deserted, not a single building was standing, the phosphorus bombs burned everything, but at the same time the city was ours. We were alone in the street; we were the queens of the town that belonged to us alone. At last we were all equal. We were all hungry, thirsty, and very dirty. Not a living soul anywhere. I felt I could count on any neighbor or passerby; we were finally worthy of being alive. (Al-Joundi 77)

Her alienation brings about a temporary unity to her ethnic identity, where her presence is valued and warranted. However, the streets do not stay empty for long; when Al-Joundi is fourteen, Gemayel becomes president, and foreign troops fill Beirut. Al-Joundi's alienation changes to that

of Lebanese circumstances due to her father's Syrian background. She feels like "a foreigner in [her] own land," ending her short-lived liberation (Al-Joundi 82).

The Israeli invasion further divides Beirut, in turn isolating families in their own homes. Safety is not even guaranteed there; "Beirut echoed like an immense jackhammer around the clock" (Al-Joundi 85). Again Al-Joundi is alienated to her home, school, and the theater. She contemplates the difficulty of having boyfriends during war. "It was in a girl's best interest to have a lover on the same street" (Al-Joundi 84). Al-Joundi's sense of self, already complicated by adolescence, continues to be overshadowed by the war. She decides to take one matter of identity into her own hands: her virginity. Influenced by her father and the eagerness brought on by seeing death on a daily basis, Al-Joundi decides she must be the one responsible. This aspect of Al-Joundi's identity is powerful in terms of Lebanese culture; she is warned that men enjoy possessing women, usually without much consent from them. Her sexual exploration leads to further ethnic identity development.

In the last years of Al-Joundi's adolescence, she descends into a promiscuous lifestyle intertwined with rebellion, drugs, and alcohol. Her ethnic identity becomes one of revolt and danger. She alienates herself from rules and laws, continuously pushing the boundaries. Al-Joundi makes rash decisions and faces hardships alone, with the exception of her father's occasional advice. After her three marriages, Al-Joundi admits "[she] wasn't able to live without the war anymore, [her] body had been programmed for it ever since childhood" (Al-Joundi 119). Without the war, Al-Joundi feels as though a piece of her identity is missing. Her alienation from other Lebanese who have moved on, ready to turn the page, damages her ability to define herself and her place in society. Al-Joundi's ethnic identity transforms, turning her independence into recklessness.

When Al-Joundi is placed into a woman's hospital, her previous notions of numerous parts of her life are challenged. To the nurses, her ethnic identity reflects a lack of morality, and they believe her behavior is the cause of her alienation to an asylum. Al-Joundi fears total compliance in the hospital will lead to insanity. "In the end [she finds] out that [patients are] locked up there at the request of their families" (Al-Joundi 133). Al-Joundi experiences complete alienation and disregard by her family, which leads to her final alienation, one that is self-prescribed. For Al-Joundi to regain her cultural awareness and a stable ethnic identity, she chooses to flee Beirut. Surprisingly, she does not admit to a complete disconnect from Beirut until her release from the hospital. Once free, Al-Joundi concludes that alienation from her past, culture, and family will lead to her personal liberation.

# Conclusion

## Negotiating a Hybrid Ethnic Identity

In each of the chapters, the connection between alienation during adolescence and ethnic identity development is evident. The characters and authors included are capable of possessing a rare extension of consciousness, a widened scope in terms of cultural awareness and analysis. It is through instances of alienation that individuals advance in ethnic identity formation. As characters and authors are separated from aspects of a heritage, recognition of the borderline between the learned culture and possible continued aspects of the culture occurs. When this recognition happens during adolescence, individuals are especially susceptible to fluctuation in perception of the world and identity.

Adolescence, although a period already plagued with physical and mental struggles, is also a time of inclusion. Children and young adults are frequently wavering in beliefs and values; therefore, they are on a constant lookout for feedback concerning cultural practices. In all facets of identity, individuals use feedback and acquired knowledge to make informed decisions about potential changes to identity. “Adolescents with an unexamined ethnic identity have not actively explored their ethnic group membership and may also have little understanding of issues related to ethnicity” (Wakefield 149). Hence, alienation during adolescence can prompt an examination of cultural factors and lead to further self-definition.

The stories from Gillan and Gillan’s collection demonstrate the significance of alienation during adolescence. Waverly experiences alienation from her family, community, and culture throughout the selection; the realization that her mother prioritizes Chinese values over her children compels Waverly to consider where her own loyalties lie and how her mother’s choices will influence her willingness to exhibit her culture. Thus, her perception of freedom and power

change, and she begins experimenting with the most accurate representation of herself. Di Prima's alienation from her heritage is apparent through her decision to redefine gender roles and discontinue the expectations associated with a traditional Italian family. Without the understanding of her ethnic identity and how gender boundaries are influenced by her culture, di Prima would not have been able to separate herself from debilitating Italian American norms. This recognition gave her the ability to make life choices a liberated woman. Nadia and Mikhi are involuntarily alienated from their father and community. It is through their realization of their father's freedom that the children are able to make decisions about the future. Being at the crossroads of two cultures provides Nadia and Mikhi with the strength to seek unique identities and the courage to leave traditional values behind. Annie from "Drowning Kittens" questions gender norms similarly to di Prima; Annie alienates herself from Jewish culture, even advocating against traditional beliefs and values. Anzaldúa not only recognizes her borderland consciousness but also defines it; she uses a modified paradigm to her benefit, noting that her identity is constantly changing. Al-Joundi learns her culture so completely through her several types of alienation, even exploiting it to escape the asylum and flee to freedom.

It is through alienation of the characters and authors that allows for each to identify and deeply understand the extraordinary place between cultures. Alienation and ethnic identities described by Gillan and Gillan, Anzaldúa, and Al-Joundi correspond to the idea of adolescence being a time of both separation from and analysis of cultural beliefs and values. Alienation during adolescence allows for careful cross-examination of why certain cultural elements exist and to what degree they affect ethnic identity. Investigation of one's culture can lead to culture shock, as finding out the reasoning, or lack of reasoning, behind norms may lead to disillusionment. For several of the characters and authors, being between cultures forges a new

consciousness that allows for a more objective perception of the world and multiple cultures. Since this consciousness develops during adolescence, lifestyle choices and future intellect are shaped by alienation that occurs at a young age.

In every instance of alienation of the texts included, the isolation endured by characters or authors is particularly influential because it occurred at a young age. Not only does alienation provide a more mature and insightful view of culture, but it also impacts future life choices. Annie decides against the constraints of marriage and supports women's rights. Di Prima chooses to have children out of wedlock with various men to fulfill her personal dream of becoming a mother. Anzaldúa finds the strength to speak for all oppressed peoples, a definite means to alienation by her culture as she admits intimate details of her life. Al-Joundi flees her homeland, knowing her identity will not flourish there. In these examples, individuals use instances of alienation as building blocks for a better defined self-identity. "A well-developed ethnic identity may be a valuable characteristic to support positive youth development…" (Wakefield 150). The characters and authors in this thesis utilize advanced ethnic identities in a way that is meaningful and constructive to overall self-perception.

Interestingly, the texts analyzed are from diverse cultures, yet the subjects strive to achieve a self-chosen identity. In several of the works, adolescents become aware of cultural norms and behaviors through the observation of their family; then, individuals consider the reasoning behind norms and behaviors besides the fact that they are traditional to a culture. Usually, this realization leads to actions resulting in alienation. For Al-Joundi, she recognized the constrictive aspects of Lebanese culture and began to rebel against the traditional female role; her sexual exploration and drug use contributed to alienation by her society and family with the exception of her father. Nadia and Mikhi understand the manipulative characteristics of their

grandmother and uncle. The siblings challenge Sitti's sickness and uncle's sanity, resulting in numerous whippings. By considering any alternative to living with Sitti, the children are considered punishable.

In order to thoroughly explore alienation and ethnic identity formation, the constructive effects of instances of isolation, whether voluntary or forced, must be considered. The results of alienation are not commonly considered positive; most that have experienced alienation have also encountered feelings of shame, depression, anger, exile, and self-doubt. However, if the extraordinary place between cultures during ethnic identity development is better understood, it can result in less oppression and alienation. Ana Louise Keating, the editor of *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, writes "Anzaldúa invites us to reconfigure identity in open-ended, potentially transformative ways" (Anzaldúa, *Reader* 3). Alienation can lead to a force of guidance towards a unique identity in which traditional aspects of a culture are challenged and transformed.

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