

The Absent Presence of Borderlands and Mestiza Consciousness in *Island of Thousand Mirrors*

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ABSTRACT: *The present study is a literary analysis of Munaweera's Island of Thousand Mirrors employing the framework of borderlands, mestiza consciousness and absence presence. The work has been explored earlier utilizing the issues of identity crisis, psychological aspects of dislocation, and senselessness of war, gendered hierarchies, and refugee theories. The present study, however, accomplishes that the selected work reveals horrendous violence and brutality committed on the basis of ethnicity and border conflicts. Unavoidably, borders either physical or mental reflect flagrant boundaries, margins, and limits. Similar schism is observable in the course of events throughout the novel. The characters with the exception of a few, are ensnared in the mesh of tenuous boundaries and fences and are unable to surpass these barriers. I argue that in order to surmount these fences, and to arrive at their essential humanity, the characters of the novel need to resort to mestiza consciousness. As new mestiza deals with differences by nurturing a tolerance for conflicts and reservations (78). There are the stages of mestiza consciousness that are required to be experienced before its complete acquisition. The analysis verifies that the stages of mestiza consciousness that appeared far-reaching in the characters' positive attitudes are La mezcla and la facultad because of their tolerance building gift. I also argue that the characters remain stranded in their self-presumed variances, which materialize the absent presence of borders that are in actuality nonexistent. Therefore, this state of affairs hedges the story with ensuing gory conflicts and violence, thus making the hypothetical absent borders perceptible as if present. Only a few characters demonstrate the ability to transcend these borders by executing mestiza consciousness.*

Key Words: Mestiza consciousness, borderlands, absent presence, race, ethnic conflict.

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Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to analyze Nayomi Munaweera's *Island of Thousand Mirrors* (2012) with the theoretical framework of Gloria Anzaldua's borderlands and mestiza consciousness, blending them with Jacques Derrida's trope of absent/presence.

Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) was a cutting-edge work that brought forward the idea of borderlands and mestiza consciousness. Anzaldua in the preface of *Borderlands* states that her book is the manifestation of her 'Self' caught in adversity and violation, which urges her "to speak [and] to write "about life, the borders, life in the shadow" (n.p.). Anzaldua's theoretical framework borderlands, mestiza consciousness that falls under the larger framework of multicultural feminism, is a blend of practices that struggle to liberate one's inner self (Orazco 2008). This liberation is attained by rejecting any kind of identity at all or espousing an identity that keeps on shifting. Thus, residing in borderlands suggests breaking with the customary classifications of identity, gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, or sexuality and carving new communities to get rid of ethnic frame of reference (Koegelar-Abdi 71). Borderlands constitute the area geographical or otherwise that creates a space parallel to 'la mezcla' [hybridity], an in-between space. This space or border is an 'invisible' one; space or border only symbolically (Orazco 2008). This in between space, argues Anzaldua, emerges: "Whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrink with intimacy" (Preface 1987 p. ix). 'Borderlands' are symbolic in their essence and inclusive of all those who can be categorized as marginalized or hybrid or those who can go against dualistic thinking (102). Anzaldua suggests that the antidote for this situation is to develop mestiza consciousness based on 'la facultad', the ability to "see from two or more perspectives simultaneously" (548). By so doing, Anzaldua anticipates the prospect of new consciousness, not an identity, engendered from "split caused by this inner struggle" (Nasser). For Anzaldua la mestiza is the upshot of transculturation and convergence of spiritual values of two groups, which as a result generates neoculturation, or to put it another way: a brand-new culture, "Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual or multilingual [...] mestiza faces the dilemma of the mixed breed" (Borderlands 78). It functions by cultivating a tolerance for contradictions.

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Invariably, all these issues also emerge in the selected work as well, as the characters are caught in the similar quandaries and struggles as those encountered by Anzaldua. Hence Anzaldua's framework of mestiza consciousness provides a magical solution for the borderlands that occur in the chosen work because it shows the ways of disabling disagreements by generating acceptance for one another. Anzaldua's and Derrida's frameworks complement each other as the hypothetical nature of borderlands outlined by Anzaldua becomes all the more prominent by incorporating Derrida's idea of absent presence. Derrida's concept helps foreground that the borderlands in the work are only existent in characters' minds, thus paving the way to prove that mestiza consciousness is a talisman that can help resolve their contentions and generate tolerance and a broader view by revving up hybridity. Hence, the theoretical nexus not only aids in the analysis but also helps prove the researcher's argument.

Munaweera's *Island of Thousand Mirrors* chronicles the tale of the two Sri Lankan families who live in a country, torn apart by the limiting borders of the biases based upon cast, creed and race. These borders can both be physical and metaphorical, as pointed out by Anzaldua in her work. The characters that Munaweera depicts, become accomplice in macabre violence on the basis of ethnicity, color, and creed, forfeiting humanity. The story is narrated by two narrators, one Sinhalese and the other Tamil, both affected by the civil war one way or the other. The story unfolds the ramifications of erecting such kinds of borders and the necessity of what Anzaldua calls mestiza consciousness, in such kind of circumstances. I argue that Anzaldua's mestiza consciousness is a solution to rise above the differences and the self-assumed frontiers depicted in the story. My unique argument is that in order to circumvent constricted view of borderlands, the characters need a broader vision and transformation as the one proposed by Anzaldua's mestiza consciousness. The text testifies that the characters with this kind of understanding and shared vision, are able to transcend these differences and prove themselves to be better human beings. The borders that are actually absent are forcedly created by some of the characters in the story, denoting Derrida's idea of absent presence. Hence, whatever is absent and latent is interpreted in such a manner that it is reminded and brought into existence. The differences they foreground can be subdued and surpassed by focusing on the element of their common nationality or common humanity, or by employing the aspect of hybridity "*la mezcla*" as Anzaldua designates it. I examine the absent presence of the borders and

mestiza consciousness in the *Island of Thousand Mirrors* (2012), by integrating with it Derrida's trope of absent/presence. Derrida defining this aspect states: "The uncanny presence of absence, and the destabilizing of ontology into hauntology (Derrida qtd. in Zapf). The aspects explored by Nayomi Munaweera in the *Island of Thousand Mirrors*, correspond with the theoretical components of the selected theories. Munaweera showcases the cultural and racial differences between Tamils and Sinhalese in the beginning of the novel and later when the narrator's family moves to the US, the disparity between them and the Western people. I have centered my analysis on these aspects with the lens of Anzaldua's theory of borderlands and mestiza consciousness by combining it with Derrida's idea of absent/presence to evaluate: how far these theoretical suggestions are incorporated in Munaweera's novel? And what are the repercussions of the absence or presence of these facets in the characters of the selected work? Derrida's trope of absent/presence emerges in the discussion to demonstrate the characters' groundless misgivings and perceptual barriers.

It is notable that Gloria Anzaldua's choice of terms "border" and "mestiza" can be misconstrued as "border crossing" or mixture of races but it is an erasure of differences and specificity (Yarbro-Bejarano 8). These borderlands are present in the cultural encounters of different races that dwell in the same territory. Thus, mestiza identity is not a singular identity but involves multiplicity. This multiplicity can be accomplished through alliance. Subsequently, borderlands become a site of incessant change from one avatar to another, where languages are fused to engender a new variety which she labels as "forked tongue" and different dialects (Jacqueline 55). Randal Margaret, in her review of *La Frontera* notices the same strand and states that Anzaldua has examined in the book the questions of race, class, culture --- particularly language (n.p.). Hence all these ingredients partake in the formation of a new consciousness which she calls "a racial and ideological crosspollination" that "provides a hybrid progeny, a more mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool" (77). Mestiza consciousness is a way of contesting and abolishing "dualistic hegemonic paradigms" that make a racially and culturally different individual an alien or an outcast. Anzaldua tears down these paradigms and advocates a mestiza consciousness "through both linguistic and visual means" (Aigner-Varoz 47). Mestiza consciousness can be achieved by constructing one's own metaphors and by appropriating the older ones. She welcomes and embraces the experiences of the people having culturally dissimilar background and different race

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and class. In this way, together they can beget a shared value system. (Perez 81). She defies culturally and socially assigned roles both for males and females. She suggests a way for female empowerment “of entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous person” (Aigner-Varoz 50). Unquestionably, all these theoretical arguments are comparable to the debates in the selected work.

Literature Review:

The critical commentary on Nayomi Munaweera’s *Island of Thousand Mirrors*, informs that the work has been analyzed with a variety of theoretical frame works and perspectives. Predominantly, the issues of identity crises faced by the female characters because of dislocation, are examined at great length (Bibhuti 164). Analogously, fragmented ethnic identities have also been evaluated regarding the characters (Assella 161). Another unique lens employed in the analysis of the work is the concept of doppelganger, after the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe, Joseph Conrad, and R.L Stevenson, who used this device to explore psychological themes. Munaweera, according to Piyasena, underscores the senselessness of war by using this keynote, through two equivalent characters and their corresponding stories (n.p.). Whilst James has used refugee theory to accentuate the issues of the burden of exile and belonging in the novel (n.p.). Apart from these concerns, the novel has also been read with the framework of gendered hierarchies and hegemonic male discourses that undermine female standpoint on war (Heidmann n.p.). Dr. Bharthiraja, on the other hand, has also focused on the question of refugees but with a variation. He has brought on the fore the physical and psychological status of the refugees by incorporating interviews of real case studies (n.p.). None of these works has been analyzed by employing the aspects of borderlands, mestiza consciousness and absence/presence. This fact, thus, determines the gap for this study.

Gloria Anzaldua in the preface of *Borderlands* states that there are certain rewards and delights of mestiza like: Living on borders and margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity” (n.p.). Furthermore, she maintains that her work is about her inner life. Eminent critics have reviewed Anzaldua’s work and have interpreted it according to their own sensibilities. The overview of their major ideas is as follows.

Erica Aigner-Varoz defining Anzaldua’s framework, argues that metaphors of mestiza consciousness bifurcate into two levels: one that is surface level and can be termed as external comparison, and the other

conceptual level metaphors that provide the foundation to surface metaphors. Anzaldua rejects both because she considers them the root cause of racism. She consciously alters the message of these metaphors finding them as “destructive, limiting borders of culture and self” (48-49). She particularly casts off the institutionalized binary metaphors that are a source of racism and promote it. In so doing, Anzaldua hopes to empower and anticipate the outcasts like herself (51). While Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano projects that the discourses that represent margins, indicate problems while theorizing difference. This conceptual difficulty in theorizing difference seems to be resolved in the texts like *Borderlands*. But at the same time, Yarbro-Bejarano finds two problematic areas in Anzaldua’s *Borderlands* that are: “the isolation of this text from its conceptual community and pitfalls in universalizing the theory of mestiza or border consciousness” (7). He argues that her use of the terms “border” and “mestiza” problematizes the course of the theory. The moves Anzaldua has given to relocate the psychic borderlands and “mestiza” consciousness, are too generalized and cannot fully resolve the issue of difference and specificity. Her model, according to Yarbro-Bejarano, lacks the ability to recognize and identify genuinely. In order to overcome this inadequacy, he suggests that “both reader and the text should be placed together within the context rather than reading it in vacuum” (8). Anzaldua’s borderlands reflect the present-day realization that “all identity is constructed across difference and the necessity of new politics of difference to accompany this new sense of self” (11). Her work engenders a sense of multiple selves embodied as one. Anzaldua names this sense mestiza. This shifting constantly breaks down differences created through binary construction to get what she calls interstice or border --- the in-between space that brings the element of mestiza hybridity --- the possibility to coexist despite having differences. Yarbro-Bejarano argues that Anzaldua repeats in the text many times that she belongs to nowhere, so she decides to create a dwelling place for herself through writing. Hence mestiza consciousness “is not a given but must be produced or built” (13). She considers it a place --- “A piece of ground to stand on” (Anzaldua 23). *Borderlands* is a discursive self-information thus and the differences in mestiza consciousness are not a cause of opposition but the source of diversity. It gives voice to the voiceless and invisible to introduce political change. Yarbro-Bejarano further reasons that the most important aspect of mestiza consciousness in Anzaldua’s text is the use of personal histories and private memories to be used as a context of political struggle (14) that invests the text the power to create

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a new history through imaginative appropriation, to create a new perception of old ways.

Hansen, on the other hand, points to another unique aspect of Anzaldua's theory. He states that for most of the Chicano authors, land is a location where linguistic difference is marker of identity. Contrary to these Anzaldua's multilingual gestures are a "fertile overlap." It is an obvious effort to create a voice, suitable to their narrative. She remains unapologetic for being multilingual. She prefers speaking "Spanglish" over English or Spanish (Borderlands 59). Yet Anzaldua reaches to her English readers through translation, contextualization, and definition, to clarify everything. Thus, for better or worse, argues Hansen, Anzaldua's multilingualism is closely combined with the instructive and ethnographic objectives of her text. Her role as a translator and ethnographer is apparent in certain instances, the purpose is to accommodate a multilingual practice, "in the context of the "borderlands" and an increasingly global society" (198). Whilst Koegler-Abdi lauds Anzaldua for outlining a bold vision for future transformation. He argues that she accepts and acknowledges completely that ambivalence is inescapable in the matters of subjectivity. In fact, she records psycho-spiritual subjectivity within the stages of mestiza consciousness (71). Koegler-Abdi distinguishing 'nepantlera' from 'mestiza consciousness' argues that in spite of its hybrid origins, mestiza consciousness also includes certain aspects of patriarchal and racist society. Norma Alarcon and Ian Barnard conversely, interpret Anzaldua's legacy in a different way. Alarcon thinks Anzaldua's mestiza as a method of plurality that privileges its white parts when speaking within enlighten framework of knowledge production" (279). Meanwhile, Ohmer takes the stance that Anzaldua's work foregrounds the history veiled by the national discourses of the powerful on both sides. Like other Chicano activists, she also, through her revival of pro-conquest history tries to remind people about their forgotten history. Ohmer referring to Salivar-Hull, argues that Anzaldua's work borderlands is eminent and unique as it brought on the forefront the Aztec goddesses that had been kept hidden earlier along with pro-conquest history. She defines everything with the knowledge of indigenous female deities and ancestors that helped her in "tracing the evolution of female deities' representation, the historical taming of sensual feminine religious images and demoralizing of other female deities" (141).

While Sheila Contreras Marie highlights that Borderlands offer a general idea of hybridity that influenced considerably postcolonial and ethnic studies. Nevertheless, Anzaldúa's use of Aztec mythology has bordered into another intellectual lineage that is "Modern Primitivism", which blends psycho analysis and anthropological discourses in the analysis of non-European Other. Hence, iconography of the Aztec pantheon can be traced in Anzaldúa's Borderlands' myth of Coatlicue, which shows her indebtedness to anthropology and primitivism. Still, it is important to recognize the profound transformation in the language of theory brought about by Anzaldúa's work and her use of unique generic forms as "it transgressed, merged and shifted the borders of academic and popular speech, scholarly and creative production" (50). Meanwhile Judith Butler, Mercer and many other cultural theorists consider Anzaldúa's text quite beneficial because it illustrates theoretical views, anti-nationalism, post colonialism, and hybridity, right at the moment of their dominance. Alfred Arteaga, vis a vis, comments that Anzaldúa's premise is all inclusive: "Anzaldúa takes up almost everyone as potential subject of the new mestiza consciousness, for nearly everyone is marginalized in some way in the borderlands" (35).

The theoretical strand of absent presence is also variously interpreted by critics. The Chicago School of Media, defining Derrida's appraisal of the metaphysics of presence articulates the production of absence and presence. He states that "there is nothing outside text" (158) without an exterior of language, meaning and sense can never be entirely present. "Rather we are separated from signification by the necessitated absence of linguistic forms. Derrida thus questions the existence of the presence. He does not believe in the constancy of presence. Meaning is both absent and present "it is neither this nor that; but rather this and that (Green 90). Thus, meaning becomes meaningless and rests upon the interpretation. I employ this trope of Derrida not in terms of meaning but with regard to the borders in the selected work, where borders that are actually absent are being considered to be present. The borders in the story are imaginary and hence do not fall under the definition of present given by Derrida, that considers anything present which is perceivable.

Analysis:

Nayomi Munaweera's *Island of Thousand Mirrors* relates the tale of two Sri Lankan families; one Tamil and the other Sinhalese, narrated by two female characters representing their families. Both the narrators grow up in the midst of a conflict and turmoil in their war ridden country and thus

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they register the details about the ethnic tension growing into a civil war in their country and its aftermath. The story unearths the unresolvable differences between the two warring ethnic factions of Sri Lanka, and the borders and fences that the characters belonging to both the groups have assumed. Among these radicals there are few characters who demonstrate the ability to rise above these mental and psychological borders. These aspects fairly synchronize with Anzaldua's theoretical framework of borderlands and mestiza consciousness. Derrida's trope of absence presence also helps foreground the fact that actually these absent borderlands and frontiers are only present in the minds of the characters, consequently, are only hypothetical and not physical.

The novel *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*, right at its commencement hints at the idea of borderlands and mestiza consciousness, looking over the binary relationship of the colonized and the colonizer. It analyzes the Sri Lankan borders in the mode provided by Anzaldua's *Borderlands*, divulging its subversive potential. The story initiates by revealing the oppression and injustices of the retreating colonizer, and lays bare their pilfering of local resources and treasurable possessions. The text informs us: "It is 1948 the last British ship slips away from the island of Ceylon, laboring and groaning under the weight of purloined treasure" (Munaweera 1). After this comes an extensive account that enlists the objects being lifted from the colony:

tusks and legs of elephant herds, rubies, emeralds, topaz;
 fragrant mountains of cinnamon, cardamom, mustard seeds;
 forest of ebony, teak, and sandal wood; screeching peacocks;
 caged and pacing leopards; ten-foot-long monitor lizards, barrels
 of fermented coconut toddy (1).

By so doing, the text points to the conquest, subjugation, and theft of local treasures at the hands of the colonizers, who not only had overtaken the land, sovereignty and autonomy of the native Sri Lankans but also committed outright theft of their historical and national heritage passed down to them: "priceless texts in Pali and Sanskrit, Sinhala and Tamil and the jewel encrusted thrones of Kandyan Kings" (1). As Valorie Thomas opines that mestiza consciousness "deconstructs impacts of patriarchy and colonialism on the Chicano psyche [...] remaps border zones created by empire voicing the experiences of marginalized" (Mestiza n.p.). The story further discloses dichotomies and demarcation of borders a little later commenting on the national flag of Sri Lanka:

on the new nation's flag is poised a stylized lion [...] it is ancient symbol of the Sinhala [...] A green stripe represents that small and much tossed Muslim population. An orange stripe represents the large Tamil minority (2).

These are the borders of ethnicity and difference but the characters of *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*, instead of surpassing these borders and eroding the constructs of identity, ethnicity and language advocated by mestiza consciousness remain stuck in them: "A rifle-toting tiger. A sword-gripping lion. This is war that will be waged between related beasts" (2). The racial groups show an incapacity to set themselves free from the prejudices and narrow perspectives regarding culture and ethnicity and embrace a hybrid identity. They remain confined within these borders both mental and physical, leaving no room for cohabitation. Instead of focusing their attention to their social and economic problems and finding solutions for them as a nation, they keep on adding fuel to fire by adhering to these vague borders, existing only mentally. In addition, by this routine they keep conjuring up these symbols of differences, only to mark their absent presence. As a consequence, they lose their heads and become collaborators in crimes against their own countrymen, just because of the differences of cast, colour and creed. Due to this persistence on their dissimilarities and invisible borders, the characters fall in the pit of degradation and ferocity. They needed to correct the previously found metaphors of differences as per Anzaldua's suggestion in *Borderlands*, because according to her, "they serve as destructive, limiting borders of culture and self" (Aigner-Varoz 49). Both Sinhalese and Tamils fail to see this logic and their insistence on mutual differences takes them to a point of no return.

Anzaldua in *Borderlands* has very strongly presented the case of women of colour and the psychological and social implications of this discrimination. She rejects the previously accepted metaphors and reiterates the need of fashioning new metaphors and ideas beyond the confining borders of colour, origin and creed. This realization in return will create 'la facultad' or shift in perception or the ability "to see from two perspectives" (Anzaldua cited in Nasser n.p.). These borders and boundaries on the basis of colour are strongly endorsed in Munaweera's work. The skin colour becomes the cause of Othering and oppression. When Beatrice Muriel gives birth to a dark skinned baby girl, the text reads how "the women submerge the child in the waiting basin of water, hoping to reveal some lighter, more appropriate golden skin tone" (5), hinting at the borders erected on the basis of colour. Beatrice Muriel

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knowing that a darker skin tone particularly of a girl is not admired becomes uneasy instead of being happy on her birth and thinks: “This black-black girl! We will never get her married” (6). The reaction of the baby-girl’s grandmother brings into focus another kind of borders --- borders and frontiers based on caste and class: “A darkie granddaughter. Such a shade we never had in our family [...] There revealed for all to see, on the skin of this girl, the stain of low-caste origins” (6). This serves as a reminder that the dark skin of the girl is a stigma because it resembles the complexion of lower castes. Thus, the baby girl becomes an outsider in her own household and the target of intolerance and prejudice on the basis of her complexion. They remain confined in their hackneyed, narrow views instead of cultivating new consciousness that Anzaldua advocates. Amid these neatly carved borderlands doggedly pursued, there are instances of evolution, reinterpretation and recreation of borderlands and ancestries in the story, the way Anzaldua defines in ‘Coatlicue’ state of mestiza consciousness (46). Yasodhara, unfolds her maternal grandfather plight during his Oxford University days because of being a brown skinned student, “when he was made to feel the unbearable shame of brownness” (10). In order to cope with this shame of brownness, he decides to cultivate a plural personality, and so he evolves himself into a crossbreed. He makes sure that his whole family should learn the ways of white people and practice them, who then take extra pains to practice those English rituals and ceremonies. They emulate English table manners, appropriate body postures and standard accent, to get certification of Englishness. The text recounts the details of the evolution of their eating habits,

The family eats puddings and soups, beefsteaks, and muttonchops, boiled potatoes, orange, and crimson-tinted sandwiches. They take tea at five, with sugar and milk, choose pastries off a multilayered silver tray. In December there is Christmas cake, fruitcake, cheesecake (10).

Visaka, Yasodhara’s mother would be dropped and picked up by a Chauffeur from her school, would practice elocution lessons and piano lessons designed by the European Classical maestros Sebastian Bach and Ludwig Van Beethoven on her baby grand piano. They deal with the differences by becoming hybrids in the manner of mestiza consciousness, as Anzaldua states in *Borderlands*, “The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (79) and “a synthesis of duality and a third perspective” (46). So do the Judge

and his family, they embrace change and instead of insisting on their regional behavioral patterns and perspectives, choose to become amalgams, in order to make the best of both worlds.

Again, in another case the absent/present borders, in the terms of Derrida, are dismantled when Sinhala activists stop a train in search of Tamils and enter into the compartment occupied by school children. Blinded by prejudice and bigotry Sinhala devout militants attack a schoolgirl Radhini, on the suspicion of being Tamil. The text reads: “She is jerked upwards like a fish plucked out of water by a cormorant’s skewering beak. A machete tip traces her upper arm” (19). This tyrannical behavior with a school child on the basis of different origin, becomes unendurable for their teacher, who albeit being a Sinhala immediately comes to rescue her. “Leave them alone! They are just school kids.” She pushes hefty shoulders, wraps her arms around the girl. “This girl has done nothing. Let her be” (19). “She is Tamil that is enough”, is the answer she gets from the racists. In order to save the girl then she has to lie, and she tries to convince them that she is a Sinhala girl with only a little darker complexion. In order to give those militants proof that she is originally a Sinhala girl, the teacher makes her sing Buddhist verses. In this way, they get rid of those “goondas” but the saving grace of all this remains the courage of the young teacher who dares to disregard these petty borders and distinctions of race and creed and saves the girl on humanitarian basis. She succeeds in perceiving the “third perspective” and accepts “duality”, hence exemplifying mestiza consciousness. A similar method to arrive at mutual acceptance and harmony is recommended by the author as well at one point in the text, which could only be triggered by recognizing one’s common humanity and shared problems and by overlooking the absent presence of separating barriers. The text reads:

The campus has turned rebellious. Students read Lenin, Marx, Trotsky, and debate with their teachers, taking on the plight of the common man, class inequality, corruption, and nepotism. Old separations and prejudices are dropping away. The struggle brings young men and women elbow to elbow. Never before have most of them been so close to men and women not related to them [...] (38-39).

Undeniably, only focusing on the ills and vices of their society and attempting to reform them for the good of their country unanimously, could ensure their solidarity. This strategy, fairly is in accordance with Anzaldúa’s “bold vision for future transformation” (Koegler-Abdi 71).

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As Yarbrow commenting on mestiza consciousness states, “Difference in mestiza consciousness is not a cause of opposition but a source of diversity. It gives voice to the voiceless and invisible to introduce political change” (14). In the same fashion when the characters in the text think about the plight of weaker strata of society and political change and make their differences a source of strength and diversity, they start feeling oneness of purpose and consequently closer to each other.

Furthermore, the perfect beauty of mestiza consciousness is epitomized in the incident of the concurrent births of Yasodhara and Shiva; the former one a Sinhala and the latter a Tamil by race, and the happenings that follow their birth. Marking the similarity between both babies’ mothers’ postpartum condition the text unfolds: “Who else can understand Visaka’s bloated breasts, her ripped innards, her strange and unaccountable moods better than another woman who has just performed the same impossible feat?” (49). This account points towards the idea of human equality and susceptibility in the face of pain, pleasure, and other human conditions, irrespective of any cast, race, or creed, and most of all to their common humanity. Yasodhara, narrating the story, further informs that “In those early years our mothers take pleasure in each other [...] our mothers nodded over our tiny heads, chatting in a mixture of Tamil, Sinhala and English that makes them laugh often” (49), right in the manner of Anzaldua’s “forked tongue” that is reproduced by fusing two languages (Jacqueline 55). The same practice is shown to be followed by the kids of both the mothers describes Yasodhara: “We had been talking in our own shared language, that particular blur of Sinhala, Tamil, and English much like what our mothers used in the early days” (50). Thus, they devise a new language by blending the two dissimilar languages, in the manner of Anzaldua who refuses to speak either English or Spanish and chooses to speak Spanglish (Borderlands 59). The simultaneous timing of the birth of their babies brings both the mothers closer and “the two women previously rivals, now seek out comfort of each other’s company” (49). They succeed in liberating themselves from the ethnic frame of references and demolish all the communication barriers separating them, creating an in between space akin to ‘la mezcla’ or hybridity (Orozco-Mendoza IX).

Thereafter, the same in between space and breaking free of different frames of references is observed in Yasodhara’s aunty Mala’s adoption of a Tamil girl Poornam, in order to save her from her abusive father. Mala agrees to take the child from her imploring mother when she notices

bruises on the child's face and legs. Yasodhara recounts: "Our aunt was left with this malnourished, dirty little thing. In the bathroom scrubbing the child, she found bruises and lacerations everywhere, had to try hard not to break down and cry in front of the girl" (54). Mala had to pay a handsome amount of money to her drunkard father to keep the child with her. The text informs: "Every fortnight, her father comes to spew filth in Tamil at my aunt's gate" (56). He only leaves when "Mala has passed over an envelope of rupees" (56). Poornam hides herself under the table on hearing her own father's voice extracted out by Mala after he goes back and Mala "holds her while she convulses in silent terror" (56). All this description manifests the liberation of these characters from the yokes of ethnicity, creed and colour. The characters show this consciousness of common humanity that can only be realized through the painful execution of mestiza consciousness. Contrary to this, is the attitude of 'Achi' Yasodhara's grandmother, who keeps on telling her and other kids do not get so fond of Shiva. When she asks But Achi, why not? What has he done? She answers: "He has not done anything. But they are Tamil. Not like us. Different" (60). These differences need to be overlooked, according to Anzaldúa to undermine these borders of differences. The same phenomenon of ignoring differences becomes evident when Sylvia Sunethra lies to Sinhala extremists, to save her Tamil tenants, "This is Sinhala household. Only I and my family live here. No bloody Tamils" (69). She keeps returning the mob time and again and covertly keeps sending them food upstairs, until the Tamil family flees sensing the lurking danger. This manifestation of tolerance becomes possible by arriving at mestiza consciousness, by seeing the points of convergence. Hence the borders that are actually absent, seem to be made present on certain occasions and are erased by the efforts of certain characters in other cases, as Derrida puts it with regard to meaning which is simultaneously present as well as absent.

And finally, these boundaries of differences are obliterated in another poignant occurrence when Anuradha Uncle, aunty Mala's husband lays his own life saving a Tamil child. This transpires when the couple finds a Tamil boy in his school uniform, chosen by the Sinhala mob for sacrifice, for ritual of killing, the text reads:

She sees Anuradha push through the men, pull himself onto the car, his body in front of the boy's. [...] This child. He has done nothing. He is no problem for you. [...] I can give you money. Anything. Just let me take this boy and go (71).

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This beseeching --- this pleading attitude ---comes with the realization of common humanitarian bond that the hate mongers had forfeited. “Anuradha turns, wraps his arms around the cowering boy. His eyes search for hers through the blood smeared glass. She sees the blade raised and brought down” (71). This tragic episode of ghastly aggression could be avoided by comprehending the other perspective, by embracing duality and by rising above the ethnic vantage points, in the mode of mestiza consciousness. Anuradha, by outdoing these borders and boundaries of racial differences embraces a ritual murder in the name of humanity and destroys the borders that divide humanity in the compartments of race, class, color, and creed. As Anna Nasser puts it “Anzaldua’s borderlands are not comfortable place to be in since they are the product of oppression and reproduce a shock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country” (n.p.). But Anzaldua shows a path to wellbeing, and this is a path to mestiza consciousness, a way to save humanity from the clutches of oppression, narrow-mindedness, and prejudices.

Conclusion:

The analysis demonstrates the existence of unseen borders that were erected and enforced by the prejudiced behavior of the various characters of the work. Misguided by their biases and hatred they ended up widening the gulf between themselves and the other party. The only available mechanism to bridge this gap was mestiza consciousness. The characters who realized mestiza consciousness, retained their essential humanity, and succeeded in demolishing the boundaries and borders, by assuming a hybrid identity and focusing on the third perspective. The others who failed to observe it, fell into the abyss of inhumanity and hatred and driven by their hatred and prejudice, indulged in unspeakable crimes against humanity. Derrida’s trope of absent present frequently emerged as well, as absent presence of the borders and boundaries was emphasized throughout the novel by the characters.

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