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### Crossing Borders: An Evolving Experience

In the beginning of Maria Root's book, *The Multiracial Experience*, she speaks of four ways that multiracial people relate to the border that they have within themselves - the two or more different cultures. No matter what these cultures are, they are bound to be both similar and different. Many cultures share the same core values, such as being kind to people, but there are also ideas and rituals unique to each. In this class, we have spoken of these four kinds of borders and related them to many different kinds of stories and cultures. This has made me reevaluate and reflect on my own life and where I sit as a multiracial person. I think that in different situations in my life I have placed myself to different categories, as many people do, and because of this it may make me feel conflicted about where I stand. Being able to relate to the stories and people we have read in this class such as Sergio Troncoso and Maria Root has helped me delve further into where I feel I fit into this world, and has helped me find out how I got here.

For the first 8 years of my life, I lived in Utah with my biological mom, older sister, and younger brother. I saw my dad two to four times a week, and we would do fun and exciting

things together - just the two of us - like go to the park, get ice cream, and play together all the time, so naturally, I liked the parent who gave me the undivided attention. As the years went by, my dad gained custody of me and we moved to California with my step-mom and my little brother. From the ages of 8 to 18, I traveled on a plane back to Utah to see my mom around three times a year, in her very white, very Mormon community. My two homes were different in almost any way you can think of. My mom's house was always a very stressful place. There were hardly any rules. We didn't have to eat healthy, we didn't have to help clean anything up, and we could just sit around, watch TV, and make messes all day. It was a young child's dream, and I got to do it for two months out of the year. The one thing that was required of me was that I go to church. I had to put on this bright orange, itchy dress, borrow shoes from my older sister, go sit in a cold building surrounded by strangers, and listen to someone talk about a God I was not very familiar with. In San Jose, at my dad's house, I didn't have to do this. There were rules about bedtime, and chores I had to do, and I had to eat my vegetables (something I still struggle with sometimes). There was structure in our home, and there was no church to go to every Sunday morning. Because of these massive differences in my houses, I would change my personality based on where I was.

When I was 9 years old, my stepmom sat me down and told me I was a chameleon. What she meant by this was that I was changing my personality consistently, trying to satisfy other

people and attempting to make my drastically different parents happy. In Maria Root's words, I had one foot in each of these cultures. I was switching loyalties based on my location in the world. She encouraged me to explore my surroundings in each, and to start making decisions on my own instead of trying to please people. After that conversation, I branched out. I accepted the fact that I may be Mormon when I grew older, or I may be Hindu. Or, maybe I would be nothing. I participated in Girl's Camp, a Mormon tradition where girls of the same age go into the woods and talk about their connections with God and each other. It was a transformative experience for some, but I went three years in a row and decided it was not for me, to my mother's dismay. My dad encouraged me to go to Hindu school, learn the language and the religion (as it is mostly fun stories for him), and I did for a short period of time. I wanted to embrace this culture that my dad had grown up in, and I really did try to, but it wasn't for me. I ended up missing out on fun things my family and friends did because of this commitment, and I kept thinking that my dad could teach me all the same things, so I stopped going after about a year. During both of these experiences, I was shifting from the foreground and the background, trying to find myself. At this point, I was no longer "switching loyalties" as Maria Root calls it, but I was changing myself to "match demands of social context" (Root, xxi). I wanted to fit in with these kids I was around, so I pretended to enjoy reading the Bible or learning about Hanuman for the 100th time, when I really didn't. While we were reading Sergio Troncoso's *Crossing Borders*, I related to him when

he said he felt like an outsider at Yale. His was in an academic sense and mine was in a religious sense, but they were very similar nonetheless. I explained to my parents that after several years of exploring these two cultures, I didn't want to fit in with one or the other. I wanted to pick and choose what I felt was necessary to use as a moral compass, but I didn't want to participate in all of the typical requirements for each. I asked my parents what they had thought of this decision I had made, and their answers surprised me. My dad said that he was angry at first, because it felt like I was choosing to be Mormon, but after a few months, he realized I was taking the good out of both cultures and applying it to my life (Krishnan). My mom said that she was disappointed that I no longer wanted to go to church with her, because she felt like that was when she spent quality time with me (Deem). She also said, though, that after a few months she realized she didn't see me much when we did go to church anyway, and it didn't affect her as much as she thought. I really appreciated the respect my parents showed me (and still show me) by allowing me to make my own decision, even though they were both upset about it (Miller).

I want to stress the idea that multiracial individuals often select and combine features of each culture to create themselves, because it is "necessary to take into account all relevant contexts simultaneously" (Falicov, 233). It is this idea that has gotten me to where I am today - decisively sitting on the border between two cultures. Maria Root explains it best when she says this is "viewing oneself with a multiracial label that cannot be erased." I think it is important for

me to include everything that makes me, me. I may feel like an outsider at times, but I don't have to fit in completely with one group or another, just like Sergio Troncoso. I can take what I want from the experiences I have had within my own two cultures and apply them to my real world, as he has done with his Hispanic heritage and his adoption of his wife's culture, Judaism.

The fourth and final type of border that Maria Root describes is camping. By utilizing this, people are capable of changing their ways of identifying themselves in a lifetime, it doesn't mean they are stuck (Root, xxii). I think in some ways, people are always camping, because it means you know who you are but are curious about the rest of the world. My journey here took a lot of work, thought, and determination, and it isn't over yet. I had to really look inside myself this semester and figure out where I land, and it may change as time goes on, who knows?

## Works Cited

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