

Remembered Borders and Cleansing Ecosystems: Geography as Intersectional Context in Select Queer Multiethnic Young Adult Novels

Borders remain a contentious literal and theoretical arena, especially in our current fraught political climate. However, borders are also an arena where identities can be questioned, reimagined, and intertwined. These borderlands become important identity forming spaces for queer young adult (YA) characters, and are even more so necessary spaces for queer multiethnic youth whose identities are borderlands unto to themselves, wherein they must traverse the complicated webs of multiplicative, intersecting identities. As Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge explain in their definition of intersectionality in their titular text, *Intersectionality*, “The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor” (2). Throughout the text, Collins and Bilge highlight six frameworks for intersectional analysis: social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice (25). However, throughout their analysis, they do not fully explore the impact of geography and physical space as a context that impacts intersectional identity development. This absence is especially problematic when considering the understudied arena of queer multiethnic YA literature. The protagonists and teen characters of these texts are in the throes of determining their identities, and, as Roberta Seelinger Trites explains in *Disturbing the Universe*, characters (specifically the protagonists) push against the boundaries of their cultural and social norms to see where they fit within those norms. The geographical location, formation, and ecosystems of the spaces where these characters exist influence how they are able or unable to manage their intersectional identity. These spaces can inhibit their ability to overcome the inherent shame that often defines racial, religious, and LGBTQ identities, amplify that same shame, or become the space that allows these characters to possibly overcome heteronormative constructs, white privilege, and conservative religious treatises. Whether through the cleansing rains of the Texan desert (Benjamin Alire Saenz’s *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*), a lake in the Canadian woods (Leanne Lieberman’s *Gravity*), the beaches and gardens of Singapore (Shyam Selvaduri’s *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*), the immigrant home (Paul Yee’s *Money Boy*), or a small town in the deep South (Jacqueline Woodson’s *The House You Pass On the Way*), these spaces, natural and man-made, psychological and physical, are a key context in analyzing how YA characters—and teens themselves—manage their intersectional identities. In this paper, I argue that the space in which these characters develop and question their identities exposes how borderlands are necessary spaces for queer multiethnic YA characters to understand the complexities of their intersectional identities and, in some cases, are the only space in which this full complexity can exist, and that these texts can then become a border space for multiethnic queer YA youth to explore their complex intersectional identities.