ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to examine the problematic of identity formation in the case of the migrant subject by relating it to the direct effects of the socio-cultural transformation which inevitably takes place in the country of migration. In the fictional works to be discussed, the identity of the characters alters or is forced to change in relation to the situations and settings into which they are thrown in their host countries. My investigation will be carried out not only in terms of scrutinising the literary representation of the dilemma of identity, but also by means of analysing both the manner in which the question of identity becomes problematic and the ways through which the migrant figure responds to such problematisation. To this end, I aim to crystallise how in each work the predicament of identity overlaps with issues principally relating to displacement, exile, postcoloniality, and cultural hybridity. Drawing on Stuart Hall's work, I approach the problematic nature of the construction of migrant identity in terms of being 'fluid', 'dynamic', and constantly unstable. The primary sources comprise a body of South-Asian and Arab postcolonial literature that has been produced since the 1960s, after significant waves of migration to the UK and the US—all of which is originally published in English, except for *Season of Migration to the North* (1969). The other works include V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *The Mimic Men* (1967), Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) and *Wife* (1975), Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003), and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). In each chapter, I engage with theoretical discourses on the politics of identity performance, representation, and re-construction; I put those discourses in dialogue with the literary texts to demonstrate how in these texts a valid and active sense of the self is inexorably rendered damaged or destroyed as an initial corollary of being in an alien land. Moreover, I argue that the very exilic or diasporic *modus vivendi* contributes to a further problematisation of identity formation for the migrant figure. My approach to such complexity is primarily done in the light of postcolonial theory, specifically, Homi Bhabha's conception of 'mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence' and Stuart Hall's understanding of the conflicting development of cultural identity. This is intended in an effort to explicate the many aspects of the destabilisation resulting from the interrelation between culture and identity, on the one hand, and migration and displacement, on the other. The cross-cultural approach of the thesis highlights the similarities with the problematic experiences of identity transformation on the migrant part, despite the different cultural backgrounds.

DEDICATION

"E tu che se' costì, anima viva,
pàrtiti da cotesti che son morti."

This thesis is dedicated to the living soul of my father, ALI DARRAJ (30th December, 1962—11th December, 2015), whose untimely death has left me *irretrievably* bereft.

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Also, I should not be oblivious to my *alma mater*, Tishreen University, for endowing me with a Doctoral Scholarship to pursue my higher studies in the UK—even when my country was (and still is) hit by a severe crisis. I extend my thanks to the British Council for their valuable financial help during the time I was cut-short of any other subsistence. I am grateful to the Department of Literature, Theatre, and Film Studies for giving me the chance to complete my doctoral studies.

Last but not least, I owe much appreciation and gratitude to my mother and four sisters for their unconditional love and emotional support; it is *they*, to whom I present this thesis which is the culmination of a five-year strenuous effort.

Investigating the Problematic of Migrant Identity in South-Asian and Arab Postcolonial Fiction in English: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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I. Chapter One: Introduction

The quest for and discovery of one's identity has always been a recurrent motif throughout the history of humanity, explored through and manifested in a variety of forms that includes—but is not restricted to—fiction, visual art, and media. The question of identity is intrinsically complex, for identity is never static: it is fluid and always in flux. This thesis aims at examining the literary representation of the problematic of identity (re-)formation in a body of Arab and South Asian, postcolonial, migrant literature in English; what makes this migrant literature postcolonial is the very fact that at its core it is a writing-back to the empire, especially with regard to the migrant position in the host country. Migrant literature and post-colonial literature show some considerable overlap in the sense that they alternately focus on similar concerns such as the social contexts in the migrants' country of origin—which prompt them to leave—on the experience of migration itself, on the mixed reception which the migrant figure may receive in the country of arrival, on experiences of racism and hostility, and on the sense of rootlessness and the search for identity resulting from dis-placement and cultural diversity. My objective will be to offer an analysis of the aesthetic reflection on the conundrum of identity construction in the case of the migrant subject by relating such a challenge to the direct effects of the socio-cultural transformation which inevitably takes place in the country of migration. My choice of the fictional works to be discussed comes from the fact that—despite their ostensibly extraneous socio-cultural back-ground—the identities of the characters in these texts change or are forced to alter in line with the situations and settings into which they are thrown in their host countries almost in a parallel way. I carry out my investigation not only in terms of scrutinising the literary re-presentation of the dilemma of identity; I also do so by means of analysing both the manner in which the question of identity becomes problematic and the ways through which the

migrant figure responds to being in a critical and awkward situation with regard to their identity. My primary sources comprise a body of South Asian and Arab postcolonial fiction that has been produced since the 1960s, after significant waves of migration to the UK and the US—all of which are originally published in English, except for Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969), which was published in its native Arabic. In addition to the latter text, the literary corpus covered in this research includes V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *The Mimic Men* (1967), Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) and *Wife* (1975), Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003), and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and the *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). Despite the ostensible socio-cultural background, ethno-linguistic, and otherwise disparities of the re-presentation of migrant communities/individuals amongst these texts, the significance of yoking them to-gether in this comparative study lies in the fact that they show more parallel experiences of the intricacy of migration and identity formation than is expected. More importantly, South Asian and Arab postcolonial literatures in English show a considerable closeness in reflecting a shared colonial history, the societal post-independence transformation, and the struggle to redefine the postcolonial present by means of inverting the colonial past. In this light, the majority of South Asian and Arab authors have shown in their writings that any con-templation on historical writing and public understanding of the colonial past in the sub-continent and the Arab World reveals that history was an important terrain of the battles that led to socio-political trans-formations rather than simply being transformed their wake; the anti-colonial challenge in the domain of historiography, however, has preceded the actual defeat of the colonial system. Yet in both worlds, the onset of colonial modernity has also led self-avowedly intellectuals to share historiographical conventions established by European scholarship that often refused to acknowledge earlier, pre-colonial representations of the past as 'proper' history. The struggle to redesign the (migratory) present in the context of the past

colonial rule and its aftermath in South Asia and the Arab World has proved to be especially long-drawn-out and complex one. On one level, the rejection of colonial historiography is as old as colonial rule itself. On another, the colonisation of the historians' archive and history-writing in both contexts has lagged quite a long time behind the formal processes of political decolonisation. At same time, the process of decolonising South Asian and Arab history has in recent years has been rendered more complex and controversial by the transformations of contemporary politics. In this light, the comparison between Arab and South Asian texts derives its significance from that fact that it enables scholars of postcolonial literature to push the limits a bit further, and shed more light onto what hardship the process of identity re-construction may bear under the postcolonial condition. Additionally, putting texts of South Asian and Arab fictions in English in dialogue with one another can serve towards a clearer understanding of 'migrant literature'. Remarkably, all of these texts do under the category of 'migrant literature,' which is primarily characterised by its content (migrant characters and their experiences) as well as by its authorship—that is, it is mainly written by migrant authors who themselves have a first-hand experience of migration and its consequences. Noticeably enough, the migrant writer tends to produce the kind of literature that engages with the aesthetic delineation of the perplexity of migration with its concomitant exacerbation of the process of identity formation and re-formation.

Throughout this thesis, I aim to find an answer to how the aforementioned texts—focalised through the migrant subject—provide a conceptualisation of the individual's problematic endeavour to attain agency and self-realisation. I consider how the texts depict an inherent cultural clash between the operating socio-cultural norms of the native country and those of the adopted home; I also examine how they approach the necessity of fulfilling a successful and/or a relative assimilation into the host society as a key-factor in rendering identity crisis less problematic. The question of home as signifier of belonging and identifica-

tion positions itself among the significant concerns which my research addresses. I also attempt at crystallising how in each work the predicament of identity overlaps with issues relating principally to displacement, exile, postcoloniality, diaspora and cultural hybridity. To this end, I engage in each chapter with theoretical discourses on the politics of identity performance, representation, and re-construction; I put those discourses in dialogue with the literary texts to demonstrate how in these texts a valid and active sense of the self is inexorably rendered damaged or destroyed as an initial corollary of being in an alien land. Moreover, I argue that the very exilic or diasporic *modus vivendi* contributes to a further problematisation of identity formation for the migrant figure represented in my chosen texts. My approach to such complexity is primarily done in the light of postcolonial theory, specifically, Homi Bhabha's conception of 'mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence' and Stuart Hall's understanding of the conflicting development of cultural identity. In so doing, I intend to illuminate the many aspects of the destabilisation resulting from the interrelation between culture and identity, on the one hand, and migration and displacement, on the other. The cross-cultural approach of the thesis highlights the similarities with the problematic experiences of identity transformation as delineated through the migrant figures represented in the texts, despite their different cultural backgrounds and individual circumstances.

The twentieth century has witnessed large scale waves of dislocation or dispersal of people through compulsory or voluntary migration to various parts of the world. Once uprooted from their country of origin, migrants or displaced people prove to constantly undergo some harrowing experiences of non-belonging, estrangement and alienation in the land they are transplanted to. The source of that traumatic sensation correlates to the sense of persistent failure to feel at home; in most of the cases, they are hardly ever found (re-)locating in that strange or alien land and yet feeling as if they belonged. The experiences of second/third-generation migrants may differ in contexts and reasons from that of first-generation migrants;

but at the core, the internal traumatic sense of disbelonging and being misfit within their immediate society remains there. Migrants also tend to become 'hybrid' individuals due to the linguistic and socio-cultural transformations to which they are inevitably liable. Their identity is starkly contested by the very fact of the ambivalent nature of their existence; it is in this light that Amartya Sen argues for the fluidity, multi-dimensionality, non-singularity, and pluralistic nature of the migrant identity.[1] Aware of their condition, the migrant figures are almost always found pondering over quintessential notions such as 'who am I?' and 'where do I belong?' These, among other issues, are the most vital queries that postcolonial (migrant) literature tries to solve, correlating the questions of migrancy and identity to the postcolonial condition within which—despite Peter Hallward's disapproval—"the hybrid, the interstitial, the intercultural, the in-between, the indeterminate, the counter-hegemonic [and] the contingent"[2] are all grave challenges to be duly addressed.

Postcolonial literature can best be described as the literary writing "emerging from the historical encounter between culturally distinct and geographically separated societies, where for some extended period one society controls the other politically and economically."[3] My approach to the term is in the light of John Thieme's perception, according to which he claims the term 'post-colonial' to imply "a continuum of experiences in which colonialism is perceived as an agency of disturbance, unsettling both the pre-existing 'Aboriginal' or 'Native' discourses of the cultures it penetrates and the English (or European) [sic] discourses it brings with it."[4] On her part, Elleke Boehmer makes a significant study of postcolonial migrant writers in her book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*; in that

[1] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, (London: Penguin, 2006), pp 9, 22.
[2] Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001), p xi.
[3] Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa, and the Caribbean*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp 1-2.
[4] John Thieme, (ed.), *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1996), p 2.

pivotal investigation, she underscores the substantial contribution made by migrant writers in the field of postcolonial literature. Boehmer argues that the existence of a paradigm shift in both form and subject-matter cannot be denied since postcolonial literature articulates the voice of the weak and subjugated people as if the empire is writing back.[5]

Using Homi Bhabha's terms, Boehmer observes that postcolonial migrant writing is the writing of 'not quite' and 'in-between'; she even underlines the unprecedented migrations and uprooting of people, not only from former colonies, but also from the countries seething with internal conflicts, economic adversities, and lack of opportunities to the metropolitan centres. Also, she clarifies that as per UN estimation about 100 million people in the world qualify as migrants who live as minorities and in a state of non-belonging.[6] With her apt observation, she claims that cultural creolisations of migrants prove to have led to a linguistic creolisation which itself has resulted in the English language becoming a process of mass literary transplantation. Thus, ranging from a professional choice—take for example Naipaul's writing vocation—to exiles and diasporans, writers from the once-colonised lands have become members of the twenty-first century "condition of energized migrancy."[7] More interestingly Boehmer considers that a post-colonial writer is more likely to be

> a cultural traveller or an 'extra-territorial', than a national. Excolonial by birth, 'Third World' in cultural interest, cosmopolitan in almost every other way, she or he works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national, ethnic, or regional background.[8]

Most of the postcolonial migrant writers—including the ones whose works I am studying in this thesis—fall into the category specified by Boehmer. Many seem to have undergone a kind of cultural and linguistic translation; this, in turn, has significantly manifested in the

[5] Please see Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp 221-23. An earlier critical approach to the theme has been articulated in Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back*: *Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*.
[6] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p 226.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., p 227.

migrant figure in their fiction in the sense that the 'transnational' and 'translational' characteristic features and identity have placed them in the position of interstitiality and/or 'in-betweenness'. Due to their cultural translations, argues Boehmer, their own 'hybridity' makes their (migrant) text a "hybrid object."[9] It is from within this perspective that this thesis looks at the works under discussion in an attempt to explore the endeavour of the 'cultural traveller' to express the complexity of migrancy and its concomitant identity crisis. In this regard, it is worth considering the effect of migration on culture and identity. Ian Chambers claims that "[m]igrancy ... involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation."[10] Chambers suggests that migration entails a change in identity and the sense of belonging; in the light of Chamber's argument, each of my aforementioned texts—as taking the form of 'migrant literature'—serves as a specific illustration of the dilemmatic pursuit of a well-constructed sense of selfhood.

Postcolonialism, in whose domain this thesis lays out its argument, is a significant discipline in cultural and literary studies; as a discourse, it principally concerns itself with the "effects of colonization on culture and societies."[11] A major *point de force* in criticism since the late 1970s, the 1980s and early 1990s, it has played a vital role in anti-colonial political movements in colonised lands. It has become a *sui generis* field of intellectual inquiry with the disintegration of the colonial regimes after World War II, examining and analysing the literature produced by cultures that have developed in response to colonial domination from the day of the first colonial contact to the present. Also, it probes the colonialist and anti-colonialist ideological forces in operation socially, culturally, and politically—which, on the one hand, press the colonised to internalise the coloniser's norms and values and, on the other

[9] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p 227.
[10] Ian Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p 5.
[11] Bill Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p 186.

hand, promote the resistance of the colonised against their oppressors. In my study, I examine how in particular the colonial migrant intellectuals—like Tayeb Salih, V. S. Naipaul, and Bharati Mukherjee, to mention a few—once they have relocated themselves in the metropolitan centre have endeavoured to represent the plight of the migrants particularly with regard to their identity and existence.

The term 'postcolonial' is a much contested epithet: it is often used with a hyphen in between 'post' and 'colonial', and thereby draws various meanings and attitudes towards colonialism. John Thieme claims that the term 'post-colonial' implies "a continuum of experiences in which colonialism is perceived as an agency of disturbance, unsettling both the pre-existing 'Aboriginal' or 'Native' discourses of the cultures it penetrates and the English (or European) discourses it brings with it."[12] However, there is no accurate demarcation between the end of colonialism and the beginning of postcolonialism as none can say exactly when the former ended and the latter started. Some theorists argue that an altered form of colonialism still exists even today in the camouflage of political and economic interventions; while others advocate the opinion that postcolonialism starts "from the very first moment of colonial contact."[13] In their influential work, *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft et al use the term 'post-colonial' (as hyphenated) to cover "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day [since] there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression."[14] They, therefore, label the literatures produced in Africa, Australia, Canada, The Caribbean, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and South Pacific island countries as 'post-colonial' literature. Ashcroft et al. also postulate that each of these literatures has one

[12] John Thieme, (ed.), *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1996), p 2.
[13] Bill Ashcroft et al., (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p 117.
[14] Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, (London: Routledge, 1989), p 2.

thing in common beyond their distinctive regional characteristics; each has "emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by fore-grounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial."[15]

For his part, Robert Young conceives of 'postcolonialism' as "a body of writing that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed."[16] In fact, it is from within this perception that one can approach the US-based texts (Arab-American and South Asian-American) studied in this thesis as postcolonial. For Young, shifting the prevailing ways means turning the world upside down, as if looking from the other side for a dissimilar, and yet, significant experience. Postcolonialism, hence, defies the dominant ways of looking at things mainly from a Western point of view, namely what Edward Said calls the European cultural superiority and the imposition of the Western manners, customs, religious beliefs, and moral values on an alien way of life.[17] Moreover, it imparts voice to the weak—that is, to the figures who are in the margins or the periphery. Moreover, Young suggests that postcolonialism claims the right of all the people on the globe equally; it is unfortunate, nevertheless, that due to European colonisation and appropriation of power by the West—often referred to as Eurocentrism—the world today is based on two unequal divisions: the West and the rest. This being the case, postcolonialism

> seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledges into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave ... [it] is about changing world ... It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures.[18]

[15] Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, p 2.
[16] Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p 2.
[17] See Edward Said discussion on this concept in the opening section of his *Orientalism*, 1978.
[18] Ibid., p 7.

Thus taking Young's definition of postcolonialism into consideration, one can possibly argue that postcolonial literature is subversive insofar as it pursues intervention, dismantling the knowledge and power structures of both the West and the non-West. Equally, it interrogates European superiority in knowledge production, and simultaneously critiques the native/ non-Western ways of accepting the West's hegemony.

However, it is worth noticing that the works also fit into the category of postmodern literature, in the sense that their concern with the intricacy of identity formation resounds with the features prevailing in post-modern literature.[19] This is quite significant for a better understanding of the novels that helps provide an enhanced structure for analysing the aspect of dealing with identity problems within them. An enormous spectrum of attitudes and criticism about postmodernism exists, including such a vehement sentiment describing it as "a theoretical virus which paralyzes progressive thoughts, politics and practice."[20] In contrast to the abovementioned statement, however, Mary Klages conceives of postmodernism in a much more constructive manner; in her disentangling study, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Klages writes in favour of the differentiating features which postmodern literary writing generally possesses, manifesting an inclination towards "reflexivity and self-consciousness, fragmentation and discontinuity (especially in narrative structures), simultaneity, and an emphasis on the de-structured, decentered, dehumanized subject."[21] She also outlines the characteristics that postmodern literature manifests as follows: "an emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity"; "a movement away from the apparent objectivity provided by omniscient third-person narrators, fixed narrative points of view, and clear-cut moral

[19] Lyotard, for example, not only critiques the concept of "grand narratives" but also argues for notion of "mak[ing] visible and present[ing] the unpresentable." So does postcolonial literature do in presenting the unpresentable. Please see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (trans.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p 78.

[20] Mike Cole, et al., "Between Postmodernism and Nowhere: The Predicament of the Postmodernist," *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. XLV, No. 2, (June, 1997), p 187.

[21] Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: Continuum Press, 2006, reprint 2007), p 165.

positions"; "a blurring of distinctions between genres, so that poetry seems more documentary and prose more poetic"; "an emphasis on fragmented forms [and] discontinuous narratives"; and "a rejection of elaborate formal aesthetics in favour of minimalist designs … spontaneity, and discovery of creation."[22] In fact, all the works I am dealing with in this thesis exhibit one feature or more of the ones postulated by Klages, and the narrative of identity performance and representation expressed in them operates within that larger framework.

Among the questions raised throughout this thesis is the representation of Arab identity in the diaspora, with much attention being paid on the concept of Arab-American identity in both my third and fourth chapters. Any consideration of the notion of Arab identity as a collective ethnic entity should not fail to take into account the exceptionable contribution of Edward Said; his work has consistently sought to examine the misrepresentation of Arabs through media images, and it offers a succinct account of how derogatory images against Arabs are "enforced every day by the media, which—whether constitutively or out of ignorance or laziness—perpetuate these images."[23] It is in this very light, as well, that scholars consider South Asian American literature as postcolonial in the sense that a great deal of its literary aspects (most importantly the narrative content) engages with catastrophic stories of border crossings that are often central to accounts of migration. In Mukherjee and Lahiri's fictions, for example, readers are privy to narratives of painful separations, and unspeakable loss. In the process of writing both authors make these stories central to their own arguments and in so doing, those crossings, separations, and losses become knowable, imaginable, and part of a larger story of global interconnectedness and inequality. Since postcolonial migrant fiction largely speaks of those who cross borders and become stuck within borders, or who are forcibly moved across borders one can argue that Mukherjee and Lahiri position

[22] Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p 166.
[23] Edward W. Said, and David Barsamian, *Culture and Resistance: Conversations with Edward W. Said*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003), p 83.

themselves at the crossroads of being activists, storytellers, and academics, even as they also locate their informants' narratives along trajectories of tragedy and possibility.

With regard to the specific images stuck against Arabs, they are not merely encountered in Western media coverage, but also in the travel books targeted at both adults and children; the more persistent stereotypes depict them as ignorant, superstitious, silly, lazy, irrational, cruel, and violent.[24] When it comes to the issue of Arab identity, any examination of 'collective identity' should ultimately seek to define the sense by which certain groups of people strive to identify themselves—and conversely, how they identify other groups. In this light, a study of Arab identity is the endeavour to identify what it means to be an Arab,[25] which is inextricably linked with the notion of how Arabs have been identified. Various scholars have defined Arabs in terms of linguistic and geographical factors, describing them as "people who speak the Arabic language, identify themselves as Arabs, and are nationals or residents of member countries of the league of Arab States."[26] For other scholars, however, place and geography are not inclusive principles for identifying Arabs; they extend their definitions, therefore, to include those people who speak Arabic but live outside the Arab World.

As an ethno-cultural identity, Arab identity is perceived by most scholars to be capable of definition in in terms of being both ethnic and cultural. On the one hand, it is ethnic insofar as it distinguishes between Arabs as a group and other ethnic groups, where ethnicity appears "as a political and social force on the national and international scene."[27] In

[24] Greta D. Little, "Representing Arabs: Reliance on the Past," in Y. R. Kamalipour and T. Carilli, (eds.), *Cultural Diversity and the U.S. Media*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp 264-66.
[25] Scholars differentiate between an 'Arab' and an 'Arabian', wherein the latter is invariably an ethnic term. Many Arabs are of Semitic origin, but cannot be defined as Arabian. The term Arab refers to the people who inhabited the Arabian Peninsula and Syrian Desert in Pre-Islamic times. However, modern conceptions of the term 'Arab' do not necessarily refer to their distant origins. For full reference, please see: Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*, (New York: Hatherleigh Press, 2002), p 12.
[26] Nicholas S. Hopkins, "Introduction," in Nicholas. S. Hopkins and Saad E. Ibrahim, (eds.), *Arab Society: Class, Gender, Power, and Development*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1997), p 1.
[27] Leo W. Jeffres, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Media Use: A Panel Study," *Communication Research*, Vol. XXVII, No. 4, (August, 2000), August 4), p 500.

this light, Arab identity from an ethnic perception, which constitutes the collectivity's sense of being,[28] refers to Arabs as a people who share, and feel they belong to a common and distinctive culture, a collective history, and a dominant religion.[29] Therefore, and in accordance with an established line of ethnic scholars such as De Vos and Romanucci-Ross (1982), Orbe and Harris (2001), Coiller and Thomas (1988), Arabness becomes a marker of belonging that indicates a shared heritage.[30] In the eyes of other ethnic scholars such as Van Den Berghe (1981), Martin and Nakayama (2000), however, Arab identity is seen "as an emotional bond that unites people together, that is rooted in the past, and that people are born into."[31] It not only summarises the entire complex of feelings of the Arab people,[32] but also—on a more inspirational level—Arabness can be a source of motivation, and a fundamental principle of action.[33] On the other hand, Arabness as a cultural identity stands for shared Arab representations, collective norms, and a shared cultural system of verbal and nonverbal behaviour. It, thus, serves as the provider of certain distinctive vocabularies, concepts, and meanings for Arabs. In short, it is the identification of the reality of Arab communication.[34]

In socio-cultural terms, the awareness of Arabs as a homogeneous people constitutes a third critique of the essentialist perception. Among the critics of Arab homogeneity is Bassam Tibi, who expounds that Arabs are heterogeneous, even though they have a common religion and language; in line with Tibi's argument "Muslim Arab Kuwaitis and Muslim Arab Moroccans are not of the same culture, and do not perceive themselves as such, even though they speak the same language and worship within the same faith."[35] In this light, and relying on a critique of essentialist approaches, Arabness may well be considered as a situational

[28] Leo W. Jeffres, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Media Use: A Panel Study," pp 500-1.
[29] Mary Fong, "Identity and the Speech Community," in M. Fong and R. Chuang, (eds.), *Communicating Ethnic and Cultural Identity*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), pp 4-5.
[30] Ibid., p 6.
[31] Ibid., p 5.
[32] Anya P. Royce, Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p 18.
[33] Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p 181.
[34] Mary Fong, "Identity and the Speech Community,"
[35] Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, (London: University of California Press, 2002), p 129.

identity, which is never unproblematic or transparent, "always in process," and always transforming its own identity.[36] Arabness is thus perceived as a collective true self, concealed inside many others, and subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. Within the sphere of postcolonial criticism, the problematic nature of Arabness and its concomitant paradoxes entail not only the restoration of the main components of Arabness, but also the deconstruction of the fixed notions of Arab identity. Distinct from the conception of 'fixing' Arab identity, a reassessment of the sources of Arabness should take into account 'the continuous unfixity of the term, and the attempts to envisage an image of Arab identity that stands up for the Arab reality.

Diaspora plays a significant role in shaping and re-shaping identity (in both the Arab and South Asian contexts). The notion of the 'diaspora' as a concept, however, is as problematic as the term 'postcolonialism'; while referring to a situation in which a body of people lives outside their traditional homeland, the term 'diaspora'—as applied to South Asians and Arabs—tends to be interpreted in two contrasting ways that go beyond the basic definition. Arif Dirlik and William Safran may be taken to give two exemplary representative definitions. Dirlik defines 'diaspora' as a complex range of social groups that range from political refugees, to individuals obliged to emigration owing to economic necessity, or to well-educated and wealthy professionals who are cosmopolitan by education, outlook, or the ability to function across cultural spaces.[37] In a different vein, however, Safran's definition suggests specific conditions through which Diasporas can be produced, beginning with:

> Expatriate communities: (1) that are dispersed from an original center to at least two peripheral places; (2) that maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland; (3) that believe they are not and perhaps cannot be fully accepted by their host country; (4) that see the ancestral home as a place of

[36] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in P. Mongia, (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p 110.
[37] Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), p 8.

> eventual return when the time is right; (5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and (6) whose consciousness and solidarity as a group are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the home-land.[38]

Thus, with term having a variety of reasonable explanations as to who falls in/outside parameters, Dirlik's definition can be taken as a mode of thinking that recognises diaspora as a phenomenon that continues to occur beyond the settled notions of place, displacement and forced departure. Safran's conception is predominantly helpful in the study of specific Arab diasporas, such as the Levantine one. The model is problematic, nevertheless, in the sense it deals with the related notions of home/host in an unduly reductive binary structure.[39] Interestingly yet, it refers to another characteristic of 'diaspora,' the feeling of exile and the notion of enforced departure from the country of origin.

In my thesis, I consider that colonialism is among the factors that have created Arab Diaspora; however, since the question of what creates such a phenomenon requires intensive critical interrogation, my study approaches Arab Diaspora as being created through multi-faceted migrations, undertaken for a variety of different reasons. In most cases, Arabs in the diaspora have been obliged to leave their countries of origin because of the ongoing effects of colonialism, or due to despotism, and the realities of economic pressure. They are neither totally removed from the countries from which they originally come, nor do they seek to be entirely assimilated into the countries where they migrate. Focusing in my third and fourth chapters on the Arab diaspora in North America, I aim to explore the problematic nature of the diasporic Arab-American identity in the light of the postcolonial condition.

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[38] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Volume I., No. 1, (Spring 1991), pp 83-4.
[39] Kellie D. Hay, *Immigrants, Citizens, and Diasporas: Enacting Identities in an Arab-American Cultural Organization*, (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2000), p 10.

In the light of the aforementioned theoretical perspectives and conceptions I argue that the problematic of identity construction in the postcolonial milieu becomes, on the one hand, inevitably bound up with the archaeology of power, discourse, and representation—that is, what Michel Foucault specifies as the scrutiny or the examination of the discursive traces and orders left by the past in order to write a 'history of the present.'[40] On the other hand, issues pertaining to an understanding of 'agency', 'identification', 'the self/the other', 'alienation/ integration', 'exile', and 'displacement' are isometrically perceived not only in terms of being a historical production; also, they are recognised in terms of falling under the category of a socio-anthropological perception of a man-made construct, being simultaneously charged with interest and prejudice. In this regard, this very synthetic nature of the challenge of constructing a well-articulated identity may be well understood in terms of the Foucauldian notion of the 'archive'. The significance of considering the conception of the archive from a postcolonial perspective consists in the principle that it not only prescribes the *differentiae specificae* of the self, but also stipulates the systemic apparatus through which the self both defines and is defined by the other.

In his seminal work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault argues for the concept of the 'archive', designating the concatenation of all the material traces left behind by a particular historical period and/or a culture.[41] In probing such traces, Foucault continues the argument, one can deduce the historical *a priori* of the period and then, if looking at science, one can deduce the episteme of the period. In this light, an 'archive' could be effectively conceptualised in terms of a 'discourse,' or a systematic construct by which historical and otherwise occurrences are encapsulated as 'statements' or narratives. When approached

[40] Michel Foucault, "Introduction," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, A. M. Sheridan Smith, (trans.), (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1972), pp 4-5.
All the subsequent quotations from the book are taken from the same edition and will be referred to by page number.
[41] For a fuller clarification, please see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p 22.

in the light of the legacy of colonialism and the consequent postcolonial, centripetal movements of periphery-centre migrations, therefore, the narrative of identity construction and its inherent problematic becomes associated with the very decentring nature of the archival statement which constantly destabilises any claimed fixity of any structure or unity. When expounding the inconsistency and functionality of the statement, thus, Foucault states that:

> [o]ne should not be surprised, then, if one has failed to find structural criteria of unity for the statement; this is because it is not itself a unit, but a function that cuts across domain structures, and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and place.[42]

On the one hand, the significance of considering Foucault's conception through a postcolonial lens consists not only in its adequate elucidation of the very instability of identification as a particular statement in the postcolonial archive. Its magnitude lies also in underlying the importance of demarcating the concrete practices, the conditions, the governing rules, and the arena within which a statement functions and operates.[43] Thus, with the migrant subject proving to go through a sequential series of metamorphic incidents in their quest to re-define their identity or act out the role of the Westerner—with the full knowledge that total assimilation can never be obtained owing to the sense of marginalisation and inferiority with which they are confronted in the host culture—the process of identification gets inexorably problematised. In fact, hence comes the argument that under such conditions "identity is formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture"; this being the case, the migrant "subject is always 'somewhere else': doubly marginalized, displaced, always *other* than where he or she is, or is able to speak from."[44]

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[42] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p 87.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in Lisa Appignanesi, (ed.), *The Real Me: Post-Modernism and the Question of Identity*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987), p 44. Emphasis is in the original.

On the other hand, the Foucauldian argument serves adequately well in showing that the manifestations of any particular narrative, or a statement, are perceived in terms of the hierarchical order of networks dominating its historical incidents. As far as the problematic of identity is concerned, thus, the archive proves to determine the mechanism of power relation that "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives."[45] More specifically, Foucault demonstrates that an archive of certain social, cultural, or political constructs could be adequately conceived as a systemic formation and/or transformation of its constituent statements whose discontinuous nature not only makes its differentiating character, but also prescribes what we can no longer say.[46] Foucault also postulates that we cannot identify the archive of our own era, insofar as it is the unconscious from which we speak; nevertheless, we can consciously decode an archive from which we are aloof.[47] As it comes to the intricacy of (re-)defining the identity, therefore, one can reasonably argue that not only does the archive dictate the nature of the self, but also it specifies the '*dispositif*' or the mechanism through which the self defines the other. It is from such a perspective, as well, that I approach the problematic of identity in the postcolonial ambiance.

Thus my selection of the works emanates from the fact that they not only engage with (im-)migration, and the dilemma of the (im-)migrant subject, but also they aesthetically scrutinise the inexorable socio-cultural and otherwise *différances*—taking the Derridean conceptualisation into account here.[48] The principal intention will be primarily centred upon the

[45] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, (ed. & trans.), (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p 30.

[46] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp 7-8

[47] Ibid., p 6.

[48] Jacques Derrida coined the term in his 1963 paper, "*Cogito et histoire de la folie*," where he pointed out that *différance* principally indicates two heterogeneous features which govern the production of meaning. The first, relating to 'deferral', is the notion that words and signs can never fully summon forth what they mean insofar as they can only be defined through appeal to additional words from which they differ. Meaning is, thus, forever deferred or postponed through an incessant chain of signifiers. The second, relating to 'difference' and is also

investigation of the predicament of identity formation and how it intersects with the multi-faceted course of migration/re-location, and cultural heterogeneity. Before proceeding further, however, it is worth drawing attention to the semantic differences between the terms migration/immigration and their derivatives. In the broader sense, a 'migrant' is defined as the person who has left their native home for a foreign country in search of work or better living conditions. An 'immigrant', however, is the individual who leaves their country of origin to permanently settle in a country or a cultural community which is initially strange to them.[49] However, in the context of the mass migration waves in the post-World War Two era of the twentieth century—which most noticeably included amongst its phenomenal manifestations the European migration to North America or Australia, along with the massive migration from the former colonies to Europe after the crumbling of the colonial system[50]—scholars have initiated a sub-categorisation of the subtle nuances between each category from a socio-cultural point of view.

In his significant essay, Graeme Dunphy argues thus for the importance of distinguishing the "emigrant perspective" of the migrant which is mostly backward in focus to the country of origin from the "immigrant perspective" in which the migrant is not only reconciled with the prospect of a permanent abode in the country to which they have migrated, but also is considerably aware of all the corollaries of living in a place of substantial cultural diversity.[51] On his part, however, Salman Rushdie reflects upon the British experience of the

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referred to as *espacement* or 'spacing', indicates the force that differentiates elements from one another and, in so doing, engenders binary oppositions and hierarchies that underpin the perception of meaning itself.
Please see the following for full reference: Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in Alan Bass, (trans.), *Writing and Difference*, (London: Routledge, 1978), p 75.
On their part, Schultz and Fried refer to the same concept; please see: Schultz W. R. and Fried L. B., *Jacques Derrida Bibliography*, (London: Garland, 1992), p 12.

[49] For further information about the subtle semantic difference between 'migration' and 'immigration', and their derivatives, see *The Oxford English Dictionary*, (eds.) John Simpson and Edmund Weiner 2nd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[50] Please see the following: Igor Maver, *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Post-Colonial Literatures*, (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), p xi.

[51] Graeme Dunphy, "Migrant, Emigrant, Immigrant: Recent Developments in Turkish-Dutch Literature," *Neophilologus*, Vol. LXXXV, No. 1, (2001), pp 1-23.

enormous, government-sponsored waves of immigrants from the ex-colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia in the post-Second World War period. Understanding the long-term nature of their abode, Rushdie goes to the extent of associating the 'immigrants' with a predicament of a socio-cultural discourse in the sense that they seem to have created "a new community of subject people [within the] new Empire."[52] In the light of both Dunphy and Rushdie's postulations, therefore, and since the 'migrant' and the 'immigrant' are two constituents of an overall spectrum, my concern centres on the migrant part in the process of becoming immigrant with regard to the underpinning question of identity.

Relying on the distinguished corpus of the scholarly work of such prominent theorists and critics including, but not exclusive to, Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and Roger Bromley, I aim to build on the already extant body of research and scholarship that subverts the inflexible, fixed, and binary categories of the self and the other. In so doing, I aim to fill in a gap in the extant scholarship; I am offering a comparative approach between two seemingly disparate experiences of migration and postcoloniality in order to understand the ways in which South Asian and Arab writers have used parallel literary strategies via the novel to give voice to a variety of themes and issues concerned with the socio-cultural, linguistic and geographical detachment from the excolonial home and the perplexing position of migrants in the host country. To this end, I embark on an examination of how are found—even within such ineluctable volatility and unfixity of identification—moments and places of solidity and co-existence, arguing for the establishment of a mechanism of including difference without coercion, whereby the identity dilemma becomes less challenging. With equal attention, I intend to inspect how the concepts of exile, displacement, and diasporic mode of existence considerably add to the complication of identity formation insofar as they ultimately drive the émigré to resort to negotiating their contested identities in order to establish a

[52] Salman Rushdie, "The New Empire within Britain," in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, (London: Granta, 1992), p 130.

simulacrum of a more stable identity. Diaspora signals an engagement with a matrix of diversity: of cultures, languages, histories, people, places, and times; in its "trans-formational quality, diaspora is typically a site of hybridity which questions fixed identities based on essentialisms."[53] More pertinently, I will examine how migrant characters are quite liable to find themselves reduced into marginal or 'subaltern' figures[54], rendered without agency by their social status in the host country in which a process of social and cultural differentiations is drastically imposed. In fact, the latter malaise simultaneously destabilises and complicates the development of a well defined identity.

In Chapter Two, I examine the challenge of identity formation in the case of the migrant subject by relating it to the direct effects of the socio-cultural metamorphosis ineluctably taking place in the country of migration. I deal with V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and *The Mimic Men* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. My investigation is to be carried out by both scrutinising the framework within which the dilemma of identity arises, and analysing the manner in which the question of identity becomes problematic—along with the ways in which the migrant figure responds to such difficulty. Toward this end, I aim to crystallise how in each discussed work the predicament of identity overlaps with displacement, postcoloniality, and cultural hybridity. I am approaching the construction of the migrant identity in terms of being fluid, dynamic, and constantly unstable in nature. In this regard, the chapter elucidates the intricacy of the intersection of identification with the concept of place. This, in fact, allows for exploring the impact of specific modes of discourse and the unfixity of identity performance, representation, and re-construction. In this light, my analysis proceeds from the argument that "a valid and active sense of self may

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[53] Joel Kuortti, *Writing Imagined Diasporas: South Asian Women Reshaping North American Identity*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), p 3.

[54] Spivak introduced the term in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which she argues about the marginality of the 'postcolonial Other' and the "obliteration of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity." Please see: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp 24-5.

[become] destroyed"[55] as an initial corollary of being in an alien land. I hence argue that the very exilic or diasporic *modus vivendi* delineated in my chosen works contributes to a further problematisation of identity formation for their characters.

In Chapter Three, I attempt at exploring the problematic metamorphosis of the female immigrant identity in three major works: Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and *Wife* and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*. Focusing on the inevitable overlap of immigration with the quandary of identity construction and self-transformation in these three books, I aim to examine the aesthetic delineation of how displacement and the impact of cultural heterogeneity highly influence the process of identity re-formation in an engaging sample of contemporary women's immigrant literature. More pertinently I will explore—by means of the double lenses of postcolonial theory and the female immigrant's perspective—how each author has artistically explicated the manner in which their female protagonists find themselves navigating amongst the various and often incongruous demands imposed both by their homeland culture and their intrinsically problematic position as second-generation immigrants in the States (specifically for the protagonists of *Arabian Jazz*). Interestingly, each of the chosen texts evidently shows that while adjusting to such demands, the gendered and cultural identities of the female immigrant become inexorably bound up with the politics of performativity. The plight of loneliness and the incessant sense of alienation alongside the awareness of and longing for a lost comfort zone all designate the phenomenal scope within which such characters strive in their trials to negotiate and re-define their contested identities. In this light, I argue that each book provides its own *sui generis* portrayal of the complexity of adapting to the specificity of re-constructing the self within the framework of intricately different socio-cultural norms. I also demonstrate that the three texts serve as overtures to

[55] Bill Ashcroft et al. (eds.), *The Empire Writes Back*, p 9.

Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber's conception of agency, most remarkably the hybridised entity that tries to surmount the confining lines of social categorisation.

My fourth chapter offers a critical analysis of a modern, literary representation of the intricacy of the migrant identity and how it has been aesthetically depicted in three contemporary diasporic texts that have been received with wide acclaim. Primarily focusing on Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*, my argument focal point is the inescapable challenges of identity re-construction, self-transformation, and the problematic of cultural heterogeneity and how such processes intersect with migration. I refer to related themes in Lahiri's earlier work, *Interpreter of Maladies*; this is done with two objectives in mind. The first one is to show how Lahiri's writing has developed while undertaking the themes of migration and identity-in-crisis; the second one is to reinforce how each text provides in its own scope parallel, metaphorical representations of the dilemma of the immigrant's identity, in particular when cultural appropriation entails an articulation of perturbing conceptions which accompany the process of constructing identities from the hybrid zone. My argument in this chapter principally lies in showcasing that these three books portray a variety of themes such as the agony of loss, the hope of acceptance, and the preservation of traditions in ways that defy readers to draw connections between objects and concepts that are not typically related. My line of argument in this chapter addresses how issues ranging in magnitude from the functionality of specific modes of discourses to identity performance and re-presentation have been articulated in three remarkable specimens of present-day postcolonial fiction. I argue that each of the texts under discussion often involves not only an approach to how particular socio-cultural experiences translate into the context of what constructs one's identity, but also an endeavour to explore how postcoloniality influences the process of identity formation.

II. Chapter Two

Migration, exile, and the challenging discovery of the self: V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1989) and *The Mimic Men* (1967), and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969).

Tu lascerai ogne cosa diletta
più caramente; e questo è quello strale
che l'arco de lo essilio pria saetta.
Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle
lo scendere e 'l salir per l'altrui scale.[56]

(*Paradiso*, XVII: 55-60)

[56] You shall abandon everything you love
Most tenderly; and this is the arrow
Which first the bow of exile shoots forth.
You shall prove how bitter it is
The bread of foreigners, and how hard a path
To go ascending and descending others' stairs.

The excerpt is taken from Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, which is itself based on Dante's personal experience of exile and displacement.

Irrespective of how conscious people are of their role in identity construction, identity remains a human construct. Persons who find that they straddle the borderlands of two or more cultures are hardly at ease insofar as defining who they are cannot be determined by means of a concrete mathematical equation. These culturally hybrid people constantly question who they are, where they belong, and how they should live. The aim of this chapter is to examine the aesthetic enquiry of the challenge of identity formation in the case of the migrant subject by relating it to the direct effects of the socio-cultural metamorphosis ineluctably taking place in the country of migration. The works under discussion here are V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *The Mimic Men* (1967) and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969). My investigation will be achieved not only by scrutinising the framework within which the dilemma of identity arises, but also by questioning both the manner in which the question of identity becomes problematic and the ways by which the migrant figure responds to such problematisation. To this end, I aim to crystallise how in each discussed work the predicament of identity overlaps with issues principally relating to displacement, postcoloniality, and cultural hybridity. I am problematising the construction of the migrant identity in terms of being highly fluid, and constantly unstable in nature. In this regard, the chapter elucidates the intricacy of the intersection of identification with the concept of place. This, in fact, allows for exploring the impact of specific modes of discourse and the unfixity of identity performance, representation, and re-construction. In this light, my analysis proceeds from the notion that a validated and operative sense of the self may significantly be rendered destroyed as an initial corollary of being in an alien land.[57] This being the case, therefore, I intend to demonstrate in my argument how the three texts have shown that the interconnection between an exilic or diasporic mode of existence with the distress of cultural hybridity often proves to be contributing to a further exacerbation of the

[57] Ashcroft et al. (eds.), *The Empire Writes Back*, p 9.

process of identity re-formation. I approach the representation of this difficulty in the light of Homi Bhabha's theorisation about 'mimicry', 'hybridity', and 'ambivalence'. Moreover, Stuart Hall's understanding of the conflicting development of cultural identity is crucial to my analysis. In so doing, my objective is set on explicating the multifaceted destabilisation that results from the interrelation between culture and identity on the one hand and migration and dislocation on the other hand.

Migration, Self-imposed Exile, and the Question of Negotiating Identity and Attaining Agency via Writing in V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and *The Mimic Men*.

Nobel Laureate for Literature in 2001, V. S. Naipaul holds a prominent position in the arena of postcolonial writings. Although his first published work was *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), Naipaul' literary career has practically commenced with the publication of *Miguel Street* (1959), a semi-autobiographical compilation of short stories.[58] Aptly enough, the majority of his literary and otherwise achievements brings out to advantage a set of concerns that range in magnitude from the impact of the legacy of colonialism and the experience of constant travelling—and, thus, diasporic living—to cultural confoundedness, and the dilemmatic identity of the alien persona. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Naipaul's status as second generation Trinidadian-born Indian— who in a massive corpus of his writing trace the experiences of Indian migrants (some could be traced to those of his own father)—justifies the consideration of his writing as South Asian literature. Born in the colonised Trinidad to a Hindu family, which only one generation earlier had come from India as indentured labourers Naipaul has constantly provided an aesthetic envisioning of the

[58] The significance of *Miguel Street* emanates from the fact that it constitutes the first work in the trajectory of Naipaul's autobiographical writings in which there has been vaguely expressed the desire to articulate the self by means of becoming a 'published' writer: all the stories are narrated in the first person, and the writer knows well the street in question; he is not merely the observing boy but the 'young writer' who craves to publish a collection of short stories which express not only the complexities of the characters, but also that of the author.

adversities labourer-migrants who have South Asian or Indian descents. In *An Area of Darkness* (1964) a semi-autobiographical account—at once painful and hilarious, but always thoughtful and considered—Naipaul depicts the hardships of migrants of Indian origins like himself and the discovery of the land of one's forebears. *In a Free State* (1971) is a narrative of displacement, alienation, and cultural estrangement which trace the personal experience of his Indian father. In such books, the experience has never been a pleasant one, but the adversities the characters suffered were creative rather than numbing. In this light, readers are encountered with a masterful work of literature that provides a revelation both of India and of protagonist: a displaced person who paradoxically possesses a stronger sense of place than almost anyone.

Noticeably, however, his work has always instigated much controversy within postcolonial criticism in the sense that he is not only deemed to be embracing a politically incorrect stance about 'Third World' communities, but also fails in fulfilling the expectation of a certain critical approach, in line of which he is supposed to have been articulating his criticism. In his essay "An Intellectual Catastrophe", Edward Said states that Naipaul, who, himself, is a person from a 'Third World' origin

> sends back dispatches from the Third World to an implied audience of dis-enchanted Western liberals who can never hear bad enough things about all the Third World myths—national liberation movements, revolutionary goals, the evils of colonialism—which in Naipaul's opinion do nothing to explain the sorry state of African and Asian countries who are sinking under poverty, native impotence, badly learned, unabsorbed Western ideas like industrialisation and modernisation. These are people, Naipaul says in one of his books, who know how to use a telephone but can neither fix nor invent one.[59]

[59] Edward Said, "An Intellectual Catastrophe," in *Al-Ahram Weekly On-line*, Issue No. 389, 6-12 August, 1998. Retrieved online via the following website: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1998/389/cu1.htm

In fact, when taking the peculiarity of Naipaul's origin into consideration, Said's indictment seems quite justifiable. Taking his origins into account, Naipaul would have been appropriately anticipated to write about the misery of the colonised and the cruelty of the coloniser. In many of his early works, instead, which include *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street*, and even *A House for Mr Biswas* (1969), Naipaul positions himself as the "ironist in [the] colonial society"[60] and bitterly ridicules the *modus vivendi* not only in the Trinidadian society in general, but also in the East-Indian, Hindu community in particular.

Indeed not only Said, but also Andrzej Gasiorek has taken issue with Naipaul claiming that the latter had rapidly achieved his recognition in the Western literary canon principally due to the very rigorous disapproval of his native land. In this regard, Gasiorek sharply declares that the majority of Naipaul's work "frequently display[s] a hostility to the region of his birth, which manifests itself not just in his satire but in his implicit assumption about its culpability for historical predicament and its congenital incapacity for regeneration."[61] Moreover, Selwyn Cudjoe has stated in his reading of Naipaul's writings that "[he] has clearly aligned himself and his writing on the side of the dominant class."[62] Actually, what instigates the highly contentious disapproval of most of Naipaul's fictional writing proves to be the derogatory treatment and the views with which he approached the 'third world' in his 1962 non-fictional work, *The Middle Passage*—a travelogue about Naipaul's own visit to the West-Indies after having been to England ten years earlier. In her reading of Naipaul's overall work, Leela Gandhi states that "in *The Middle Passage* (1962), for instance, [his] gaze upon his former homeland appears mediated, without qualification, *through the con-*

[60] Gordon Rohler, "The Ironic Approach: The Novels of V. S. Naipaul," in Louis James, (ed.), *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p 122.
[61] Andrzej Gasiorek, *Post-war British Fiction: Realism and After*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p 49.
[62] Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p 226.

demnatory imperial prose of former Victorian travellers to the region."[63] Actually, such a stance on Naipaul's part has brought him much notoriety even before the publication of that travelogue; George Lamming, too, disapproves of this negative attitude in the sense that

> [h]is books can't move beyond a castrated satire ... When such a writer is a colonial, ashamed of his cultural background and striving like mad to prove himself through promotion to the peaks of a 'superior' culture whose values are gravely in doubt, then satire, like the charge of philistinism, is for me nothing more than a refuge. And it is too small a refuge for a writer who wishes to be taken seriously.[64]

Plausibly enough, then, one can agree with such a negative attitude implied in Said, Gasiorek Cudjoe, and Lamming's stances, especially when approaching works, fictional and otherwise, like *A House for Mr Biswas*, *In a Free State* (1971), *A Bend in the River* (1979), *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981), and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (1998) which was dedicated to his Muslim wife, Nadira. In such works, Naipaul directs his piquant criticism at the postcolonial societies, within which he was attempting to discover the rationale behind the multi-faceted failure on the part of the individual.[65] Unsparingly though, Derek Walcott disapproves of Naipaul's tendency to associate such mal-functionality with the cultural, historical, ethno-religious, and geo-demographical backdrops of the characters.[66]

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[63] Leela Gandhi, "A Complicated Occidentalism: Colonial Desire and Disappointment in V. S. Naipaul," *International Interdisciplinary Conference Occidentalism*, La Trobe University, 2005. My italics. Accessed online via the following link: http://www.bulgc18.com/occidentalism/gandhi_en.htm

[64] George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1960), p 225.

[65] See Denis Walder, "'How Is It Going, Mr Naipaul?' Identity, Memory and the Ethics of Post-Colonial Literatures," *Journal of Common Wealth Literature*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 3, (Sage Publications, 2003), pp 5-18.

[66] Derek Walcott, "The Garden Path: V. S. Naipaul," first published in *The New Republic*, 13 April 1987, now in *What the Twilight Says: Essays*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), pp 121-133.

Nonetheless, the case is remarkably different with his fiction-autobiography hybrid work, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987). The book demonstrates a genuine, substantially personal—and to some extent universal—portrayal of not only Man's pursuit of a place to call 'home', but also the craving for a well-demarcated identity in a conspicuously fluid milieu. More importantly, the novel is deemed to present a more positive stance of Naipaul's native Trinidad as a 'homeland'. In her essay, Kavita Nandan states that in "*The Enigma of Arrival*, the narrator goes through a healing of sorts which leads him to re-present Trinidad in terms of creativity and mobility; the previous dominant association of Trinidad with ship-wreck fades."[67] Thus projecting his own postcolonial cultural perspective, Naipaul displays in *The Enigma* the demand to articulate the complexity of the quandary of self-identification. From his homeland in Trinidad to India—where he pursued his ancestral roots—and then to England where he was educated, Naipaul has constantly been in a restless search for his own identity. In consequence, he seems to have always aimed at locating his place and re-defining his own identity within the variables of places and cultures.

In fact, Naipaul constantly articulates the anxiety of the postcolonial persona in their yearning for identifying the self, which ineluctably accompanies the condition of various, movements and re-locations. In his book *Finding the Centre* (1984), however, Naipaul eloquently refers to the significant impact of travelling upon reaching a better perceptiveness of the self in the *semper mutatis* immediacy of its surroundings. Indeed, he concurrently alludes to the role that such a discernment plays in adjusting the way in which one's identity is to become more congenially constructed as best befitting one's circumstances:

> To travel was glamorous. But travel also made unsuspected demands on me as a man and a writer, and perhaps for that reason it soon became a necessary stimulus for me. *It broadened my world view; it showed me a changing world*

[67] Kavita Nandan, "V. S. Naipaul: A Diasporic Vision," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Vol. V, No. 2, (March, 2008), p 86.

> *and took me out of my own colonial shell*; it became the substitute for the mature social experience—the deepening knowledge of society—which my background denied me ... I recognized my own instincts and was content to be myself. *I learned to look in my own way*.[68]

Therefore, one can argue that Naipaul's mental journey of identity construction, which *The Enigma of Arrival* fictionally externalises by means of the narrator's, takes on the *simula-crum* of his physical journeys in which writing becomes a contrivance of (re-)defining and articulating the self. Hence, the book shrewdly ends with the innuendo that after having been to many places, and accordingly been exposed to a variety of socio-cultural miscellanies, the post-colonial subject is likely to become more capable of facing his identity loss and opening up for a new life.[69]

Divided into five sections, and mostly taking place in England where Naipaul himself hired a cottage in the countryside of Wiltshire, *The Enigma of Arrival* depicts the narrator protagonist, whom Salman Rushdie claims it to be "impossible not to see as the author,"[70] and the initial sense of unease accompanying his movement to England. He recalls "the four days of rain and mist that answered [his] anxiety about [his] work and this move to a new place."[71] Having been wandering for long, and yet still failing in identifying a place to which he can belong, disillusionment and dejection instantly ensue. As the narrator has gradually familiarised himself with the neighbourhood, however, he comes to realise that his former pre-conceptions of his new place are a little bit more than an ephemeral mirage, engendered by his misleading colonial education and upbringing. Quite significantly, the novel has early drawn attention to the dichotomy of preconception and recognition on the one hand, and its concomitant problematic impact on the process of identification on the other hand.

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[68] V. S. Naipaul, *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* (London: Penguin, 1984, reprint. 1985), p 11. My italics.
[69] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, (London: Penguin, 1987), p 318. All the subsequent references and quotations from the novel are taken from the same edition, and will be referred to by page number.
[70] Salman Rushdie, "A Sad Pastoral" in *The Guardian*, March 1987. Retrieved online via the following link: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/1987/mar/13/fiction.vsnaipaul
[71] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 12.

With enough skilfulness, Naipaul has neatly delineated the desire for adjusting the self to the bleakness of a lived reality in order not to get crestfallen under the disillusionment of pre-conceived identification. In this regard, it is worthwhile to consider Alan Lawson's argument in his distinguished paper, where he states that "[t]he inevitable recognition for the colonial, nurtured either personally or culturally on images of a distant different place, [transforms into] … a discrepancy between image and experience, [and] between culture and context."[72] Peculiarly enough, *The Enigma of Arrival* begins by showing how most of the narrator's presumptions are recurrently proven erroneous. "This idea of winter and snow had always excited me; but in England the word has lost some of its romance for me, the winters I had found in England had seldom been as extreme as I had imagined they would be."[73] Moreover, he "didn't associate flowers or the foliage of trees with any particular month. And yet [he] liked to look"; "the year was a blur to me ... It was hard to me to distinguish one section or season from the other."[74] Hence, the particularity of the individual's experience which, in turns, provides each person not only with a different perception, but also with a uniqueness of vision, forms one of the major themes of *The Enigma of Arrival*. However, the novel does not fail in displaying that with all such incidents, and many others throughout the book, it becomes unavoidably incumbent upon the narrator to be aware of what he actually experiences rather than what he expects to.

From a Foucauldian point of view, however, this predicament could, in fact, be alternatively approached when considering the 'material practices' within the postcolonial archive from which the narrator's preliminary perception emanates. Foucault argues for the "rules governing the formation of concepts"[75]—that is the regularities and customs set in a cultural

[72] Alan Lawson, "The Discovery of Nationality in Australian and Canadian Literatures," in Bill Ashcroft et al., (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p 168.
[73] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 11.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p 63.

and socio-political space with their objects and architecture, with their behaviours and norms, with their clear interest and prejudice. Being very volatile and fluid in nature, though, such practices utterly lead to the emergence of pre-conceptions through what Foucault specifies as "illusions, prejudices, errors and traditions."[76] From such an incongruity, hence, stems the initial identity crisis for the immigrant narrator; due to his colonial education, he fails in identifying himself with an image of England that goes disturbingly asymmetrical with the one he has already pre-conceived. The fiasco of coming to terms with such asymmetry is adequately delineated in the scene in which the narrator is found standing in a pre-medieval site. In that scene he arduously attempts to revisit "the very ground" and "the same weather" of the people who lived there centuries before; however he finds it rather unattainable, because they are "not now the same dawns or sunsets": they are now besmirched with the disconcerting modernity of "the vapour trails of air craft."[77] Apparently, this very perplexing situation of imagined-versus-real experience proves to be considerably problematic as the novel proceeds. It unfolds in the sense that no sooner would the narrator rectify a fault in perception than he would himself be corrected not only in terms of acquiring further information, hitherto unknown to him, but also by the relativity of native perception. Hence, the narrator is inevitably confronted with the intricacy of what Homi Bhabha calls the supremacy of a "norm given by the host society or dominant culture,"[78] in an ambience of a multiculturalism that does still have a vestige of intolerance. The book adequately depicts such initial perturbation in the vignette externalising the intrinsic agitation inherent in the narrator's sense of "strangeness and the absurdity of [his] inquiry"[79] when he first asks about the way to Jack's cottage.

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[76] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p 64.
[77] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, pp 29-50.
[78] Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in Jonathan Rutherford, (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, (London: Lawernce & Wishart, 1990), p 208.
[79] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 15.

In addition to the nuisance of image/reality experience, the novel perceptibly marks out how simultaneous with migration comes the anxiety of displacement and alienation, which in turn adds to the problematisation of identity construction. Just like Naipaul, the narrator is the outsider who is labelled with coming from a different cultural background; an alien who would not easily integrate, even after having spent a long time in England:

> There was no village to speak of. I was glad of that. I would have been nervous to meet people. After all my time in England, I still had that nervousness in a new place, that rawness of response, *still felt myself to be in the other man's country, felt my strangeness, my solitude*.[80]

Along with the malaise of estrangement and otherness, the migrant figure in the person of the narrator bitterly undergoes a sense of loss of belonging as well. Not only does he consider himself a stranger in England, but also he feels that he is the victim of an imperial past from which he is not segregated. As much as Naipaul himself, indeed, the itinerant protagonist becomes the sheer personification of what Bruce King describes as the "Indian earning his living as a writer in English in England, [whose] life is part of a larger historical process which began with the sending of indentured Indian labourers to Trinidad."[81] Then, one can plausibly argue that the novel serves as a record from which Naipaul aesthetically externalises the intricate anastomosis of migration and the concomitant maladaptation resulting from a dislocated state of being and the dilemma of identifying the self.

In this regard, it is equally significant to mention that Naipaul does not fail in taking the chance to articulate—later in the book—the necessity of embracing a multicultural, fluid identity in a constantly variable and unstable postcolonial world. Therefore, the narrator is found highlighting the indispensability of coming to terms with the mélange constituting his personality in order his identity to be better defined: "[e]ver since I had begun to identify my

[80] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 13. My italics.
[81] Bruce King, *Modern Novelists: V. S. Naipaul*, (London: Macmillan, 1993), p 140.

subjects I had hoped to arrive at a synthesis of the worlds and cultures that had made me."[82] Indeed, opening up to such a stance not only exhibits the immigrant writer in terms of what Simon Beecroft calls "a synthetic construct made by his experiences of the 'world and cultures,'"[83] but also allows for the fusion of the multiplicity of variations within the post-colonial individual, a method wherewith the problematic of defining one's identity can be rendered less troublesome. In fact, this very strategy, one can logically argue, develops into a mechanism that Bhabha claims to "open up the possibility of articulating *different*, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities."[84]

Still more pertinently, an exacerbation in the predicament of identifying the self proves to become intrinsically associated with the crescendo in the sense of estrangement and banishment, resulting from the very rupture with the familiarity and security of one's native place. Approached with such a perspective, therefore, the identity crisis proves to originate in the complexity of developing or recuperating "an effective identifying relationship between self and [the new] place."[85] In fact, such a nuisance has been poignantly designated in the Negro vignette, where, with a pensive projection of a respectively similar and personal experience, the narrator ponders upon the stark metamorphosis which is ineluctably befalling the migrating labourer:

> *At home*, among his fellows, just a few hours before, *he was a man to be envied*, his journey indescribably glamorous; *now he was a Negro*, in a straw-coloured jacket obviously not his own, too tight across his weight-lifter's shoulders ... Now, in that jacket (at home, the badge of the traveller to the temperate North),

[82] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 144.
[83] Simon Beecroft, "Sir Vidia's Shadow: V.S. Naipaul, the Writer and *The Enigma of Arrival*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1, (March, 2000), p 74.
[84] Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," pp 210-1. Emphasis is in the original.
[85] Bill Ashcroft et al., (eds.), *The Empire Writes Back*, p 8.

> he was bluffing it out, insisting on his respectability, on not being an American Negro, on not being fazed by the aeroplane and by the white people.[86]

Conceivably enough, what Naipaul tries to convey here is the very perturbability of both forfeiting the security and familiarity of home and facing the disturbance of alienation and apprehension 'there,' that is in the foreign land. In this light, it becomes quite believable that both the uprootedness from one's native place and the very disquiedtness of being displaced into an unfamiliar ground—which itself is marked by an absence of any assuring indigene to cling to—severely destabilise the former safety and content enjoyed within the congeniality of one's native land. This is done in the sense that at the initial state of being in the foreign land of the country of migration, the migrant labourer is starkly deprived of obtaining a proper sense of belonging or identification.[87] In this regard, Ashcroft et al. argue for how inherent it is in the initial existence within a *terra incognita* that "a valid and active sense of self may [become] eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration [and] transportation."[88] In fact, *The Enigma of Arrival* saliently depicts this state of fretfulness and being ill-at-ease—that is the inertia of a lack of an 'active self' with which the migrant figure is to be faced—both in the scene where the narrator recalls his increasing anxiety over arriving in New York and the ensuing incidents. Hence, he is found anxiously exclaiming: "[w]as it the fear of New York? Certainly. The city, my behaviour there at the moment of arrival, my inability to visualize the physical details of arrival, how and where I was going to spend the night—these were developing anxieties as we flew on and on."[89]

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[86] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 101.

[87] Huon Wardle, "Jamaican Adventures: Simmel, Subjectivity and Extraterritoriality in the Caribbean," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. V, No. 4, (December, 1999) pp 523–39.

[88] Bill Ashcroft et al., (eds.) *The Empire Writes Back*, p 9. Emphasis is in the original.

[89] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 102.

To such an intrinsic overlap of migration with the notion of an apposite identification of the self in terms of spatial demarcations, moreover, Doreen Massey argues for the inter-relation between place and the process of self identification with regard to their mutual instability in the postcolonial realm. In her prominent work, *Space, Place, and Gender*, she postulates that "[p]laces do not have single, unique 'identities'; they are full of internal conflicts ... over what its past has been, over what should be its present development, over what could be its future. The specificity of place is continually reproduced."[90] In this light, one can possibly argue that the problematic of identity in *The Enigma of Arrival* lies in the fact that the narrator initially perceives the surrounding place as a static piece of history that has never changed for centuries. Nonetheless, as his stay is extended, he becomes gradually aware that the area nearby is an ever changing place whose ordinary inhabitants respectively live away from the rest of the world. Increasingly, thus, the narrator starts to ponder upon the nature of the human perceptions of the contiguous milieu and how much these perceptions are affected by one's pre-conceptions of a place:

> The sacred places of our childhood ... I had lived in them imaginatively over many books and had in my fantasy set in those places the very beginning of things, had constructed out of them a fantasy of home, though I was to learn that the ground was bloody, that there had been aboriginal people there once, who had been killed or made to die away—our sacred world had vanished.[91]

Having reached such realisation, and as he comes to ultimately accept the inherent versatility of place as a construct and its impact on the process of identifying the self, the narrator admits his approval of an identity which comprises "a synthesis of the worlds and cultures that made [him]."[92] Credibly enough, this attitude proves to underscore the feasibility of the Foucauldian notion of the unfixity of identity and the alterability of conceptual experimenta-

[90] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p 155.
[91] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 318.
[92] Ibid., p 144.

tion: "[d]o not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our police and bureaucrats to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write."[93] In *The Enigma of Arrival*, this stance proves to correlate to the narrator's experience of writing—in the sense of his incessant endeavours of renovating the perimeters of thinking as well as extending an understanding of one's own activity. In an effort to spare himself further disheartening disillusionments, the narrator, hence, decides to perceive the immediate habitat within which articulating one's identity operates as a spot of recurrent volatility, flux, and deterioration: "I had trained myself to the idea of change, to avoid grief; not to see decay."[94]

In the light of what has been demonstrated, therefore, the narrator—under the new versatile *modus vivendi*—finds himself in an 'in-between' space which is characteristic of a multiplicity of possibilities in terms of cultural, social, ethnic, and otherwise *différances*. As far as the problematic of identity is concerned, however, the basic and logical reaction to such circumstances lies in what Andrew Gurr deems to be the "search for identity through self-discovery or self realization."[95] Logically enough, one can argue that such a response is neatly depicted in the scene in which the narrator reluctantly comes back to England with the intention of overcoming his mental and psychological distress; conspicuously however, he is considerably aware, now, of the indispensability of establishing a new start. Thus, he decides to settle down in Wiltshire where he is being given a new lease of life:

> For me, a miracle had occurred in this valley and in the ground of the manor where my cottage was. In that unlikely setting, in the ancient heart of England, a place where I was truly alien, *I found I was truly given a second chance, a new life*, richer and fuller than any I had had anywhere else.[96]

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[93] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p 19.
[94] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, pp 300-1.
[95] Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature*, (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981), p 14.
[96] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 96. My italics.

With the new stance, the very cottage which has initially brought the narrator the disturbance of isolation and the feeling of deracination is now transformed into a place for creation and assimilation—without coercion. In fact, such a transformation signifies the ability to find, amidst the flux of migration and travel, moments and places of stability and co-existence. Under the disguise of the protagonist of *The Enigma*, hence, Naipaul projects his own discovery of the necessity of accepting change in order to alleviate the acrimony of attaining self-identification in a distinctly divergent milieu. In doing so, the immigrant figure is allowing for a possibility of including difference without coercion, whereby the identity dilemma becomes less challenging

By the same token, the postcolonial migrant subject is ineluctably required to adjust to the new situation in which the adherence to the notion of developing a fixed or rigidly stable identity becomes intricately problematic, particularly in the case of having a multicultural background. Indeed, this is why Naipaul makes the narrator state at the end of the novel that "[e]very generation was to take us further away from those sanctities. But we remade the world for ourselves; every generation does that."[97] It stands apparent, then, that Naipaul is aware that his identity will not be fixed, nor will it be totally identified by the past. On the contrary, he reaches a conviction in line of which it becomes unavoidable for the postcolonial subject to negotiate between spaces inasmuch as between cultures. In this regard, the novel depicts the narrator getting down to writing as an effective means of achieving subjectivity and cultural negotiation, indispensable for re-constructing his identity within the complication of landscape, culture, and social differences of the postcolonial world. As Richard Kelly argues, it is by means of articulating and presenting all the events and experiences through which they have gone that the postcolonial immigrant can decrease the pain of being a displaced colonial man; the act of writing provides him with the *panacea* for his sense of dis-

[97] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 318.

location. "[T]hrough writing," hence, the narrator becomes "at last able to take control of the fragments of his past and shape them into a[n] autobiography."[98]

In fact, the same challenging conundrum of displacement, being the direct corollary of migration, and the crisis of identity has been equally well delineated in one of Naipaul's major previous works—that is his semi-autobiographical novel, *The Mimic Men*. In this work, Naipaul brings out to advantage how the predicament of identity construction of the migrant figure emanates from, and is exacerbated by, what Nicoleta Medrea specifies as the "fragmented and chaotic post-colonial world [where] the characters feel estranged from the world around them and go through a crisis of identity which leaves them hollowed and unable to reinvent themselves."[99] Thus, in the form of the realistic narrative of traditional English fiction, the novel demarcates its settings in both the fictional, Caribbean island of Isabella and London, the metropolis. Indeed, a careful reading of the novel would show that the perspective spanning the historical, socio-cultural, and geo-demographical backdrops of Isabella directly interlinks with that of Naipaul's native Trinidad.[100] The book aptly provides a portrayal of the perplexing *status quo* in the newly independent country—that is Isabella—where the formerly colonised inhabitants seem to have been rendered considerably incapable of establishing order or administering their own country in the post-Independence era. Under the legacy of the cultural hegemony of colonialism, the formerly colonised natives have been reduced to perceive themselves in an inferior position as compared to that of their former colonisers. With such a perception, the latter enjoy all that the people of Isabella are deprived

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[98] Richard Kelly, *V. S. Naipaul*, (New York: Continuum, 1989), p 90.

[99] Nicoleta Medrea, "*The Mimic Men*: In Search of Imagined Identities." A paper in the project of 'Transnational Network for Integrated Management of Postdoctoral Research in Communicating Sciences', published by the Proceedings of the "European Integration—Between Tradition and Modernity" Congress, Petru Maior University, (2011), p 674. Retrieved on-line via the following link http://www.upm.ro/facultati_departamente/stiinte_litere/conferinte/situl_integrare_europeana/Lucrari4/MEDREA.pdf

[100] I refer here to the argument which Selwyn Cudjoe provides about Naipaul's articulation of his perception of his native Trinidadian society. See Cudjoe's *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*, pp 33-35.

of: namely, not only a seemingly rich culture, but also a state of discipline, regularity, prosperity, and accomplishment.

Appositely enough, the image of such a distressing condition is represented in *The Mimic Men* through one of its narrator's ejaculations about the fettering, disorderly condition in his native land: "[t]o be born on an island like Isabella, *an obscure* New World transplantation, *second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder*."[101] Hence comes the increasing desire to identify with all that the colonising power symbolises. With migration—and the ensuing exile at some later stage, as is the case with Ralph Singh, the narrator of the novel—nonetheless, the postcolonial immigrant is found stranded away from their homeland, a perturbing mode of existence in which one's own original traditions, ethnic and otherwise particularities would ultimately become meaningless and of less significant value; thus, an identification with the remote conventions and codes of the native land is rendered an improbable possibility. However, as the immigrant realises how different they are, in terms of their racial, socio-cultural, and ethno-religious backdrops, they discern that they can never fully and effectively associate themselves with the codes of practice in the country of migration either. They endure, therefore, a conglomeration of dislodgment, placelessness, disintegration, and an avoidable loss of identity. They get lost in their new postcolonial habitat and, consequently, turn into 'mimic men' who solely replicate and echo the life style, value, and views of the former coloniser. After having been to the coloniser's metropolis, Ralph is found stating in a pensive retrospection that "[w]e pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new."[102] As Homi Bhabha argues, the challenge of identity becomes complicated further by means of this very mimetic practice, in whose course reality is replaced with the *desideratum* of identifying with the coloniser

[101] V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, (London: Penguin, 1969), p 118. My italics. All the subsequent quotations from the book are taken from the same edition and will be referred to by page number.
[102] Ibid., p 146.

'other', which often brings in a misleading alteration of self-representation.[103] Thus, Ralph is conceivably aware that mimicry by itself is a destructive catalyst which considerably diminishes the aptitude for collective thinking and action, necessary for a desired regeneration on the part of the immigrant; yet he does not seem to have done well in avoiding being a 'mimic man' insofar as he knows he is "a specific product of a particular socio-economic formation called colonialism."[104]

What remarkably draws one's attention in *The Mimic Men* is the structural pattern through which the stark metamorphosis that has befallen its central character—Ralph Singh, a former impeachable politician, now exiled in London—is delineated. The book is divided into three main parts, and is chronologically sequenced in terms of the events displayed. Beginning *in medias res*, the narrative starts with Ralph being in London, reflecting on his life in the boarding house run by Lieni; his university days; numerous sexual exploits; and then his ultimate bond to an English girl, Sandra, in matrimony. In retrospection, the narrative shifts then to Ralph's arrival in his native Isabella, delineating not only his childhood amongst family and school companions, but also his flourishing job in property development as a building contractor and his entrance into the vast world of politics with his friend Browne. In this part, Ralph provides an account of the end of his marriage and the abrupt withdrawal from engaging in political affairs in his homeland. The sequence of events turns to where Ralph is seen back in London, exiled, settling in the former boarding house (which has been made a hotel now), comparing his impressions of the city to those he initially developed in the aftermath of the Second World War, and pondering upon his inglorious political fiasco, which he deems to have resulted from the deficiency of his own society.[105] Thus, with Ralph becoming the central axis around which the account of childhood and up-

[103] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp 85-88.
[104] Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*, p 100.
[105] I am indebted, here, to Peter Nazareth who provides the summary of events as such. Please see the following: Peter Nazareth, "*The Mimic Men* as a Study of Corruption," in Robert D. Hammer, (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on V. S. Naipaul*, (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1977), p 140.

bringing, educational background, and political career revolves, the significance of laying out the narrative as such could be traced in Suman Gupta's argument in line of which "the act of writing and the act of reading merge into an identical unchronological and unlinear pro-cess: almost metaphorically the writer and the reader reach a harmonious relationship which is deliberately outside the simple logic of linear narrative."[106] Such a non-linearity helps designate, more efficiently as John Thieme suggests, the social, cultural and psychological annoyances with which Ralph is confronted as he endeavours to bring the chaos of his turbulent life into a state of order.[107]

As is the case with *The Enigma of Arrival*, the disruption of dislocation remains the principal *raison d'être* of the identity crisis in *The Mimic Men*. In the latter work, such a disturbance proves to have taken on a diversity of forms. It ranges from the immigration to the metropolitan centre of the coloniser which comes concomitant with a geographical and socio-cultural displacement; to the predicament of exile and alienation on both the social and cultural levels; and to, ultimately then, the experience of cultural mimesis in whose course the postcolonial immigrant metamorphoses into a cultural hybrid where an ambience of a 'hybrid space'—which Homi Bhabha calls the 'Third Space'—is generated. This space is characterised by being neither the 'Self,' nor the 'Other'; and, although it conduces to a crescendo in the sense of being estranged from one's own identity, it allows for other techniques by which the self is defined and subjectivity is attained.[108] In this regard, Bhabha argues further that such a 'hybrid displacing space' not only interlinks the native culture of the colonised with that of the imperial centre, but also allows for the materialisation of new patterns of confronting both the agency and authenticity of the hegemonic colonial culture of the coloniser; "[it]

[106] Suman Gupta, *V. S. Naipaul: Writers and Their Work*, (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1999), p 30.
[107] Please see John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction*, (Hertford: Hansib Publications, 1987), p 113.
[108] Homi Bhabha, "Postcolonial Criticism," in Stephen J. Greenblatt and Giles B. Gunn, (eds.), *Rewarding the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, (New York: Modern Language Association, 1992), pp 57-8.

enables other positions to emerge ... displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority."[109] Robert Young, however, expounds that hybridity "can never *be* third because, as a monstrous inversion, a miscreated perversion of its progenitors, it exhausts the differences between them."[110] In this light, the very peculiarity of the space between cultures becomes itself problematic in nature and noticeably contributes to the problematisation of identifying the self. This, in fact, elucidates Naipaul's ambivalent perception of hybridity; as challengingly experienced by Ralph, it is a disruptive corollary of colonialism, on the one hand, inasmuch as a constructive consequence, on the other hand. I argue, how-ever, that the protean nature of being culturally hybrid allows room for Ralph for the possibility of engendering adaptable identities within an intricate cultural ambience of alterity and otherness.

More significantly, *The Mimic Men* provides a depiction of the intersection of migration and dislodgement with the exacerbation of the predicament of identity from which the colonial and postcolonial immigrant bitterly suffers in the novel—and this issue can be traced in Naipaul's own life. In fact, this is a recurrent motif which is to be found in his later work, *The Enigma of Arrival*. In his native Trinidad, Naipaul descends from a small ethnicity of East Indians whose ancestors departed from their original home in India as indentured labourers, with the intention of accumulating wealth and returning home afterwards; they ended up, instead, residing in Trinidad, still with a rampant sense of estrangement.[111] Home becomes, therefore, a trope signifying the pivotal space whose absence brings about the individual's isolation and alienation. Since his early childhood, Ralph's reaction to the sense of neglect manifests in his idealising reverie of his motherland, India; he is found absorbed in reading

[109] Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Jonathan Rutherford, (ed.), (London: Lawernce & Wishart, 1990), p 211.
[110] Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p 23. Emphasis is in the original.
[111] I am indebted to Landeg White who has provided an ample account of Naipaul's origin. Please see Landeg White, *V. S. Naipaul: A Critical Introduction*, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd: 1975), pp 3-7.

books on the homeland Asiatic and Persian Aryans, dreaming of "Central Asian horsemen, *among whom I* [that is Ralph] *am one*, looking for their leader."[112] Thus embarking upon creating an ideal and heroic *simulacrum* of his assumed past, which itself goes incongruent with the real-life circumstances in Isabella, Ralph is seen not only endeavouring to re-construct history in order the better to re-establish his identity, but also arduously trying to seek an identification with a currently remote code of tradition from which he is apparently now aloof.

Hence, on the one hand, disillusionment ensues as Ralph comes to realise the futility of a task he was enthusiastically determined to undertake. Such a disheartening realisation is neatly depicted in the vignette where he goes to the beach house possessed by his grandfather only to have witnessed the death of three children, who were drowning in the sea, while the fishermen seemed to have done next to nothing to save the children's lives.[113] At that moment, Ralph comes to recognise that Isabella is unlikely to be the best landscape for which he is searching in his quest to identify the self. In this regard, John Thieme observes that the beach scene refers to the myth of Perseus and his rescue from drowning by Dictys, a heroic fisher-man, who stands in contrast with the nonchalant and rather selfish Afro-Caribbean fishermen. Therefore, Thieme claims that Ralph's experience on the beach has made him "too aware of the distance between Isabella and his true, pure world."[114] On the other hand, moreover, Ralph is seen rendered incapable of apprehending the culture of his origin. He appears immensely shocked at the sacrifice of the race horse, Tamango, despite the fact that he is aware of the symbolic importance of such an act in Hindu tradition; Donald Mackenzie conceives of this ritual performance as a means by which prosperity and fertility are secured.[115] Ralph intensely idealises both his Hindu past and culture, and yet he is obviously

[112] V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, p 98. My italics.
[113] Please see *The Mimic Men*, pp 108-9.
[114] John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction*, p 117.
[115] Donald A. Mackenzie, *India*, (London: Studio, 1985), pp 90-1.

incapable of taking Hindu-ism in; when the horse is killed, however, the ideal past proves to collapse irretrievably with "the concrete experience shocking the child."[116] With a stance as such, one can plausibly argue that the sacrifice makes Ralph perplexingly aware of an Indian world which is incongruent with the dignified and idyllic realm of imagination. In consequence, the Hindu rituals prove to have ultimately forfeited their significance and value in Isabella insofar as the people, themselves, have lost their tying bond with India, its culture, customs and traditions. Hence comes Bruce King's argument that having left India and gone to the Caribbean islands, Indians have been doomed to an irretrievable sense of segregation and dislocation:

> The process of losing one's Indianness started with leaving India. That was the original sin, the fall. After that Indian traditions could only either decay into deadening ritual or become diluted, degraded and eventually lost through outside influences and intermarriage with others.[117]

Therefore, as Ralph fails not only in establishing an unwavering connection with the peculiarity of his ethnic background, but also in the very social and cultural identification with Isabella and its inhabitants, he determines to seek the construction of his identity elsewhere. "[I]n a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, [where there is] no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests,"[118] immigration to the long desired world of order and discipline of the metropolis looms in Ralph's horizon as the penultimate antidote to his predicament. This option has been corroborated, in fact, after the ignominious fiasco with which he was befallen in his political career. No sooner has he set foot in London, however, than he comes to the appalling realisation that the city almost promises nothing to an East Indian colonial subject; a failure of identifying himself with the postcolonial ambiance of London shortly ensues. Once there, he appears to have finally

[116] John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction*, p 133.
[117] Bruce King, *Modern Novelists: V. S. Naipaul*, (London: Macmillan, 1993), p 68.
[118] V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, p 206.

acknowledged that he could never be an Englishman, in spite of his education, insofar as one can only be English if one is born in England. In this light, Louis Simpson argues that the agitation of displacement in the metropolis is what the postcolonial immigrant is most likely to face:

> [t]he descriptions of the immigrant's life in *The Mimic Men* show how disillusioning that life could be. Nothing would have prepared the West Indian for the English climate or the dreariness of living in a boarding house. Confronted with greasy wallpapers and a gas meter into which you had to feed shillings to keep warm, he would have had long thoughts.[119]

With Ralph, whom Andrzej Gasiorek considers to "act as a metonym for the West Indies,"[120] the problematic of identity is exasperated with immigration, or what Gasiorek calls a 'chosen exile.'[121] Such an unexpected aggravation is caused by the sense of an irretrievable segregation on the levels of geography, culture, and ethnicity: that is the exilic experience which has brought about a rampant alienation from the immediate social and cultural surroundings. Hence, indeed, comes Ralph's likening of the reality of London—in which he is but the immigrant who lives among a group of other displaced people on the fringes of the city—to a malevolent living organism feeding on the personalities it divides:

> [i]n the great city, so rooted in its soil ... Those of us who came to it lost some of our solidity; we were trapped into fixed, flat postures, and this growing dissociation between ourselves and the city, scores of separate meetings, not linked even by ourselves, who became nothing other than perceivers: everyone reduced, reciprocally, to a succession of such meetings, so that first experience and then the personality divided bewilderingly into compartments.[122]

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[119] Louis Simpson, "Disorder and Escape in the Fiction of V. S. Naipaul," *The Hudson Review*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 4, (Winter, 1984), p 574.
[120] Andrzej Gasiorek, *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p 51.
[121] Ibid., p 53.
[122] V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, p 27.

Instead of attaining his much yearned-for desire of finding his autonomous identity in the very place where he has hitherto deemed the ideal landscape, Ralph recognises that his dreams of pulling together the fragments of his identity into a collective, independent whole were almost next to an ephemeral mirage. Exile and displacement have brought him in "the panic of ceasing to feel [himself] a whole person."[123]

Yet, Ralph is not denied the possibility of achieving subjectivity through writing, which becomes a mechanism by dint of which he hopes to attain agency by finding the reasons for his malfunction; in fact, this is a recurrent theme in *The Enigma of Arrival*. By getting down to writing his memoirs, Ralph gets to finally learn how, as a postcolonial figure, the experiences of coloniality have considerably influenced and framed both his life and his personality. Born to a state of chaos and mayhem, Ralph craves for a sense of control over his own life, which he eventually attains through writing which serves as a "means of releasing" him from the "barren cycle of events."[124] Moreover, by articulating all the different times, places, and circumstances, he has hitherto experienced, Ralph embarks upon putting all the parts together in order to complete the mosaic-like mystery of identification. This being the case, not only does writing become a contrivance to reconstruct one's identity, but also it develops into a mechanism of both getting rid of the crippling sense of being a fragmented persona and giving meaning to one's existence. Hence indeed comes Richard Kelly's observation of Naipaul's (quasi)autobiographical works whose protagonists, "through writing," become "at last able to take control of the fragments of [their] past and shape them into a spiritual and psychological autobiography."[125] More significantly in this regard, it is worth considering the remarkable observation of Anthony Boxill in whose light the composition of *The Mimic Men* "occupied the time from August 1964 to July 1966, a period of over twenty months, similar

[123] V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*, p 27
[124] Landeg White, *V. S. Naipaul: A Critical Introduction*, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1975), p 180.
[125] Richard Kelly, *V. S. Naipaul*, (New York: Continuum, 1989), p 90.

to the amount of time, Ralph Singh, its narrator, indicates it has taken him to write his story."[126]

As Ralph of *The Mimic Men* obtains agency and subjectivity through writing, so does the unnamed narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*. Through writing, then, the narrator manages to bring together all the fragmentary insinuations into a form of a neatly-arranged, cyclically-chronological autobiography, projecting the significance of developing as a writer, which helps him, at last, attain the well-articulated identity for which he was long searching. With writing, thus, the narrator is enabled to include in his own '*enigma of arrival*' the diversity of experiences and knowledge whereby he reaches the mastery of recognition from a multi-dimensional perspective. This, in fact, has been artistically achieved by means of tackling re-curring motifs and themes: migration and (in)dependency; time, change, and (dis)continuity; along with knowledge, illness and death. While re-describing, retelling and even revising everything that was formerly delineated, from the perspective of new contexts and ways of perception, the narrator is found stating towards the end of the second section, 'The Journey', which serves as a record of his life up to, and inclusive of, the symbolic rebirth in Wiltshire, that:

> With me everything started from writing. Writing had brought me to England, had sent me away from England; had given me a vision of romance; had nearly broken me with disappointment ... writing strengthened me; it quelled anxiety. And now writing restored me again ... *Now it was writing, the book, that gave savour, possibility to each day, and took me on night after night*.[127]

In her reading of the book, Judith Levy argues that the incorporation of a linear, sequential narrative of the narrator's life as a writer into an assemblage of narratives where the linear

[126] Anthony Boxill, *V. S. Naipaul's Fiction: In Quest of the Enemy*, (York: York Press, 1983), p 49.
[127] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 154. My italics.

progress of time has been rendered rather irrelevant provides the writing experience with a sense of atemporality: an experience taking place out of time.[128]

In the light of what has already been demonstrated, an observant reading of *The Enigma of Arrival* shows that not only the content—as comprising the account of the narrator's own life story which, itself, ultimately leads to the creation of the book as a whole—but also the form is highly significant in assessing the mechanism through which the writer-narrator's subjectivity is constructed. As stated on its titular page, *The Enigma* is "A novel in five sections"; these sections are 'Jack's Garden', 'The Journey', 'Ivy', 'Rooks', and 'The Ceremony of Farewell'. The structure, then, is framed in terms of forty-one subsections, split almost evenly among the first four divisions of the book which are then concluded by the fifth section as an epilogue; the arrangement of the subdivisions unfolds as follows: I. xii; II. vii; III. xii; IV. ix; and V. i. Three sections, namely the first, the third, and the fourth, deal with narrator's abode in a cottage on Waldenshaw Estate, Wiltshire, spanning ten years of his life. The second section, 'The Journey', records the narrator's life up to his new recognition of himself where he states that "[t]hrough writing—knowledge and curiosity feeding off one another—I had arrived at a new idea of myself and my world."[129] The final section, remarks the death of the narrator's sister back home in Trinidad.

It is worth mentioning, in this regard, that the pattern in line of which the account on the sojourn in Wiltshire is narrated is not one of chronology: it is, rather, a single-time succession of space, during whose course various cycles—of nature, birth and demise, flux and displacement, life and death—are concurrently taking place. Opposed to this lay-out, however, 'The Journey'—despite comprising a cycle of its own, as it begins and ends in the present time—is a linear narrative tracking time before arriving in Wiltshire in terms of a

[128] Judith Levy, *V. S. Naipaul: Displacement and Autobiography*, (London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995), pp, 102-3.
[129] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 145.

series of incidents mostly associated with writing. Hence drawing on Levy's argument that "the insertion of the section 'The Journey' into the sequence of the cyclical sections on Wiltshire is a structural representation of the incorporation of the pre-Wiltshire experience into rebirth at Wiltshire,"[130] one can argue for the immense role of writing—being practiced in Wiltshire—in regenerating the self. Hitherto, the narrative was an account of failure: the narrator is the dislocated migrant, constantly moving from a place to another without ever settling in, and, thus, failing the long-awaited autonomy and peace of mind; with all the orderliness and confidence that writing has been imparting to him, instead, he is now "given a second chance, a new life, richer and fuller than any [he] had had anywhere else."[131]

Bruce King argues, moreover, that "writing requires material, an idea, a story, a setting, dialogue, themes, a model, interest in others, a sense of inquiry, an ability to see, practice."[132] In this regard, it becomes ineluctable on the narrator's part to realise—and, in fact, he *did* finally realise—that "to get anywhere in the writing, [he] had first of all to define [him]self very clearly to [him]self."[133] This is because "only his own life and experience could be the basis of his subject matter and themes. Which *Enigma* is."[134] Hence, the narrator initially conceives of himself as a former colonial who has transformed into a homeless cosmopolitan. Afterwards, however, he embarks upon defining his purpose—that is, devoting his life to becoming a thriving writer in English, irrespective of where he is, deeming English to be the *materia cruda* by dint of which he could reach a wider audience. In this light, therefore, this very attainment of a '*nosce te ipsum*'[135] ultimately helps the narrator come to terms, and consequently, resolve not only his ever-present sense of displacement but also the resultant identity crisis from which he has long enough suffered. Having finally demarcated

[130] Judith Levy, *V. S. Naipaul: Displacement and Autobiography*, p 103.
[131] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 96.
[132] Bruce King, *Modern Novelists: V. S. Naipaul*, (London: Macmillan, 1993), p 147.
[133] V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, p 141.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Latin for 'Know yourself'.

the setting of his story in the bucolic 'England of Hardy's novels' and 'Constable paintings'; and contrasted his successful vocation as a writer with the failure of both Alan and his landlord as writers; and by renovating the local houses, amidst the decomposition and disorder of the manor, into a design of his own, the narrator has attained his long desired subjectivity declaring himself the inheritor whose efforts have guaranteed him a place and made him "part of the new order, the new literary tradition, of the migration of the world's people."[136]

Drawing on what has been hitherto elucidated, therefore, Naipaul's autobiographical and quasi-autobiographical works, *The Enigma of Arrival*, and *The Mimic Men* shed light on the problematic situation of what Selwyn Cudjoe calls "to be a colonial subject in a post-colonial society."[137] Both works extensively reveal their protagonists' changing of perceptions upon arrival in different countries after leaving their native land, Trinidad; they trace their narrators' lives in exile and diaspora, bringing out to advantage the initial, yet ineluctable, fragmentations among culture, geography, ethnicity, and ultimately the self, which are all concomitant with immigration and displacement. Both novels, moreover, underscore the significance of writing as a mechanism through which agency and subjectivity are obtained; they depict Naipaul's endeavour to express his own intricate experiences, displaying the complexity of what Breytenbach describes as "[t]o be an exile is to be written."[138] Naipaul, however, who is of a formerly marginalised origin, that is a colonised people, intends to embark upon a centripetal movement by which he drags his identity from the margin to the centre. Throughout *The Enigma of Arrival*, and noticeably *The Mimic Men*, he has managed to grasp an awareness of his ethnic particularity and discovered a position for himself towards the definition of his identity. Pretty much as his protagonists, nonetheless, Naipaul has not failed

[136] Bruce King, *Modern Novelists: V. S. Naipaul*, p 148.
[137] Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*, p 99.
[138] Breyten Breytenbach, "The Long March from Hearth to Heart," in Arien Mack, (ed.), *Home: a Place in the World*, (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p 69.

in ultimately realising that identity is constructed and contingent rather than being given. Thus, the books stand as authentic representations of the attempt of their author to re-discover and affirm his identity after a strenuous process of learning and experiences.

Migration, Cultural Hybridity, and the Challenge of Self-Discovery and Identity Construction in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*

In the Arab world, the collapse of the colonial empires in the post-Second World War epoch has contributed to the emergence of several sovereign states, most of which have been remarkably influenced by the former experience of colonialism and imperialism.[139] With the new *status quo*, the postcolonial subject's attempts to achieve a functional reality have been articulated by means of the incessant endeavours to re-create one's identity which has long been exposed, partially or entirely, to a systemic process of sabotage, injury, and marginalisation. From within such a context, hence, a new mode of writing has emerged as an autonomous literature foregrounding cultural conflicts inasmuch as examining the binary nature of the relationship between the centre and the periphery. In this light, Arab literature composed after the colonial era not only wields narrative as a "method [used by] the colonized people to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history."[140] It also conscientiously questions as well as it challenges the Western cultural patterns of cultural hegemony, which have significantly played a vital role in fixing the relationship between the Occident and the Orient—that is a relationship based on the naturalisation of the superiority of the Western civilisation and the inferiority of the African/Eastern one.[141] Out of the complexity of such

[139] In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that while the "age of empire" has formally come to an end after World War Two, imperialism has left a cultural legacy in the formerly colonised civilisations: a legacy whose residues are still traced today, dominating the international systems of power.
[140] Edward Said, "Introduction," *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1993), p xiii.
[141] Disapproving such a negative stance, Tayeb Salih, in his *Season of Migration to the North*, has made the unnamed narrator recall to memory the denigrating manner with which Professor Maxwell Foster-Keen used to address Mustafa Sa'eed: "[y]ou, Mr Sa'eed, are the best example of the fact that our *civilizing mission* in Africa

cultural and socio-political circumstances, then, Tayeb Salih stands as one of the pioneers and most prominent postcolonial Arab authors. His widely acclaimed *Mawsim al Hijra ila Shamal* (*Season of Migration to the North*)—published ten years after the Sudan has received its independence from Britain on 1st January, 1956, and only one year before the notorious Arab defeat of 1967—densely explores a multiplicity of themes, which range in magnitude from the problematic of identity and cultural hybridity to cross-colonial experiences and 'orientalism.'[142] Before engaging in an analysis of the novel, however, it is worth shedding light on the development of the narrative writing in modern Arabic literature within whose framework the novel operates.

To begin with, any argument about the emergence of the modern Arabic novel would prove inadequate in default of a consideration of the framework of influence, opposition and interaction between the Arab and Western cultures. The *fin de siècle*—deemed by many Arab literary historians and theorists as the culmination of the 'Nahda,' or what is widely known as the Arab cultural renaissance—has brought the Arab world a momentous crescendo in terms of literary achievement. Most writers of the period, primarily those writing from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Sudan, have been attempting to catch up with the modern world by means of embarking upon an achievement that goes parallel to the Western accomplishment in various fields of knowledge. In this regard, the Western ideas, feats, and ideals, the French Revolution, the democratic reforms, and scientific findings, to mention the least, prove to have played a vital role in the intellectual arousal of Arabs. Hence, Waïl Hassan points out in his essay, "Modern Postcolonial Theory and Arabic Literature", that

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is of no avail. After all the effort we've made to educate you, *it's as if you'd come out of the jungle for the first time*." Please see: Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, Denys Johnson-Davies, (trans.), (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), pp 93-4. My italics. All the subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from the same edition and will be referred to by page number.

[142] See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp 31-32.

> [i]t was not simply Arab intellectuals' fascination with modern European civilisation but also, and more urgently, its colonial threat that led to the movement known as *Nahda* (or 'revival') in the mid-nineteenth century. In the wake of the short-lived French occupation of Egypt, Muhammed Ali's first aim was to build a modern army, and therefore the purpose of the educational missions he began sending to France in the late 1820's was to borrow European science and technology. Those missions eventually exposed Arab intellectuals to European culture, thought, and literature.[143]

As a result of such an encounter, innovative patterns of expression have taken place in the literary arena. Poetry, for instance, has forfeited its long-established association with the description of chivalric values, lamenting the deprivation of the beloved, or glorifying one's clan and ancestors: so far typical themes of Arabic poetry; instead, it has assumed new roles, directing the angle of interest onto socio-political issues.

Concomitant with this thematic novelty, moreover, a formal leap has been initiated, in line of which the traditional structures have been substituted by Western ones and the outdated expressions by a contemporary poetic diction. Yet more significantly, this very interlude of immense inter-cultural influence has witnessed a stark metamorphosis in the literary scene: that is the materialisation of the novel as a literary genre *per se*, which was then considered an unparalleled literary form with no roots in the Arabic literary tradition, contrasting poetry which has long enjoyed having a rich repertoire. In this regard, the Western prose narrative was welcomed into the Arabic literary heritage owing to its potential for capturing and representing daily life within an intricate system of relationships. Aspects of the novel, such as dialogism, polyphony,[144] and irony, made it the more-convenient literary form which

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[143] Waïl Hassan, "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application," *Journal of Modern Arabic Literature*, Vol. XXXIII, No 1, (2002), p 57.

[144] In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, Bakhtin uses the term to describe the kind of novel Dostoevsky had initiated, where polyphony does not refer to the simple co-presence of harmonising voices. To Bakhtin, the polyphonic novel is defined by the quality of the relationship between the narrator and the character, in which the former allows the latter the right to the final word: i.e. the character's voice is never ultimately submerged by narrator's. Hence comes Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's novels in terms of "*a plurality of independent*

succeeded in representing the reality of Arab societies and the life of their citizens more than any other existing form of expression. In this regard, it is worth noticing that the stark alteration of Arab societies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has not only imposed instantaneous challenges, but also brought about vital transformations in all respects of life, ranging from culture to politics, economics, and education.

In fact, the early ventures at narrative writing seem to have been immensely influenced and oriented by Western prototypes of thoughts and ideologies; in a *modus operandi* similar to that of the 'masters' in the West, then, Arab writers have been attempting to lay bare the silence surrounding the socio-political conditions of both the individual and the community. Hence, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra—a Palestinian poet, novelist, and literary critic—argues that Marxist and Existentialist ideologies prove to have instigated the revolutionary spirit of early Arabic novels during the 1940s and the 1950s where the trend which is based on the motivations of 'social justice' and 'the human condition' gained a

> powerful momentum, which coincided with the appearance in Arabic of the Existentialists. When Sartre and Camus were translated and studied all through the fifties, they took Arab intellectual life by storm. Sartre was the special favourite of Beirut's literary workshop, and the reaction in Baghdad and Cairo was tremendous. One did not have to agree with everything Sartre said, but his ideas became pivotal to the new generation of writers who sought involvement in the political and social issues of their times.[145]

In this light, the Arabic narrative genre proves to have significantly initiated both stylistic and thematic enhancements, by dint of which it has acquired the capacity of depicting the concerns of the Arabs in a more striking way than any other mode of literary expression. The distinctive features of narrative writing have found appeal amongst many Arab writers who

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and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices. What unfolds in his novels is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with his own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event[s he depicts]." See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Caryl Emerson, (ed. & trans.), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p 6. Emphasis is in the original.

[145] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. II, (Brill, 1971), pp 87-8.

have considered it an adequate literary genre which could not only absorb, but also better reflects the major metamorphoses and frustrations of the Arab societies. Socially speaking, moreover, the new literary form has succeeded in reaching some *terra incognita*, hitherto untrodden in the Arabic culture. Hence, sexual issues, Arabic patriarchy and male-dominated culture, and the position of women within their community have all become not only subject matters of considerable popularity, but also a vital constituent of earnest debates. In this regard, it should not pass unobserved that the emergence of the Arabic novel has helped raise the issue of language. As an established literary genre, the novel has given Arabic a new dimension other than its communicative function, that is, granting it an operative attribute by means of the establishment of new relationships and/or a dialogue between convention and novelty—between the Arabic literary heritage and the unfamiliar texts produced in, and imported from, elsewhere in the world.

From the late 1950s, and early 1960s, however, the Arabic novel proves to have taken on another dimension due to a multiplicity of factors. These factors range in significance from the breakdown of the colonial empires with its consequent waves of mass-migration to multi-faceted historical and socio-political changes. Hence, the emergence of authoritarian regimes in most of the newly-independent, Arab states, the economic and social mayhem in the post-Liberation era, and the ignominious 1967 defeat in the war against Israel have all played the role of the catalyst in the maturation of the Arabic novel. In this phase, the question of identity has become a dominating theme, being expressed not only through the reconsideration of the interconnection between the personal and the collective history, but also by examining the very functionality of a fixed conventionality in an epoch of a vast intercultural interface and significant universal changes. Under the influence of the remarkable transformations befalling the world in the post-World War Two era, therefore, Arab authors began enhancing their attempts at reaching new ways of looking at the world from new

perspectives, writing back to the empire in an endeavour to restore the collective identity. In this regard, the literary enlightenment of the 1960s and after—having declared an utter break with the traditional modes of expression—could be seen as the corollary of a variety of intricate aesthetic and formal formations and transformations through which Arab writers have addressed the new issues of interest. In this respect, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra points out that

> The leit-motifs of the new writers were: freedom, anxiety, protest, struggle, social progress, individual salvation, rebellion, heroism. There was to be commitment to humanity. Altogether, there was something in the air rather akin to what had happened in England and France twenty years earlier—in the Thirties. Hemingway, a novelist of action, became belatedly almost as popular as Sartre.[146]

In fact, these aspects, about which Jabra speaks, noticeably materialise in the works of many authors: Hani Al-Raheb, Ghada Al-Samman, and Hanna Mina (Syria); Ghassan Kanafani (Palestine); Naguib Mahfuz, Gamal Al-Ghitani, and Nawal Al-Saadawi (Egypt); Tayeb Saleh (Sudan); Ahlam Mosteghanemi (Algeria), and Mohammed Berrada (Morocco) among others. Now assuming their autonomy from the masters of the novel in the West, modern Arab novelists have been embarking upon their subject matter in a more profound and independent way. In this regard, the recognition of 'authenticity' is no longer to be seen from the mere perspective of culture and history; rather, it is to be approached from a broader angle which allows for a deep scrutiny and interrogation of the components of these two discourses. This is, in brief, the general atmosphere in which *Season of Migration to the North* has appeared.

As for *Season of Migration*—Salih's *magnum opus par excellence*—one can argue that no Arabic novel has attained ever before as much interest and discussion both in the Arab World and the West.[147] Such acclaim with which the novel was received could indeed be related to the fact that it was the first postcolonial Arabic novel to effectively depict the

[146] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," p 88.
[147] For a comprehensive list of the works that have engaged in an analysis of the novel, please see the praiseworthy article of Ami Elad-Bouskila: Ami Elad-Bouskila, "Shaping the Cast of Characters: the Case of Al-Tayyib Salih," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, (July, 1998), pp 59-60.

dichotomous and historically conflicting East/West discourse, subjecting to a grave interrogation not only the intricacy of cultural hybridity, but also the problematic of identity and representation in the postcolonial ambiance. It is "a cohesive, dense, well interwoven, captivating, and a dark novel," states the Syrian literary critic Muhieldin Subhi; "it contains a multiplicity of queries about the quintessence of the human existence in history and also the quintessence of the individual's existence not only in their own society, but also in an alien society."[148] In fact, since its publication, the book has remained a source of incessant critical debate in post-colonial studies, transcending "time and geography, [and] moving away from the particular to suggest the universality of the experiences [it] portray[s]."[149] Among such experiences, the novel neatly delineates the rather problematic reciprocality between the Western colonising power and the Arab World, advancing a critique of the hierarchical relationship between the European colonialist modality and the re-constructed, now autonomous identity of the indigenous people. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that although the novel does not generally seem to adopt a totally irrefutable or an irrevocable stance, one can possibly argue that the British presence in the region has contributed to a fracture in the Sudanese collective identity:

> The English District Commissioner *was a god* who had a free hand over an area larger than the whole of the British Isles. *They used to behave like gods*. They would employ us,[150] the junior government officials who were natives of the country, to bring in taxes. The people would grumble and complain to the Commissioner, *and naturally it was [he] who was indulgent and showed mercy. And*

[148] Mohieldin Subhi, "*Season of Migration to the North*: Between Othello and Meursault" in *At-Tayyeb Salih: 'Abkaryy al-Riwaya al-'Arabiyya* (Tayeb Salih: The Genius of the Arabic Novel), Ahmad Said Mohammadieh et al., (eds.), (Beirut: Dar al-'Awdeh, 1976, reprint. 1984), p 39. My own translation of the original Arabic.

[149] Hani Al-Raheb, "Two Invasions and One Tragic End: The Dialectics of North and South in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*," *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies*, No. 17, (Spring, 1994), p 50.

[150] In the original Arabic, the word used is 'yosakherunana' which is derived from the root 'sakhar', meaning in Arabic 'to compel', 'to be indentured' or 'to impose something utterly undesirable on somebody'. It does by no means signify an ordinary employment whatsoever where one is enjoying a dignified status of an employee.

> *in this way they sowed hatred in the hearts of the people for us, their kinsmen, and love for the colonizers, the intruders*.[151]

Drawing on the Foucauldian conceptions of the 'archive' and 'discursive formations', one can ascribe the dent befalling the Sudanese collective identity to the asymmetricality of power-relation in the colonial system where "power as a strategic relation permeates life and is productive of new objects, relations, and discourses."[152] In fact, the novel unfolds to show how the colonial practices have entailed new modes of thinking and living in and beyond the colonial encounter.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the problematic of identity departs from the mere postulation of the negative impact of a hegemonising Western culture on a displaced post-colonial migrant which could bring about an irretrievable sabotage of all aspects of life. Instead, the book revolves around the foreignness and alienating character of the British culture—a culture which is conspicuously incompatible with the historical, ethno-religious, socio-cultural and otherwise specificities of the country of origin—to the Sudanese migrant; the unnamed narrator has only "lived with them [the British] superficially,"[153] and Mustafa Sa'eed, after his long abode, still feels that he is the outsider there. Thus, the emphasis is put on the concept of the return as an endeavour for retrieving one's identity; this, has been reflected in the unnamed narrator's description of his return "*yearning* for [his] people in that small village [where he] experienced a feeling of assurance [and] felt not like a storm-swept feather, but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose."[154] Equally, Mustafa has ultimately gone homeward after having spread "his sails on the ocean in pursuit of a foreign mirage"[155] to retrieve and assert his identity by means of settlement, mar-

[151] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p 53. My italics.
[152] Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Reformation and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p 17.
[153] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p 49.
[154] Ibid., p 2.
[155] Ibid., p 92.

riage and the establishment of a family. Hence, despite the controversial nature of the efficiency of return in restoring a shattered identity, Rajaa' Al-Nakash argues that:

> The solution [to the problematic of identity] deemed viable for [Salih's] confused, lacerated hero is to return to his origin to start there anew, for this is the right and appropriate start. He would never find himself in London no matter how much he absorbs from its knowledge and education; no matter how strongly its women were ardently and voluptuously attached to him, he would never find assurance but in his native land where he would cast off the shucks of the Western culture, keeping only the quintessence of that culture and blending it to the reality of his country. Only then would he acquire agency with a functional role in life.[156]

In light of what has already been demonstrated, then, one can further argue that the predicament of identity (re-)construction in *Season of Migration* derives from the confrontation between two heterogeneous cultures; in most cases, indeed, such a cultural contact seems to have inevitably caused an ineluctable disruption in the post/colonial subject's identity. In this regard, Patrick Colm Hogan claims in his seminal work, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, that

> the colonial contact disrupts indigenous culture, often radically, it renders traditional ideas uncertain and ends the easy performance of traditional practices. In doing this, it makes cultural identity a problem—an issue on which one almost necessarily takes a stand … In short, under colonialism, in the region of contact, the conflicts are so strong and pervasive that they constitute a challenge to one's cultural identity, and thus one's personal identity.[157]

Essential to this argument, indeed, is the hierarchical relationship between the natives on the one hand and the coloniser on the other in which "The English District Commissioner was a

[156] Rajaa' Al-Nakash, "Al-Tayeb Salih: A New Novelistic Genius" in *At-Tayyeb Salih: 'Abkaryy al-Riwaya al-'Arabiyya* (Tayeb Salih: The Genius of the Arabic Novel), Ahmad Said Mohammadieh et al., (eds.), (Beirut: Dar al-'Awdeh, 1976, reprint 1984), p 83. My own translation of the original Arabic.
[157] Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p 9.

god ... who was indulgent and showed mercy."[158] This relationship gets unravelled by means of the historical cultural contact. In fact, the novel not only depicts the stark corollaries of the European colonisation of the land of their colonised subjects where "[t]hey imported to [the colonised] the germ of the greatest European violence as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the like of which the world has never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand years ago."[159] It also aptly delineates how consequent to the cultural encounter the identity of the postcolonial (im)migrant is often rendered subject to a loss of belonging, degeneration, and interpolation. By means of a retrospective reflection, the narrator recalls to memory Mustafa Sa'eed's ever-present conflict which complicates the establishment of a firm identification with his native land:

> perhaps you will realize what I mean if you cast your mind back to what I said to you that night. *It's futile to deceive oneself. That distant call still rings in my ears*. I thought that my life and marriage here would silence it. But perhaps I was created thus, or my fate was thus. Rationally I know what is right: my attempt at living in this village with these happy people. *But mysterious things* in my soul and in my blood *impel me towards faraway parts* that loom up before me and cannot be ignored.[160]

Hence, the postcolonial persona—as exhibited both in the characters of the unnamed narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed, who could be thought of as the former's *doppelgänger*[161]—is never the same after they have encountered the colonial European culture. The very process of being exposed to a specific discourse of power/knowledge relation leads in turn to the pro-

[158] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration*, p 53.
[159] Ibid., p 95.
[160] Ibid., pp 66-7. My italics.
[161] A literary technique by which a character is duplicated (usually in the form of an *alter ego*), or divided into two distinct, usually opposite personalities. The use of this characterisation device is widespread in 19th and 20th century literature, indicating a growing awareness among authors that the 'self' is really a composite of many 'selves'.

duction of new colonial subjectivities.[162] After having returned, with an inflated ego, the narrator correlates success with the advanced education obtained in the West to the extent that he "had reckoned that the ten million inhabitants of the country had all heard of [his] achievement."[163] In this regard, however, one can argue that his experience of a physico-emotional detachment from his native land is a crucial aspect of the process of reconstructing his identity. Shortly after his initial encounter with Mustafa at which the latter states that "we have no need for poetry here,"[164] without including the narrator in the 'we', the narrator starts to experience anxieties and insecurities with which he has been hitherto unfamiliar. Among these disquiets are the ones concomitant with his increasing realisation of having changed; those of having become different; and simply, the sense of non-belonging to that which he had once known so well. This is depicted later in the novel in his relationship with, and attitude towards, Mahjoub, his childhood friend, and the villagers. In this light, the main issue here does not consist in the simple argument that for the narrator being abroad means to bring about a change in ways that spending one's whole life in that remote village of his youth would not be capable of. Instead, the problem seems to lie in his time abroad—that is, most significantly in the 'West', which itself seems to have re-structured his stance towards his community. In fact, the direct outcome of the interaction with the former coloniser's culture is, in effect, an attempt to colonise that which is within, thus giving birth to what David Scott specifies as 'the new subject'. Such an about-face is translated into a conceptual alteration of the modality in line of which life and relationships are understood and experienced by the narrator; ironically, it is not Mustafa now who is seen as the stranger, but rather, it is the narrator who feels as if he is the stranger—an emotional situation that is associated with the internal violence inflicted by colonial practices.

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[162] See David Scott, "Colonial Governmentality," *Social Text*, No. 43, (Autumn, 1995), pp 191-220.
[163] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p 8.
[164] Ibid., p 9.

So is the case with the problematic character of Mustafa Sa'eed. Interestingly enough, the novel foregrounds the impact of the post-encounter apprehension in Mustafa's personality which is generated by the tension between the European, Occidental culture of the coloniser on the one hand and the Afro-Arab, Oriental one of the colonised on the other hand. This being the case, this very tension has challenged both the racial and cultural purity, putting at stake the very identity of the postcolonial immigrant.[165] Indeed, Mustafa gravely undergoes a traumatic experience of identity crisis in an alien culture: "Mustafa Sa'eed, gentlemen of the jury, is a noble person whose mind was able to absorb Western civilization but it broke his heart."[166] As a product of imperial tutelage, Mustafa ineluctably becomes culturally hybrid, which seems to further exacerbate his identity predicament; ironically, he is neither like the English/coloniser—"after all the effort [the English] made to educate [him], it's as if [he]'d come out of the jungle for the first time" and is thus "the *intruder* whose fate must be decided"[167]—nor is he like the 'other'/the natives, for he is "the spoilt child of the English" and is nicknamed as "the black Englishman."[168] Hence, Roger Allen points out in his reading of the novel that it "is the most accomplished among several works in modern Arabic literature that deal with [the impact of] cultures in contact."[169] In this light, one can possibly argue that Mustafa's relationship with Jean Morris, the British woman whom he marries and later kills, "symbolizes the absolute clash of these two cultures within a Western context."[170]

Therefore, as an inevitable outcome of the aforementioned cultural contact, cultural hybridity remains one of the most significant aspects of the dilemma of identity in *Season of*

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[165] I consider Mustafa Sa'eed as an 'immigrant', for the very act of migration is quite inadequate to him because it implies a form of curtailed acceptance for someone who aspires to seamless assimilation. Migration is for foreigners, while Mustafa has long believed he was going 'home', that is to the country whose language, culture, and education he has already mastered.

[166] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p 13.

[167] Ibid., pp 93-4. My italics.

[168] Ibid., p 53.

[169] Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p 159.

[170] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p 161.

Migration; in fact, the issue is introduced quite early in the novel. Only one day after the drinking scene, the narrator meets Mustafa in the field, digging up the soil around a lemon tree. Initiating a conversation with the narrator, Mustafa says "[s]ome of the branches of this tree produce lemons, others oranges"; on his part, the narrator responds to this in English saying "[w]hat an extraordinary thing!"[171] The grafted tree could be taken, indeed, as a trope for cultural hybridity: it bears two kinds the fruits, just as both the narrator and Mustafa speak two languages and have experienced two cultures. In this regard, Patricia Geesey argues that not only Mustafa but also the narrator himself is culturally hybrid; she enquires whether or not Mustafa Sa'eed should be viewed as a 'cultural hybrid', since he is the by-product of a 'colonial union' between Britain and the Sudan:

> The clues presented in the text indeed suggest that Sa'eed represents a less than happy intermingling of East and West. The narrator too has been similarly affected by cultural "contact" between England and the Sudan, but he is at first unwilling to acknowledge this reality. Only through his exploration of Mustafa Sa'eed's account of his life does the narrator come to understand more fully the nature of cultural contact and contamination between Sudan and its former colonial power.[172]

From such a perspective, one can approach Mustafa's dedication in one of his notebooks—an incomplete autobiography the narrator discovers in Mustafa's secret study "[t]o those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue and see things as either black or white, either Eastern or Western"[173]—with a different dimension. Essentially, the key significance of such a dedication is to be found in the last phrase: those who are capable of seeing things as 'either Eastern or Western' are not—dissimilar from Mustafa—culturally hybrid. The imaginary audience to whom that very notebook has been dedicated might possibly enact the

[171] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p 15.
[172] Patricia Geesey, "Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim al-Hijra ila al-Shamal* (*Season of Migration to the North*)" *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, (Autumn, 1997), p 129.
[173] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, pp 150-1.

unfeasibility of separating the East from the West; culturally hybrid, however, Mustafa himself is not able to see things in accordance with the intention of his dedication, and is consequently rendered incapable of finishing the story of his life. In this light, one can argue that Mustafa's identity crisis emanates from its very existence on the borderline of two cultures, dwelling in what Homi Bhabha calls "the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white'"[174] within the colonial discourse. Mustafa gravely undergoes a marginal existence as an outsider due to his cultural hybridity; the internalisation of such mixed heritage is the *raison d'être* of the identity predicament in the novel. Therefore, Mustafa ends up seeking some psychic unity in an importunate pursuit of self-recognition, asserting his identity by means of shutting himself off from his former experiences in Europe and reflecting on them in a manner that Muhsin Al-Musawi specifies as a "self-critical stance."[175] However, Mustafa's confession to the narrator could be interpreted as an exorcism of his hideous past, signifying an attempt—regardless of its success—to retrieve the 'native identity' and surmount the damage inflicted by the colonial contact.

In *The Location of Culture,* Homi Bhabha argues that the power of cultural hybrids consists in their capacity to manipulate "the Third Space of enunciations," or the interstice "that carries the burden of the meaning of culture."[176] This capacity, however, proves rather problematic with Mustafa Sa'eed. No sooner is he transplanted from his native land than his identity is ultimately put at stake; misplaced in London, he is doomed to a loss of identity, ending up a convict in trial for a murder: no wonder, then, that he has been assuming multiple fake identities in his relationships with English women: Hassan, Charles, Amin, Mustafa, and Richard. Further becoming aware of all the hybrid constituents that construct his composite identity, Mustafa's identity crisis is further exacerbated; as Patricia Geesey argues, his self-

[174] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 131.
[175] Muhsin Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence*, (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2003) p 201.
[176] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 38.

assumed empowerment through the doubling effect of hybridity proves to have been both destructive and reactive for him, rather than permitting him to transcend the negative effects of colonial, cultural 'contamination.'[177] After enjoying a conceited "I, over and above all else, am a colonizer ... an invader into your very homes,"[178] Mustafa becomes rather schizophrenic, estranged from his actual self: not only has he metamorphosed into a "symbol rather than a reality"[179] but also he has developed a psychotic state in which he "sat for weeks listening to the lawyers talking about [him]—as though they were talking about some person who was no concern of [his]."[180] He is rendered hideously inarticulate: 'a corpse' before his cross examiner in the courtroom, sitting there in a state of 'stupor'; his answers reduced to "I don't know" or 'Yes.'[181] Aware of being a product of two antagonistic cultures, Mustafa deems himself an insubstantial *chimaera*; his identity is even reduced to becoming a 'lie': "[t]his Mustafa does not exist. He is an illusion, a lie. I ask of you to rule that the lie be killed.[182] Indeed, even the narrator refers to him in such regard, telling Mahjoub that "Mustafa Sa'eed was a lie."[183] Moreover, the narrator even doubts Mustafa's material existence, describing him as a ghost: "[o]ccasionally the disturbing thought occurs to me that Mustafa Sa'eed never happened, that he was in fact a lie, a phantom, a dream or a nightmare that had come to the people of that village one suffocating dark night, and when they opened their eyes to the sunlight he was nowhere to be seen."[184] Thus, the narrator—aware that he himself is culturally hybrid one way or another—becomes considerably afraid of transforming into a 'lie' himself as an outcome of his contact with both Mustafa and the Europeans in the West. In a pensive

[177] Patricia Geesey, "Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in *Mawsim al-Hijra ila al-Shamal*," p 130.
[178] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, pp 94-5.
[179] Ibid., p 43.
[180] Ibid., p 31.
[181] Ibid., pp 32-5.
[182] Ibid., p 32.
[183] Ibid., p 107.
[184] Ibid., p 146.

contemplation, he questions the very prospect of whether what happened to Mustafa could also have happened to him:

> Was it likely that what had happened to Mustafa Sa'eed could have happened to me? He said that he was a lie, so was I also a lie? I am from here—is not this reality enough? I too had lived with them. But I had lived with them superficially, neither loving nor hating them. I used to treasure within me the image of this little village, seeing it wherever I went with the eye of my imagination.[185]

In a sign of self-defensive mechanism, hence, the narrator tries to reassure himself that his identity is still intact. This being the case, he tries to restore confidence that he always imagined his small native village when he was in the West.

Drawing on what I have hitherto discussed, *Season of Migration to the North* remains one of earliest works in Arabic Literature to examine the interpolation among identity and subjectivity, imposed by the colonial discourse by means of the cultural contact with the colonial power. It shows how the concept of identity is considerably problematised by a separation from, and/or an exorbitant return to, one's native land customs. Moreover, the book wields the genre of the novel to write back to the empire. In fact, this is revealed at the end of the novel by a dismissal of the coloniser's system: the narrator rejects associations with the former colonising power, exorcising Mustafa Sa'eed as a man whose life has proven irretrievably troubled by the colonial contact. This exorcism has been attained by setting fire to Mustafa's secret, that is the Anglicized study, and then plunging into the waters of the Nile: a symbolic act of catharsis and regeneration. Thus, telling Mustafa's story becomes, in a sense, a curative act by which the narrator manages to expel the haunting ghost of Mustafa Sa'eed. This, in fact, seems to have cured him of the pernicious effects of the colonial culture that have ultimately destroyed Mustafa: his tenacious clutching on life at the end of the novel implies a restoration and re-invigoration of one's identity. Hence, one can argue that the mes-

[185] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p 49.

sage which Salih tried to convey in his novel is that in the aftermath of the colonial contact neither mere assimilation nor sheer traditionalism is the *panacea* for the problematic of identity. Rather, a new, adaptive vision is required to solve such a dilemma with the least difficulties: a vision which allows for an acknowledgement of an indispensable change and seeks to move beyond it in order the better to achieve an integration into one's culture.

Conclusion

In the light of what has been illustrated throughout this chapter, I argue that both Naipaul and Salih have dealt with the problematic of migrant identity in a parallel manner, despite the difference in both the settings and characterisation. On the one hand, a common denominator—which is immediately noticeable—between *The Enigma* and *Season of Migration to the North* is that the main character is nameless, adding the emphasis to the notion that their identity is yet to be established. Also, the two narrators' professions as *Hommes des Lettres* (a writer and a PhD-holder in Poetry) and their reflections on the course of their life play an important role in the way they come to understand their identity crisis; in this regard, one can argue that their professional identities are strongly linked to their colonial history and identity. Moreover, the similarities between these two novels in terms of how they deal with displacement and identity suggests that they are rooted in the very similar backgrounds of their protagonists and writers. In this regard, the journeys taken in both novels highlights in what ways they influence the lives of the narrators. With an attentive reading of the two books, one can conclude that it is obvious that the journey is central to the development of both these characters; more precisely, it becomes clear through the texts that not only is the journey inevitable for both characters, but also it does have an impact on them differently and leads them to different paths of life.

On the other hand, Ralph's experience in *The Mimic Men* conspicuously corresponds with Mustafa Sa'eed's in *Season of Migration to the North* in the sense that not only do both figures undergo the corollaries of a seemingly self-imposed exile, but also they suffer from the intricate effect of cultural hybridity on their sense of identity. However, what is in common among the four figures (the two unnamed narrators, Mustafa, and Ralph) is that they live in a state of separation from home. Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson have examined how the imagining of migration and exile affects the construction and experience of place, landscape, and identity:

> [t]he study of movers and variously displaced persons reaffirms the division between those who are "emplaced" and those who are "out-of-place", the sedentary and the non-sedentary, fixed vs fluid, roots vs routes, isled vs ex-isled.[186]

In fact, the three novels portray characters who add a dimension to the categories 'emplaced' and 'out-of-place'. The protagonists in these texts are not in forced exile in England, but have, mainly for professional reasons, chosen to go there. Nevertheless, their situation is still similar to that of the exile's in the sense that they are in a location that is not their home, and they have both felt it necessary to leave their respective countries of birth to find themselves in an alien and rather hostile land, which further contributes to problematising the process of identity re-formation.

[186] Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson, "Migration, Exile and Landscapes of the Imagination," in Barbara Bender and Margot Winer, (eds.), *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p 321.

III. Chapter Three

Maximalist versus Minimalist immigrants: the problematic transformation of the female immigrant identity: Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) and *Wife* (1975), and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993).

> "Migrancy ... involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in *identities that are constantly subject to mutation*."[187]

> "The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radical new types of human being: […] people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves."[188]

> "I *changed* because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward."[189]

The following chapter attempts at investigating the problematic metamorphosis of the female immigrant identity in three major works: Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) and *Wife* (1975) and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993). My primary intention is to probe how migration proves to have ineluctably overlapped with the quandary of identity construction and self-transformation in these three books; to this end, I aim to observe the aesthetic delineation of how displacement and the impact of cultural heterogeneity influence the process of identity re-formation in an engaging sample of contemporary women's immigrant literature. My objective is, therefore, to explore—by means of the double lenses of post-colonial theory and the female immigrant's perspective—how Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber have artistically elucidated the manner in which their female protagonists find themselves navigating amongst the various and often incongruous demands imposed both by their homeland culture and their intrinsically problematic position as (second generation) immigrants in the US—especially in the case of the protagonists of *Arabian Jazz*. In fact, each of the texts

[187] Ian Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p 5. My italics.
[188] S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, (London: Granta Books, 1991), p 124.
[189] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1990), p 185. My italics. All the subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from the same edition and will be referred to by page number.

under discussion conspicuously shows that while adjusting to such demands, however, the gendered and cultural identities of the female immigrant become inevitably bound up with the politics of performativity. The predicament of loneliness and the incessant sense of alienation alongside the awareness of and longing for a lost comfort zone all designate the prodigious scope within which such characters strive in their attempts to negotiate and re-define their contested identities. Although the three novels noticeably differ in their settings and characterisation, there is an irrefutable bond that brings them together: it is their involvement in a meticulous scrutiny of how particular experiences translate into the context of what constructs one's identity. Interestingly, each book provides its own *sui generis* depiction of the complexity of adapting to the specificity of re-constructing the self within the framework of intricately different socio-cultural norms. More significantly, the three texts fictitiously represent the ways in which the female immigrant tries to exploit immigration as an opportunity to both appropriate and subvert any established role in the course of re-constructing their negotiated identities. In this light, one can argue that *Jasmine, Wife*, and *Arabian Jazz* all serve as over-tures to Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber's conception of agency, most remarkably the hybridised entity that extends beyond the lines of social categorisation.

Maximalist versus Minimalist Immigrants and the Problematic Metamorphosis of the Self in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine and Wife*

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the well-recognized voices of the Indian diaspora in North America. Of a Bengali origin, she was born into a Bengali-speaking, Hindu Brahmin family in Calcutta, India, 1940. After Independence, she travelled with her parents to Europe, only returning to Calcutta in the early 1950s during which time she received a BA from the University of Calcutta and an MA from the University of Baroda. She next left India with a studentship for the University of Iowa, USA, where she met and married her husband, Clark

Blaise, in 1962 and obtained her PhD in 1969. As an author, however, Mukherjee is considered amongst the most contentious chroniclers of the Indian immigrant's identity in a multi-cultural ambiance. In this regard, Sandra Ponzanesi states about Mukherjee that

> [i]t is not a coincidence that her literary model was originally V. S. Naipaul. She shares with the Caribbean author not only the common Indian Brahmanical background but also the tackling between native values and Western ideologies in a way that has been considered provocative by many postcolonial critics. However, their most important common trait concerns the investigation of the migrant identity.[190]

In fact, Mukherjee has explicitly announced her affiliation to Naipaul in her introduction to her collection of short stories, *Darkness* (1985), which is based on her own experiences in Canada. She declares not only taking Naipaul as a 'model', but also using a similar technique in characterizing her novels:

> Like Naipaul, in whom I imagined a model, I tried to explore state-of-the-art expatriation. Like Naipaul, I used a mordant and self-protective irony in describing my characters' pain. Irony promised both detachment from, and superiority over, those well bred postcolonials much like myself, adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong.[191]

In fact, Mukherjee's literary career spans over thirty years; the self-claimed *differentia specifica* of her fiction is that it "seek[s] to emulate the Mughal painting by giving multiple characters equal significance and putting multiple narratives together so that they are inextricably connected to one another."[192] It is worth mentioning, however, that parallel to her own experience, Mukherjee often offers in her fictional work a portrayal of Indians, mostly

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[190] Sandra Ponzanesi, "Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*: The Exuberance of Immigration, Feminist Strategies and Multicultural Negotiations," in Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Pier Paolo Piciucco, (eds.), *Studies in Indian Writing in English*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001), p 77.

[191] Bharati Mukherjee, "Introduction," in *Darkness*, (Toronto: Penguin, 1985), p 2.

[192] Tina Chen and S. X. Goudie, "*Holders of the World*: An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee," *Conversations with Bharati Mukherjee*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p 78.

women, who endure the hardship of leaving their native country and primarily relocating to North America.[193] Hence, from *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) to *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), and *Desirable Daughters* (2002)—along with its sequel, *The Tree Bride* (2004)—the majority of the trajectory of Mukherjee's literary writing brings out to advantage the metamorphic experience of immigration and its problematic aftermaths on the identities of Indian female immigrants. In this regard, Mukherjee seems to delineate not only how the identity of a particular type of immigrant undergoes inevitable transformations in the arduous process of integration/assimilation, but also the very extent to which such integration is an individual/collective process. Equally moreover, she examines the dynamics that interfere in the course of an unattainable ideal of adapting into a new culture, the re-formation of the immigrant's identity, and how the gender aspect plays a significant role in the course of identity re-construction. In other words, Mukherjee attempts to fictionally conceptualise why some Indian female immigrants of the same culture, age, and education, (despite the difference in social status)[194] might manage to integrate successfully, while some might not—Jasmine is contrasted to Dimple Dasgupta in *Wife*, for example. More relevantly, she externalises how the search for belonging correlates with the quest for articulating and defining the self. Hence, Mukherjee wields fiction as an aesthetically speculative medium through which a diverse problematisation of different narratives of identity construction is artistically explored.

In *Jasmine,* Mukherjee explores not only what Fakrul Alam specifies as the "phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates as well as by Indian women,"[195] but also the expatriate's incessant pursuit of identity in an alien land. The book aptly presents an account of the alterations and

[193] Please see the following: Victoria Carchidi, ""Orbiting": Bharati Mukherjee's Kaleidoscope Vision," *MELUS*, Vol. XX, No. 4, (Winter, 1995), pp 91-93.
[194] In *Wife*, Dimple Dasgupta starts with a higher socio-economic status than does Jasmine in *Jasmine.*
[195] Fakrul Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee,* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1996), p 7.

life experiences of Jyoti, a Punjabi girl from India, and suggests "a strategy of continual transformation as a necessary and historically contingent ethic of survival."[196] With an *in medias res* narrative, Jyoti's life—now Jane Ripplemeyer—is being recaptured from her point of view when she is twenty-four year old woman, pregnant with the baby of Bud Ripplemeyer, a crippled banker who is more than twice her age. During the span of two months in Iowa, Jyoti narrates her biographical experiences both in Punjab and in the States as she struggles to become independent. She then illustrates that when one's relationships go through fundamental changes, this will inescapably have a substantial impact on one's identity. In this light, "the novel," states Victoria Carchidi, "is a culmination of Mukherjee's characters."[197] It demarcates the story of a young Asian woman who has changed from being a victim or passive agent to a person that is willing to take tough options in pursuit of establishing a firm sense of identity that is not offered by the easy, pre-existing patterns from which she can choose. The book aptly shows Jasmine metamorphosing from the would-be burnt widow of her first husband; to the victim of the man who raped her; to settle into a 'Little India' enclave, isolated from America; or to be the care-giver of an older man. Although the book tracks the titular character in the course of becoming an empowered and autonomous individual more than it does the process of becoming an American, Jasmine's metamorphic process of 'becoming' still seems to have no foreseeable end; even in the last scene of the novel, Jasmine is delineated as uncertain of that which she has turned into. This being the case, Mukherjee presents Jasmine pensively stating how ambiguous it is to define who she is after all she has been through: "there is nothing I can do. *Time will tell* if I am a

[196] F. Timothy Ruppel, ""Re-Inventing Ourselves a Million Times": Narrative, Desire, Identity, and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*," *College Literature*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, "World Women's Inscriptions," (1995), p 182.
[197] Victoria Carchidi, ""Orbiting": Bharati Mukherjee's Kaleidoscope Vision," *MELUS*, Vol. XX, No. 4, (Winter, 1995), p 93.

tornado, rubble-maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud. I am out the door and in the potholed and rutted driveway, greedy with wants and reckless from hope."[198]

The problematic of having the very primordial seeds of transformation seems to have always existed within Jasmine since she was a child in Hasnapur, India. The then known Jyoti is said to have been the most beautiful and cleverest person in her family. Dissimilar even from her own sisters and other girls in the village, she has excelled in school and continued her education further until the 8th grade, irrespective of her father's dissatisfaction. For the would-be Jasmine, education represents a means by which she can not only separate from many girls of her age, including her own sisters, but also be able to re-shape and re-construct a seemingly fixed narrative of identity.[199] In other words, it allows for an emancipation from the semi-feudal, community in which she lives. In this regard, A. Suri Babu argues that "Jasmine rebels against the system, wherever she finds herself differing from it."[200] Thus early in the novel, she is depicted as annoyed at how, like most Indian women at the time, her life would prove to be immensely controlled and dominated by the patriarchal figures of such a male-dominated, rural hierarchy: "big-city men prefer us village girls because we are brought up to be caring and have no minds of our own. Village girls are like cattle; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go."[201] Resentful as she was at this confining role of women as a mother or a manageress of household affairs in a bucolic society, however, Jyoti displays the initial glimpses of altering her identity at later stages during her marriage to the ten-years-older family friend, Prakash Vijh. At an early stage of her life cycle, thus, she

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[198] B. Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 241. My italics.

[199] Lois Zamora argues that the notion of the "litany of the re's" in American fiction is an evidence of an "anxiety of origins" by which intertextual strategies are motivated, revealing both the multiplicity and indeterminacy of both individual and national foundations. Please see the following for full reference:
Lois Parkinson Zamora, *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp 5-6.

[200] A. Suri Babu, "Compromise and Assimilation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*," in S. Prasanna Sree, (ed.), *Woman, Who Owns You?*, (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2008), p 62.

[201] B. Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 46.

undergoes her first transformation from the simple, dutiful daughter to the modern wife and city-woman, soon after marrying Prakash who initiates such an alteration by renaming her and insisting on calling her 'Jasmine'.

Talking about his wife—Jyoti—for the first time, Prakash says "[s]he is a woman of fine sympathies."[202] Not only does he consider her as the delicate woman, but he also sees her as the obedient wife who has followed her family's wishes and the societal restrictions on women. Jyoti, on her part, describes her husband as "a modern man, a city man"; for unlike his uncle who deems 'love' as a ruling authority and 'respect' as submission, love for Prakash "was letting go. Independence, self-reliance: I learned the litany by heart. But I felt suspended between worlds."[203] No sooner has Jyoti lived with Prakash than she has become instantly fascinated with his personality, as she never met anyone like him before; his individuality and strong presence is what attracts her to him. Recounting how he wanted her to call him by his first name, Jyoti remarks that in "Hasnapur wives used only pronouns to address their husbands. The first months, eager and obedient as I was, I still had a hard time calling him Prakash."[204] In this light, the difficulty she has in trying to call him by his first name reflects the difference between how she used to live in Hasnapur before Prakash and how she is doing so after having married him. Prakash, moreover, insists on calling Jyoti 'Jasmine', thus playing a significant role in the would-be Jasmine's life insofar as he has been the first person who helped her become more conscious of the modern world and the opportunities therein.

Not less importantly, Prakash is the catalyst that accelerates Jyoti transformation by insisting that she has to change her *modus vivendi*; ruminating on such influential incident, Jasmine states that "he wanted to break down the Jyoti I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine ... *Jyoti,*

[202] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 74.
[203] Ibid., p 76.
[204] Ibid., p 77.

Jasmine: I shuttled between identities."[205] In fact, the gradual change in terms of self-referral —that is how she refers to herself from Jyoti to Jasmine—demonstrates not only how she is viewed by others, but also how she is to ultimately accept this new identity. Later on, Jyoti is depicted revealing that "Parminder in flat 2B said that since I had no in-laws and no infants to harass me all day, why didn't I go with her on her door-to-door detergent-selling routes in three neighborhood buildings and she would cut me in. The commission I kept secret from Prakash."[206]

Appositely enough, one can argue that keeping her 'own kitty' from her husband elucidates how Jyoti has changed after marrying Prakash: before the marriage, she would never have imagined keeping a job and a source of income secret from her spouse. Prakash, then, proves to have helped her not only to become more independent, but also to waver from the path of tradition. This being the case, Jyoti is shown considering how "all fates would be canceled" if just she and Prakash "could just get away from India," where they would "start with new fates, new stars [and] say or be anything [they] wanted."[207] Her attitude towards life and her own personality having changed, therefore, Jyoti is becoming less reliant on Prakash, imagining a better life for herself, Prakash, and their future family. With Prakash planning for his trip to the States, however, many of Jyoti's misgivings start to materialise as she starts to question Prakash's commitment to her; responding to such premonitions, the former nonetheless declares: "[y]ou're Jasmine now. You can't jump into wells."[208] In saying so, Prakash seems to believe that the new Jasmine he has helped materialise is capable of living on her own and being independent. However, it should not pass unnoticed that although many of Prakash's actions are controlling, Jasmine does not fail to realise that she has considerably changed in so many ways; she is, therefore, found stating that "[m]y life before Prakash, the

[205] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 77. My italics.
[206] Ibid., p 79.
[207] Ibid., p 85.
[208] Ibid., p 92.

girl I had been, the village, [was] like a dream from another life."[209] Only after the death of Prakash in a radio bomb, which was basically meant for Jyoti, does Jasmine substantially evolve into becoming capable of coming to terms with all the differences that shape her identity. Yet as Jasmine now, she is determined to go to the United States to fulfil Prakash's wish of studying at a university; her intended journey is to prove full of metamorphic incidents that will affect her conceptualisation of the negotiated identity(/ies) for which she persistently searches.

Immigrating to the States proves to be catalytic in regard to Jasmine's alteration of identities; no sooner has she arrived in the New World than she is raped by a man whom she calls Half Face. Her response to such a traumatic experience is initially a repellent sense of defilement which has driven her to the extent of deciding to re-invent herself: "[m]y body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for."[210] Later on, Jasmine kills Half-Face and is seen preparing to commit *sati*; remembering how Half-Face laughed at her and her mission, nevertheless, she wavers from death by deciding that she cannot die. Having avenged herself, Jasmine shuts the door of the motel behind her and sets a fire in a trash bin, burning her husband's suitcase along with her blood-stained clothes. In this regard, Jaspal Kaur Singh observes that with "Jasmine burn[ing] her clothes, Mukherjee seems to suggest that Jasmine can symbolically trash the old traditions and, hence, her traditional identity."[211] When she leaves the motel, Jasmine is depicted as deserted, hungry, feeling sick, and horribly destitute, following a highway north. In an elegant, finely-worded passage, Mukherjee delineates Jasmine as the epitome of the immigrant who not only suffers deeply from feelings of despondence, hopelessness, but also undergoes and a lacerating sense of loss and disorientation:

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[209] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 91.
[210] Ibid., p 121.
[211] Jaspal Kaur Singh, *Representation and Resistance: South Asian and African Women's Texts at Home and in the Diasporas*, (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2008), p 71.

> We are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tarmacs, ferried in old army trucks where we are roughly handled and taken to roped-off corners of waiting rooms where surly, barely wakened customs guards await their bribes. We are dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season, the wilted plumage of intercontinental vagabondage. We only ask one thing: to be allowed to land; to pass through; to continue.[212]

No sooner has Jasmine gone through that situation than she is found undergoing, once again, another identity transformation insofar as she metamorphoses from 'Jasmine' to 'Jaze'; this has been brought about as she was fulfilling her mission of travelling to Tampah, where she could bestow her deceased husband the peace she felt he well merited. It is worth considering in this regard, however, that Jasmine goes through the disturbing, first-hand experience that life in America could prove bitterly traumatic—given her harrowing experience of rape. After killing Half-Face in the motel, Jasmine sets off travelling on foot until she has finally reached the home of Lillian Gordon, an American Quaker who helps undocumented immigrants survive and make a living in the States. Jasmine clarifies here that Lillian "wasn't a missionary dispensing new visions and stamping out the old; she was a facilitator who made possible the lives of absolute *ordinariness* that we [immigrants] ached for."[213] Reminiscent of Prakash, Lillian wants Jasmine to discard her past as "[s]he had a low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia."[214] With Lillian's assistance, however, Jasmine is prepared to relinquish her past and make a new identity for herself in the States: "[l]et the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you."[215] In fact, Lillian transforms Jasmine into an ordinary American girl when the latter has exchanged her sari for the casual American clothes of the former's daughters: "I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at my transformation. Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes. I couldn't tell if with the

[212] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 101.
[213] Ibid., p 131. Emphasis is in the original.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.

Hasnapuri sidle I'd also abandoned my Hasnapuri modesty."[216] Hence, I argue that in this context that the trope of changing clothes can be aptly considered as a metaphor of cultural transformation, which necessarily entails the disappearance of certain external markers of the original personality. In so doing, Jasmine metamorphoses from being a minority into just another immigrant. With Lillian changing Jasmine's name to Jazzy—to make her appear more American—the latter thus obtains a positive outlook towards America, acquiring a new identity for herself as she lets go of her past.

Arguing about the re-construction of the 'individual identity,' theorist and scholar John McGowan postulates that identity is a construct which is established by means of constitutive actions when the individual is put amongst a network of 'intersubjective relations.' In his argument, he declares that the resulting being is the "product of a process, radically non-autonomous, is differentiated from other selves and possesses an identity that unifies its disparate experiences, guides the presentation of the self to others, and forms the context for the various choices that the self makes."[217] In line with McGowan's postulation, one can argue for the possibility of identity construction in the context of relationships with others and with the environment. As far as the immigrant figure is concerned, hence, identity alters or is caused to change in accordance with the situations or the 'intersubjective' settings one is thrown into, irrespective of one's will or wish—and this is the case with Jasmine. A salient example of the impact of an 'intersubjective' setting/relation on the problematisation of Jasmine's identity consists in her experience of living with an Indian family, where she exhibits an identity predicament owing to the existence of "a strong personal and emotional commitment to two distinct identity com-

[216] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 133.
[217] John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p 243.

ponents that [are destined to] become incompatible."[218] As far as Jasmine's identity crisis is concerned, I argue that in her situation the two constituents that have long been harmonious suddenly start to make conflicting demands for action, and the new circumstances or choices dictate the acquisition of a new identity component that is soon found to be in conflict with other long-standing ones. As Roy F. Baumeister adeptly clarifies, the struggle arises insofar as the person "gets into a situation in which the different components prescribe different, incompatible behaviours."[219] Thus drawing on this approach, Jasmine can be seen enduring an adjustment problem that results from a change or transition of identity. Under such circumstances, therefore, Jasmine is found stating:

> In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, *I wanted to distance myself from everything Jyoti-like*. To them, I was a widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude ... Of course, as a widow, I did not participate [in any activity]. I felt myself deteriorating … I was spiraling into depression behind the fortress of Punjabiness. Some afternoons ... I would find myself sobbing from unnamed, unfulfilled wants. In Flushing I felt immured. An imaginary brick wall topped with barbed wire cut me off from the past and kept me from breaking into the future. I was a prisoner doing unreal time.[220]

In accordance with McGowan's theorisation, the above-quoted scene depicts Jasmine as being dysfunctional in creating the sense of self and the new identity she aspires to take—that is discarding her past, leaving everything behind that reminds of Jyoti, and creating a new, American, future for herself. In this regard, moreover, Kuldip Kaur Kuwahara observes that Jasmine experiences "'the tug of opposing forces' as she travels from India to America. This conflict sets up a constant pattern of 'Hope and pain. Pain and hope'... Hers is a conflict

[218] Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self*, (New York: Oxford University Press Incorporated, 1986), p 211.
[219] Ibid., pp 211-2.
[220] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, pp 145-8. My italics.

between two worlds, and the essence of her struggle is both to survive and to fulfil herself."[221]

Being a contingent process, therefore, self-construction is never absolute, and the self may acquire a number of identities which, themselves, are responses to diverse life situations or settings. More importantly, however, McGowan also accentuates the significance of one's past and its influence on choosing amongst alternatives in the sense that "choice can only be made in relation to the self's commitment to its past and to its sense of itself. Choices are self affirming and serve to reinforce identity by enacting it."[222] With regard to the consequence of one's past on identity change, however, McGowan claims that

> because an identity is constructed in an intersubjective process that takes place in the self's earliest years, the self, at a later time, can easily experience that identity as imposed or as inadequate to some other sense of self [...] the experience of alienation from the earliest identity (or identities) stems from the creation of new identities in new intersubjective contexts, not from some existential split between the social and the true self.[223]

In the light of what has just been demonstrated, therefore, McGowan suggests that even though past experiences are important in shaping one's identity, the individual's past is just one aspect in the lifelong identity (re-)formation process.

In fact, McGowan's conceptualisation aptly applies to the stages through which Jasmine has gone searching for—and re-constructing—her identity. In a sequel of transformations—through the constant change in the roles she undertakes: Jyoti, the youthful village girl of Hasnapur; Jasmine, the young wife, and shortly after, widow in the city of Jullundhar; Jazzy, the illegal immigrant in Florida and New York whose main aim is to survive in a

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[221] Kuldip Kaur Kuwahara, "Bharati Mukherjees *Jasmine:* Making Connections between Asian and Asian American Literature," *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, No. 4 (Fall, 1996), pp 31-5. Accessed online via the following website: http://www.asat-jast.org/images/JAST-ISSUES/JAST-04/04_Kuwahara.pdf

[222] John McGowan, *Postmodernism and its Critics*, pp 216-7.

[223] Ibid., p 245.

foreign environment; Jase, the timorous *au pair* learning and trying to adapt to the American culture represented by the host family; and finally Jane, the self-confident lover and partner of a middle-aged banker in Iowa who dares to reach for her dream and leave for California with the man she really loves—Jasmine's identity is influenced, re-constructed, and re-shaped by the experiences she goes through in each of the new places in which she finds herself. This being the case, however, Jasmine suffers further problematisation in the course of her identity construction insofar as the dilemma of identity "is never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image."[224] With regard to Jasmine's constant movement and changes of places and identities, however, Ralph J. Crane argues that Mukherjee "uses the metaphor of a journey through three continents to emphasize the distance Jasmine, and by extension all womankind, has to travel in search of her true self."[225] Yet, this very concept of the 'true self' will prove to be an aspirational ideal for Jasmine insofar as she seems to have been constantly oscillating between how she perceives herself while readapting and re-constructing her identity and how others perceive her.

With a whiff of optimism, Jazzy leaves Lillian Gordon, hopeful that the remainder of her life will be pleasant. As she arrives in New York, nonetheless, her hope ends up in smoke and the new American identity she has acquired collapses. In fact, a salient feature of *Jasmine* is its "emphasis on the disjunction between representations of immigration internalized by im/migrants, which haunts them when they set foot in the Promised Land, and the less glamorous and more brutal actual experience of immigration."[226] Hence, no sooner has Jazzy

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[224] Homi Bhabha, "Introduction," in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Lam Markman, (trans.), (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p xvi.

[225] Ralf J. Crane, "Of Shattered Pots and Sinkholes: (Female) Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*," *Span: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*, No. 36. Accessed online via the following website: http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/litserv/SPAN/36/Crane.html

[226] Françoise Král, *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp 84-5.

put a foot in New York than she shockingly witnesses the poverty which people face thereat; shaken by the sight of beggars amongst whom one has cursed her as a 'foreign bitch' and the taxi driver who was a migrant practitioner from Kapul living like a dog, she bitterly exclaims how "[o]n the streets [she] saw only more greed, more people like [her]self. New York was an archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens."[227] It is then that she stays with Professorji and his family in Flushing, New York for five months, during which time Professorji makes her feel like a 'clumsy whiner', for Professorji's "kind of generosity wasn't good enough for [her]. It wasn't Prakash's, it wasn't Lillian Gordon's."[228] Seemingly, Jazzy cannot bear the circumstances under which she was living to the extent that she "wanted to distance [her]self from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like" insofar as the apartment she was living in with the Vadheras was "*artificially maintained Indianness*."[229] In this regard, Jazzy states about Flushing that it frightened her to the extent of having felt herself deteriorating. Yet more depressingly for her, she comes to find out that Professorji is not actually a professor in New York: he is only an "importer and sorter of human hair" from India. She has even realised that Professorji "needed to work here [as wig maker], but he didn't have to like it [for] he had sealed his heart when he'd left home."[230] Though tiresome, Jazzy's experiences in New York allow her to articulate what she does not want to become: a hopeless Indian widow. Hardly a week after discovering the truth about Professorji, Jazzy calls Kate Gordon-Feldstein who finds her a job with her friends, Wylie and Taylor who are looking for an *au pair* for their daughter, Duff: a new episode of Jasmine's metamorphic cycle is to take place.

[227] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 140.
[228] Ibid., p 143.
[229] Ibid., p 145. My italics.
[230] Ibid., p 153.

In the two years she spends as an *au pair*, Jazzy "became an American."[231] Apparently, she seems to have gone through a stark identity change from when she was with Professorji and his family: now living the 'American dream'. Taylor has given her a new name: 'Jase' to substitute 'Jazzy', which she seems to have enjoyed inasmuch as "Jase was a woman who brought herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants … Jase went to movies and lived for today."[232] For Jase now, the name has become a symbol of everything she has always wanted to be; not only does she feel 'lucky' and amongst family now, but also she "fell in love with what he represented to [her]."[233] More importantly, she declares later that she even fell in love with Taylor's world; in fact, she seems to identify herself with "its ease, its care-less confidence, and graceful self-absorption. [She] wanted to become the person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful."[234] Hence, Taylor Hayes represents to Jase what she has achieved in America after leaving her poor life in India.

When Wylie Hayes falls in love with another man, Stuart Eschelman, Jase knows that this would change everything. Comparing her identity transformation to the relationship between Taylor, herself, and Wylie, Jase recollects that not only Taylor never wanted to change her, but also

> [h]e didn't want to scour and sanitize the foreignness. My being different from Wylie or Kate didn't scare him. *I changed because I wanted to*. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia. To sheath the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward. On Claremont Avenue, in the Hayeses' big clean, brightly lit apartment, *I bloomed from a different alien with forged documents into adventurous Jane*.[235]

[231] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 165.
[232] Ibid., p 175.
[233] Ibid., p 167.
[234] Ibid., p 171.
[235] Ibid., pp 185-6. My italics.

In this light, one can argue that because of her relationship with Wylie and Taylor, Jase was able to overcome her past and truly become an American. This being the case, she is now capable not only of creating her own dreams, but also of becoming more confident in her actions. As she sees the murderer of her husband in New York, nevertheless, Jase is taken aback by her unpleasant past; in order to escape from her fears and to keep Taylor and Duff safe, Jase decides to go to Iowa, where readers meet her at the present moment as Jane.

The ultimate episode of Jasmine's identity transformation cycle is delineated as she—as Jase—goes to Iowa, where she is to meet Mother Ripplemeyer and later her son, Bud. Mukherjee presents readers a capturing vignette of such a momentous meeting, reminding them of Lillian Gordon who—changing 'Jasmine' to 'Jazzy'—has been of an influential impact upon the multifaceted process of re-constructing Jasmine's identity: "[y]ou need a meal as well as a job, dear. I'm going to take you home for lunch; then I'm going to call Bud and see if he doesn't need a pretty new teller."[236] Still caught in an awkward situation, nevertheless, Jase does not seem to be able to talk with Mother Ripplemeyer about the poverty she has once faced in India: "I thought we could trade some world-class poverty stories, but mine make her uncomfortable … I have to be careful about nearly everything I say."[237] Homi Bhabha argues that the intricacy of "representation of cultural and racial difference" is intricately bound up with "the signs and designs"[238] of the socio-cultural hegemony. And this intensifies the problematic of identity further. In Iowa, therefore, Jase seems obliged to not re-collect certain aspects of her past in conversations Mother Ripplemeyer insofar as the latter is frightened to hear about the former's perplexingly 'different' past.

[236] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 196-7.
[237] Ibid., p 16.
[238] Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in Russell Ferguson et al., (eds.), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, (London: MIT Press, 1990), p 71.

Through Mother Ripplemeyer, Jase meets Bud, who at the time of their meeting is still married to Karin. Not too long later, however, Karin files for divorce from Bud with Jase eventually getting pregnant with Bud's child. In her description of Bud, Jase states that "Bud's not like Taylor—he's never asked me about India; it scares him. He wouldn't be interested in the forecast of an old fakir under a banyan tree. Bud was wounded in the war between my fate and will."[239] The important issue here, however, is that resembling Jase's other relationships, Bud also changes Jase's name to 'Jane': Bud calls me Jane. Me Bud, you Jane. I didn't get it at first. He kids. Calamity Jane. Jane as in Jane Russell, not Jane as in Plain Jane. But Plain Jane is all I want to be. Plain Jane is a role, like any other. My genuine foreignness frightens him. I don't hold that against him."[240] Seemingly, Jane wants to stay in Iowa forever and forget her past; however, she still feels conflicted between her past and present: "in the white lamplight, ghosts float toward me. Jane, Jasmine, Jyoti"[241] Despite her assertion that the past does not matter in her relationship with Bud, Jane does not seem to forget her previous identities: "in Baden, I am Jane. Almost."[242] When talking to Dr. Mary Webb, therefore, Jane admits that she has been re-born a myriad of times, with some lives being vividly recallable. Having been re-born several times in her present life implies that not only is she forced to live a worthless life, but also she might have forfeited her native identity; thus the re-incarnation metaphor is well wielded to signify the continuous process of re-constructing identity on the heroine's part. In fact, Jane realises that she has "had a husband for each of the women [she has] been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane. Half-Face for Kali."[243] Thus, she ponders upon going back to Taylor who seems to have enjoyed hearing her stories about India, encouraging her in the meanwhile not to disregard

[239] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 12.
[240] Ibid., p 26.
[241] Ibid., p 21.
[242] Ibid., p 26.
[243] Ibid., p 197.

her past. When leaving Taylor, hence, Jasmine articulates her feeling as such: "[i]t isn't guilt that I feel, it's relief. I realized I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me re-position the stars."[244] Jane recognises that she can still have dreams and maintain her own identity. She does not have to follow the limits that her relationships seem to have imposed upon her. Hence, she ultimately runs away with Taylor, the man she really loves, seizing the opportunity for a new future, in which she forges her own identity and still remains true to her roots.

With the last point, it is worth drawing attention to what Mukherjee expounds in her article, "Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists", about maximalist characters; Mukherjee argues here that such characters are the ones who "shed past lives and languages, and have travelled half the world in every direction to begin again ... They've lived through centuries of history in a single lifetime—village-born, colonized, traditionally raised, and educated."[245] Interestingly, *Jasmine* sketches such a journey of maximalist transformation. In this regard, the epigraph to the novel, which is taken from James Gleick's *Chaos Theory*, functions as an avowal of such maximalist perspective: "[t]he new geometry mirrors a universe that is rough, not rounded, scabrous, not smooth. It is a geometry of the pitted, pocked, and broken up, the twisted, tangled, and intertwined."[246] Mukherjee describes *Jasmine* as a tale of the new immigrant experience, which highlights not only the psychic violence, but also the very self-invention she deems necessary for an immigrant to be doing well in America. Still, however, many non-immigrant characters prove to have been afflicted with the same pressure of enduring psychic violence insofar as they adapt to the mutability of America's cultural and ideological landscape.

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[244] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, pp 240-1.
[245] Bharati Mukherjee, "Immigrant Writing: Give Us your Maximalists!" *The New York Times Book Review*, (August, 1988), p 28.
[246] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 1.

Lauren Hazenson argues that Jasmine's journey exemplifies the "tangled geometry of a maximalist universe through a cultural version of what Gleick observes in physics. Her journey characterizes the melding of Indian and American cultures and how a more tangled view of cultural identity can positively transform those who come into contact with it."[247] This being the case, Jasmine's ultimate alteration offers a chart for what Mukherjee calls the 'new maximalist American'. Jasmine personifies not only the positive image of a 'maximalist' immigrant woman, but also the transformative catalyst that encourages other characters to embrace their maximalist selves. She re-incarnates multiple times through the roles and names she adopts; hence, Jasmine embraces what she herself comes to understand as an American culture, ultimately coming to recognise her own needs—which Mukherjee deems to be a huge accomplishment in the life of an Indian immigrant woman. Therefore, in one of the finest passages in the novel, Jasmine is found satisfactorily ruminating over what she has learnt to be the conundrum of being an immigrant:

> In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. *Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible, or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate.*[248]

If Jasmine may be considered as an example of Mukherjee's maximalist characters, Dimple Dasgupta in her *Wife*, however, is the sheer antithesis. As Sumati and Pasupati Jha argue, the female immigrant in this book suffers from going through a "torturous physical, mental, and emotional agony, [affecting her] entire personality [and] largely turning [her] into

[247] Lauren D. Hazenson, *The Maximalist Transformation of the Female Immigrant Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine and The Holder of the World*, (Ames: Iowa State University, 2010), p 8.
[248] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p 181. My italics.

a whole new being,"[249]—that is an ultimately minimalist figure, depressed and dysfunctional. This, interestingly enough, goes in outright opposition to the meaning of Dimple's name in Hindi: 'lucky' or 'happy.' In fact, the novel has created much controversy following its publication, especially within the feminist discourse and critique of the mid-1970s and1980s.[250] The *raison d'être* of that fervent discrepancy in opinion is that the book was deemed to have been manifesting the murky side of a stark psychological transformation rather than its positive outcomes. Responding to such a critique, nevertheless, Mukherjee states in an interview that

> [Her] stuff is meant to be optimistic. Dimple, if she had remained in Calcutta, would have gone into depression and she would have found a very conventional way out for unhappy Bengali wives—suicide. But in the US, she suddenly lives to ask herself "self" oriented question. Am I happy? Am I unhappy? *And that to me is a progress.* So instead of committing suicide, turning the society-mandated violence inward, she, in a *misguided act*, kills the enemy ... It is meant to be a positive act, Self assertive.[251]

Despite the fact that Mukherjee is claiming otherwise, I argue that Dimple's transmutation and transformative act are regressive rather than progressive—and, in contrast, Jasmine fits with US immigrant ideals. As my discussion of the novel goes further, I show that Dimple is ultimately rendered into a helpless state of inertia as a result of being a non-fitting immigrant in the States.

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[249] Sumati Jha and Pashupati Jha, "Mind and Movement: Metamorphosis of Women in Bharati Mukherjee," in Nandini Sahu, (ed.), *The Postcolonial Space: Writing the Self and the Nation*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Ltd., 2007), p 2.

[250] Sushma Tandon, *Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction: A Perspective*, (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2004), p 43.

[251] Michael Connell et al., "An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee," *The Iowa Review*, Vol. XX, No. 3, (Fall, 1990), p 21. My italics.

Jasmine's predominant theme consists in journeying across cultures, nations and continents, exhibiting the protagonist's pursuit of her identity via emerging from and succeeding over the paradoxes and alienation of the immigrant's dualism—resulting from having been born and brought up in India, and encountering, afterwards, a multicultural sphere in which she is obliged to continually re-define herself. *Wife*'s, however, does in the problematic emanating from the "lived experience of processes [across cultures], constitutively open to conflicting cultural currents and interpretations,"[252] leading to an irretrievable disintegration in the immigrant's identity. In this light, R. S. Krishnan argues that the "novel foregrounds the experience of a woman forced to confront her marginalization within her own (Indian) culture, while attempting to forge an identity within an alien (American) culture, both of which, however, are entrenched in patriarchal ideology."[253] Dimple's conflicting efforts to negotiate both the cultural and ideological splits demonstrate, thus, not only the contradictory inter-actions of culture and ideology, but also their negative impact on one's identity. Indeed, one can argue that *Wife*'s thematic sequence precedes *Jasmine*'s and is vital in understanding Mukherjee's line of argument in her attempt to figure out the problematic cultural contact between the immigrant and the host culture.[254] Such a contact appears to be of ambivalent nature—that is an astatic process of fluctuation between two situations: one is of acceptance and the other is of transformative rejection. In this regard, Mukherjee seems to have propounded two sub-conditions within the immigrant's psyche—that is when one part of the acceptance-rejection scale has the upper hand over the other. Dexterously, *Wife* represents the case in which the immigrant's cultural contact is caught up in dismissal of both the past and

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[252] Gerald Graff and Bruce Robbins, "Cultural Criticism," in Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, (eds.), *Redrawing the Boundaries*, (New York: MLA, 1996), p 434.

[253] R. S. Krishnan, "Cultural Construct and the Female Identity: Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*," *The International Fiction Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 1-2, (1998). Accessed online via the following website: http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7599/8656

[254] Mukherjee fully explains this in terms of the narratives of expatriation, exile, immigration, and repatriation. Please see: Bharati Mukherjee, "Imagining Homelands," in André Aciman, (ed.), *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language and Loss*, (New York: The New York Press, 1999), pp 68-86.

the present; hence the novel culminates in a kind of decadence into temporary madness. *Jasmine*, on the contrary, demonstrates the embrace of assimilative deeds which ultimately leads to acceptance.

Divided into three parts, which significantly interlink with the three stages of its protagonist's displacement, alienation, and stark metamorphosis, *Wife* recounts the life-changing experiences of Dimple Dasgupta from the perspective of an omniscient third-person narrator; this goes in contrast with *Jasmine*, which is written in the first person. The difference in the narrative design not only highlights the dissimilarities of experience for both characters, but also creates different attitudes to the characters by different points of narration. The setting of the first part in *Wife* is in Calcutta, where Dimple is portrayed as the young, timid, Bengali adolescent who is immensely absorbed in the typical values of Indian traditions. Her utmost ambition being getting married, her father manages to find her a man who is said to best match her horoscope. Dimple immerses herself in an illusory reverie of performing the role of Sita, the ideal Hindu wife—which, in fact, is saliently "contrasted with her attempts to be a modern and intelligent spouse."[255] In this phase, Dimple is seen eager for marriage with hopes of excessive love, tenderness, and freedom: requisites for which she was too subservient to ask in her patriarchal family. Moreover, she amply engages in reading romantic novels and film magazines, an act which has noticeably led her to negate the harsh reality of life insofar as the excitement and fulfilment she thought would become exquisitely lucid on her wedding day soon evade her after she is married. The second part depicts Dimple immigrating with her husband, Amit Basu, to the States, where her ideological framework starts shaking rapidly after she is in touch with the American culture. In this phase, she develops an identity conflict and begins to psychologically deteriorate; she suffers what Leah Rang aptly specifies as "the disempowerment and pain caused by a multicultural society that

[255] Pier Paolo Piciucco, (ed.), *A Companion to Indian Fiction in English*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors Ltd., 2004), p 427.

negates individual identity in favor of communal identities located in [a] foreign culture."[256] In the third part, Mukherjee presents a portrayal of Dimple's outright alienation not only from her own self, but also from both the Indian and the American cultures, until she is eventually provoked and descends into hideous state of madness; this, in fact, marks the ultimate stage of a disintegrating self, which culminates at a moment of frenzy by killing the husband. The young Indian immigrant wife's experiences translate, therefore, unto "the fictional framework for narrating the complexity of cultural dislocation and loss of identity."[257]

Wife re-addresses the notion of women *in extremis*, established in the traditions of the works of such authors like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Drawing on the critical conceptualisation and findings of Elaine Showalter that are provided in her book, *A Literature of Their Own*, one can situate Mukherjee's book in the phase of "*self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity [in] literary subcultures, such as black, Jewish, Canadian, Anglo-Indian, or even American"[258] in which women writers engage. In this light, the overture of the novel marks its author's determination to re-construct the hegemonic conventions by means of appropriating and modifying Jane Austen's ironic depiction of marriage in the latter's *Pride and Prejudice*.[259] In this light the book interestingly opens up as follows: "Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking

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[256] Leah Rang, *Bharati Mukherjee and the American Immigrant: Reimaging the Nation in a Global Context*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), p 16.

[257] Jenni Valjento, "Solitude Experienced inside the Group: Physical, Social, and Psychological Isolation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*," *The Electronic Journal of the Department of English at the University of Helsinki*, Vol. III, (2004). Accessed online via the following website: http://blogs.helsinki.fi/hes-eng/volumes/volume-3-special-issue-on-literary-studies/solitude-experienced-inside-the-group-physical-social-and-psychological-isolation-in-bharati-mukherjees-wife-jenni-valjento/

[258] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p 13.

[259] "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, (1813). Please see Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, R. W. Chapman, (ed.), 3rd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932, reprint 1983), p 3.

for engineers in the matrimonial ads."[260] In fact, such a delineation represents the social construction of Dimple's reality as the docile Indian wife, who is cast into the image of Sita; her perception of marriage is a construct of traditions: the exaggerated depictions in Indian movies, women's periodicals, magazines, and newspapers. Initially, she wants "a different kind of life" from the one she leads now, pondering that "[m]arriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love."[261] In her dreams, therefore, "she became Sita, the ideal wife of Hindu legends, who had walked through fire at her husband's request. Such pain, such loyalty, seemed revered for married women."[262] In this light, Dimple's sole existence appears to have been revolving around a matrimony that "she was sure, would free her, fill her with passion. Discreet and a virgin, she awaited for her real life to begin."[263] She internalises marriage as the epitome of life in her Indian society insofar as she is constantly introduced to one obligation: namely, performing the role of Sita, for the other roles of working and outgoing women are for dissolute movie stars and Westerners. Even her education is meant to secure her a good man for "without a B.A. she'd never get a decent husband."[264]

Apparently, Dimple seems to be undergoing an adhesive identification with the ideology of the traditional Indian society; with this very ideology, being simultaneously the protector and devastator in her life, imitation becomes, thus, a mechanism by which she can survive inasmuch as she is indoctrinated into society so that it cannot hurt her. Dimple's absolute conformity and blind mimesis to societal constructs manifests in the way she holds on to the ideal of Sita; I argue that Dimple's relationship with reality is psychotic in the sense that the demarcating boundaries between reality and fantasy become much blurred. Not only

[260] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1992), p 3. All the subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from same edition, and will be referred to later on by page number.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid., p 6.
[263] Ibid., p 14.
[264] Ibid., p 10.

is she inept in perceiving reality subjectively or individually, but also her own conscious being transmutes into being imbedded in the collective consciousness of the Indian culture to the extent that she becomes incapable of critical thinking. In her college exams, Dimple memorises passages from *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance* and instead of thinking of freedom fighters and the sacrifices shed for freedom, she begins to fantasise about her ultimate form of resisting her husband, where she becomes "a good wife, a docile wife conquering the husband-enemy by withholding affection and other tactics of domestic passive resistance."[265] In fact, this internal struggle could be seen in the light of the problematic aspect of her gender identity. Mukherjee reveals an extreme side in Dimple's character from a very early stage in her life as the latter tends to be suicidal. Dimple the "HOPELESS BUSTLESS"—a non-Sita like feature—implores Miss Problemwalla "the saviour of suffering women, to pull a magical remedy from [her] proverbial beauty basket, [crying out] HELP ME!"[266] The flat-chest problem drives Dimple "desperate, almost suicidal, feel[ing] life is slamming its doors in [her] face. *I want to live*!"[267] After a prolonged suffering, though, Dimple eventually marries Amit, the engineer, despite her fantasy of marrying a 'surgeon'. Apparently, her horoscope matched marriage, arranged by means of the ubiquitous matrimonial advertisements in some local newspapers and magazines signifies the subordinated and passive role of a daughter brought up to obey the patriarchal authority. On her wedding day, Dimple says to herself "[b]ut I thought he was tall!"; hence, Mukherjee presents this marriage as a trope that demonstrates how Dimple forces her fantasies into realities—the first unpleasant aspect of which she stumbles upon, however, is her disillusionment at Amit's height.

[265] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, p 9.
[266] Ibid., p 11.
[267] Ibid.

Nevertheless, the outcome of the marriage signals Dimple's initiation into a slightly more substantial perception of reality; this gradually manifests as she moves, in a typical Indian *modus operandi*, to live with her in-laws, Amit's mother and brother. Now, she renounces the hopes of love, freedom and happiness she has been associating with marriage; in a fervent passion she projects her hatred onto her mother-in-law, the petty flat, the sofa, the bedroom, the curtains and everything else which becomes "h-o-r-r-i-d," including Amit, the once charming prince she imagined. At times, when she is in bed with him, she "thinks of the baby lizard she had found in her pillow case,"[268] directly realising how her father has mislead her. In a dismal mood, she states that "[h]appy people did not talk to themselves and happy people did not pretend that they had not been talking to themselves. 'Dimple Basu,' she repeated. *'Dimple Basu is a happy woman.'*"[269] However, Dimple retreats afterwards to her fantasy world: a world made of borrowed faces in magazines in which she engages with such imaginary, made-up people in the fashion of day dreaming.[270] In fact, such a fantasy world seems to not only accommodate her yearning to live happy, but also to help her survive the hideous reality. However, Dimple's duality continues as she still believes that this is her Sita fate and she has a duty to fulfil.

In a patriarchal society as hers, therefore, Dimple becomes gradually aware that women are reduced into the inferior status of being objects or properties. Dimple recollects how she was prepared all her life to be a subservient wife. As she moves to Amit's apartment, Dimple is delineated as if shipped to her in-laws' house, where it is the husband now who inherits the authority over her life. She is further expected to at least control her individuality and identity, if not to obliterate them, in order to fit into social role of an imposing patriarchy. Hence, Mukherjee designates the predicament of the Indian woman whose social role, by tradition, is

[268] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, p 12.
[269] Ibid., p 21. My italics.
[270] Ibid., p 24.

defined by a patriarchally encoded culture. Dimple, thus, responds to a magazine editor who writes about women's rights in the institution of marriage, by reinforcing the image of Sita:

> Marriage is the song of the road and we should all sing it. Otherwise the virtues of our culture will wither and fall off by the wayside. Are you forgetting the unforgettable Sita of legends? Can you not recall how she walked through fire to please Ram, her kingly husband? Did Sita humiliate him by refusing to stroll through the fire in front of his subjects and friends? Let us carry the torch of Sita's docility![271]

The letter to the magazine signifies Dimple's endeavour to reassure, remind, and further convince herself of what she must be. Everything could happen in Sita's life save for dis-loyalty, which can be found in any form of dissatisfaction with Amit. Dimple resumes

> Then if "happiness" is our only goal as you claim, we should all be "happy as monkeys" and then where our culture would be? ... just as the man has certain obligations to society, so the wife has obligation to the husband ... After all, we are not so depraved as Europeans or our own film stars.[272]

Soon afterwards, however, an awareness grows in her reminding her how miserable she is: upon forgetting to prepare the fresh lemonade for Amit—having been absorbed in the world of the magazines pages—Dimple laments how his "disapproval tortured her [and that] all her life she has been trained to please. He expected her like Sita to jump into fire if necessary."[273]

Dimple's frustration in her married life increases along with the anxiety of and the tendency towards resorting to a fantasy world. Moreover, she starts displaying inclinations towards violence; in one of the vomiting times of her pregnancy, for example, she notices a mouse which she chases "in an outburst of hatred, her body shuddering, her wrist taut with fury, she smashed the top of a gray small head," and to Dimple "the dead mouse looked

[271] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, p 28.
[272] Ibid., p 28.
[273] Ibid., p 30.

pregnant."[274] Symbolically, killing the mouse could be interpreted as a projection of hatred unto herself and her husband and a reaction to feelings of insecurity and insignificance. Besides, Dimple's sudden pregnancy serves as another distressing imposition in her life: "no one consulted her before depositing it in her body"; she "hated tyrannical foetuses," and the more time passes the more her "body swell[s] violently with unvented hate."[275] It is worth noticing here how ironic it is that when the promise of happiness with Amit renews its vows with the plans of immigration, and desire for "everything to be nice and new", Dimple's pregnancy "seemed an unfinished business. It cluttered up the preparation for going abroad as she did not want to carry any relic from her old life."[276]

This being the case, at a critical moment of her life when she is in need for solidity, tolerance and a sense of the self, the pregnancy comes upon her, enhancing a state of fragmentation, stagnation, exploitation from which she has been badly suffering so far. Added to this, the Basus seemed to be treating the unborn son as a "communal property"—and Dimple, herself, by extension.[277] Inducing miscarriage, therefore, looms inevitable now, insofar as she cannot allow the foetus to dominate her life; upon a salient impulse, Dimple skips with a rope till her legs become numb and loses the embryo. Sumati and Pashupati Jha demonstrate here that "[t]his is the first act of asserting [Dimple's] will, regenerating herself, as she had never done before, [for] no typical Indian woman would have committed such a ghastly act, that too in the case of her first child."[278] In this regard, Mukherjee depicts Dimple's act as an involuntary surrender to a temporary madness which allows a room for making a choice: "It's not

[274] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, p 35.
[275] Ibid., pp 33-4.
[276] Ibid., p 42.
[277] See what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), p 12.
[278] Sumati Jha and Pashupati Jha, "Mind and Movement: Metamorphosis of Women in Bharati Mukherjee," in Nandini Sahu, (ed.), *The Postcolonial Space: Writing the Self and the Nation*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Ltd., 2007), p 3.

like murder ... I would never commit a murder!''[279]—as long as it is not planned, it is not considered a murder. In fact, Mukherjee re-inscribes the difficulty which Dimple encounters while facing the Indian values, for every time she needs to take control over her own life, it has to happen at a moment of irrationality. Now with no baby in prospect, Dimple looks forward to an American future, with no "relics from her old life" which gives her the chance to "be [a] more exciting person, take evening classes perhaps, [or] become a librarian," since many "Indian wives in the States become librarians."[280] Interestingly, Mukherjee concludes this phase of Dimple's life by introducing her to Ratna Das. In Dimple's eyes, Ratna is modern and intelligent and would not walk into the fire for anyone; she ruminates over this new character in her life to conclude that one cannot possibly be modern and heroic simultaneously: "[y]ou had to choose between being Sita of the rounded hips who could saunter through fire or being Ratna Das."[281]

Immigrating to the States proves to have brought Dimple's identity into further problematisation: no sooner has she set foot in the foreign land than she is concurrently shocked at and afraid of its ampleness. The first few days of arrival go pleasantly, but shortly afterwards she begins to suffer from the immense difference between New York and Calcutta, added to that the increasing sense of frustration owing to Amit finding no job: now, the "little gestures," which she did notice at home, "had begun to irritate her."[282] Her attachment to Amit dwindles further insofar as she wanted him "to be infallible, intractable, godlike, but with boyish charm," while the latter contrarily seemed to "have collapsed, to have grown pale and shabby."[283] Moreover, it is here—that is in the States—that she goes through the conundrum of (re-)defining the self in the light of the cultural politics of her native and new cultures: the

[279] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, p 43.
[280] Ibid., pp 42-3.
[281] Ibid., p 48.
[282] Ibid., p 88.
[283] Ibid., pp 88-9.

self-contained domestic world of Indians in Queens and the "sophisticated" parties of the more expansive and "Americanized" Indians in Manhattan.[284] With her new acquaintances, conversations are almost always on either the Indians' individual/collective expectations of 'making it in America' or on the disadvantages of living in the States: that is the high crime in the streets of New York, the cost of buying groceries, the reasons for not getting to know Americans; she is, thus, perplexed over the necessity of even knowing foreigners: "... who needs *Sahibs*? There must be a thousand Indians in just this neighborhood."[285]

Nonetheless, Dimple attempts to immerse herself in the openness and modernity of the American culture, but seems to have failed to adapt to the ways of life there: either on account of her pecuniary straits or owing to her timid and inhibited nature. Moreover, what she believes would make her free to lead a life both different and distanced from that which she had left behind in India seems to have reinforced her native cultural moorings insofar as she finds herself in the challenge of existing in a vague, undefined social space which disturbingly keeps reminding her of her "Indianness" among the "Americanized Indians."[286] This, in fact, leads to crescendo in the sense of alienation and marginality which is to ultimately bring about a transformation of the self beyond recognition: "her mind [is] strained ... beyond endurance ... inertia, exhaustion, [and] endless indecisiveness."[287] In this light, it is worth considering Sumati and Pashupati Jha's observation that "[a]n inner violence generates in [Dimple], leading her to convert from a future-excited, future-enthusiast into a morose carving out seven ways of committing suicide or killing her husband seeking revenge."[288] Indeed, one can argue that the genesis of such a transformant stems from the very fact of being pre-

[284] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, pp 60-1.
[285] Ibid., p 54.
[286] Ibid., *Wife*, p 77.
[287] Ibid., p 115.
[288] Sumati Jha and Pashupati Jha, "Mind and Movement: Metamorphosis of Women in Bharati Mukherjee," in Nandini Sahu, (ed.), *The Postcolonial Space: Writing the Self and the Nation*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Ltd., 2007), p 5.

viously marginalised by the patriarchal Indian culture, inasmuch as she is likewise at sea in the new, adopted culture.

In the States, Dimple's sense of her own identity as an immigrant—which is accompanied by an anxiety over her marginality—frames all of her reactions to the new milieu, generally consisting of Indians, mostly Bengalis. In other words, the ethnography of Indians, including 'Americanized' Bengalis, constitutes the very experience of being in a foreign country; as R. S. Krishnan argues, this "is one of the many reversals of ideological positioning Mukherjee employs in *Wife*."[289] This state manifests in the scene in which Jyoti and Amit discuss "guns and licenses" over dinner with Dimple thinking that "she had never really been friends with anyone before this, never stayed with someone for weeks and discussed important things like love and death. That's what America meant to her."[290] In this light, it seems that Dimple's blunder of taking the social circle of Indians for a cultural experience proves to have prevented her from experiencing life on the exterior level which might have re-framed her view of the American society. Interestingly, however, Mukherjee depicts Dimple in a way that projects her analysis of the earliest encounter with the alien socio-cultural ambiance of the American society from the very perspective of her own cultural moorings; such projection is neatly externalised in the scene where she is turned away from her request for "five hundred grams of cheesecake," with the reminder that "Schwartz's is a *kosher* deli, and does not sell "milk, cheese, [or] sour cream."[291] Quickly afterwards, Dimple is found reflecting that "[i]n Calcutta she'd buy from Muslims, Biharis, Christians, Nepalis. She was used to many races; she'd never been a communalist," but now in the States she "was caught in the crossfire of an American communalism she couldn't understand. She

[289] R. S. Krishnan, "Cultural Construct and the Female Identity: Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*," *The International Fiction Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 1-2, (1998). Accessed online via the following website: http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7599/8656

[290] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, pp 84-5.

[291] Ibid., pp 59-60.

felt she'd come very close to getting killed on her third morning in America."[292] Thus, the fiasco she faces in her endeavour to negotiate the cultural splits reiterates her failure in finding her own space within the confines of an alien culture. This being the case, she becomes incapable of either negotiating the cultural obstacle or finding a voice which answers her needs, speaks for her, or divulges the import of her yet chaotic experience. The shop scene reflects the precariousness of relying on one's own cultural standards while attempting to understand the norms of an alien community: she leaves the store in dread with "eyes closed, hands covering her mouth and nostrils."[293] Hence, the first actual encounter is a clash between the two cultures, which alienates Dimple and plants fear in her heart. She deteriorates later into a state of inertia where she spends her day sleeping, eating cold food and listening to the television.

Culturally confused as she is, Dimple's perplexity over what constitutes 'American communalism' is further intensified by her inability to communicate via the language of either the Americanized Indians or the Americans. Addressed by Ina Mullick, Dimple is told that talking to her is like "talking to a porpoise"; Dimple response, however, is "I like porpoises ... They're so nearly human, aren't they?"[294] The irony lies, yet, in the fact that "she had seen only one in her life, and that too on television, flipping and squealing in a kidney-shaped swimming pool in a suburban backyard while it waited to be freighted clear across the country. A porpoise was an immense, soft, vulnerable creature."[295] Mukherjee continues the exquisite narrative by delineating how "[a]t the back of [Dimple's] mind floated a disturbing image of herself as child, with scarred knees and a pink taffeta bow on her head. [And] When Ina spoke in English, her words were predatory, Dimple realized."[296] Thus juxtaposing

[292] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, p 60.
[293] Ibid., p 60.
[294] Ibid., p 136.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid., p 137.

Dimple's association of the image of the porpoise's "vulnerability" with her own as a child with her apprehension of the social world of Ina—as represented by language—Mukherjee externalises the female immigrant's conflict between her self-image, that is her interiority, and her experience of the "other's" language as signifier of a culture perturbingly alien. In this regard, "[l]anguage, in immigrant literature, becomes a metaphor both of belonging and of not belonging."[297] Thus being both inadequate and incapable of reaching a rapport between her experience and the language appropriate to its expression, Dimple is rendered both culturally and linguistically silenced; her incapacity of responding to Ina reiterates her insular life insofar as it does her qualms. Having been denied expression—that is a voice—Dimple is rendered inefficient in validating not only her experience, but also her identity. In fact, one can argue that she seems to have reacted to her surroundings—be it social, cultural, or otherwise—in a manner so instinctive and predictable that it could be categorized a tropism.

With the increasing sense of being excluded from her own cultural grouping, afraid to venture out, and reticent about meeting people, on the one hand, Dimple is found spending most of her time isolated from the world outside, reading *Better Homes and Gardens* and watching television: "[d]aytime shows with inspiring names like 'Guiding Light' and 'Love of Life.' The women on television led complicated lives, became pregnant frequently and under suspicious circumstances ... murdered or were murdered, were brought to trial and released; they suffered through the Ping-Pong volley of their fates with courage."[298] It is considerably ironical that it is principally from television that Dimple "learned the details of American home life."[299] On the other hand, Dimple's subservience proves to re-iterate the negative impact of a culture and an ideology—native and alien—both of which deny her the right to personal feelings and desires which not only would serve her own interests, but also

[297] B. A. St. Andrews, "Co-Wanderers Kogawa and Mukherjee: New Immigrant Writers," *World Literature Today*, Vol. LXVI, No., 1, (Winter, 1992), p 56.
[298] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, pp 72-3.
[299] Ibid., p 73.

could allow her to forge her own identity. As she has been brought up to defer to the father and husband's power when examining and judging her emotions and behaviours, Dimple becomes ineluctably unable to act as an agent of change on her own behalf insofar as she does not seem to comprehend any reason that justifies her feelings. With regard to the problematic of identity, therefore, it is worth noticing that as an Indian woman, considered as the symbol and repository of 'virtue,' it becomes her *feminine* obligation to subjugate both her feelings and desires to the will of the patriarchal figure, be it a father or a husband; then, her congenial sense of selfhood is suppressed, rendering here identity enormously disturbed.

When Dimple is seduced by Milt Glasser, her isolation and despair grow more acute and intense; in doing so, she is committing an ultimately ghastly sacrilege, that is the betrayal of her gendered Indian culture, which drives her inner sense of identity to deteriorate drastically: "[s]he was *so much worse off than ever, more lonely*, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, *left only with borrowed disguises* ... [and living] like a shadow without feelings."[300] This being the case, her sense of loss is heightened by such seduction: a moral lapse that is as inimical to her status and self-identity as it is insidious to her role as a wife. Increasingly isolated from the world outside, and bitterly disappointed in Amit as he takes to washing dishes, owing to not finding a professional job, Dimple bewails how "[l]ife should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a chimera."[301] In fact, Amit had earlier reinforced the hierarchised gender relationship of the Indian culture by observing that "[w]ith so many Indians around and a television and a child, a woman shouldn't have any time to get crazy ideas."[302] In this regard, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that "[i]t is debilitating to be any woman in a society

[300] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, p 200. My italics.
[301] Ibid., p 156.
[302] Ibid., p 69.

where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters."[303] This being the case, Dimple is debilitated and is ultimately made a monster owing to the sense of her own subservience and marginality, on the one hand, and the constant frustration in adjusting to her new environment and new experiences, on the other hand.

Immensely insulated and self-introvert as she grows now, Dimple descends into madness where the line between the real and imaginary is indistinct. In a nebulous fit, between the TV, her delusions and the apartment, she stabs Amit and thinks of TV advertisers of cereals and imagines the knife becoming redder than ever when she used it for chicken and mutton and Leni. For Dimple, thus, television becomes the other reality, or in other words the exaggerated world of social intercourse; her ultimately violent final act significantly comes after a strenuous attempt to give voice to her feelings in a language that is alien to her:

> She groped for the right words, then remembering Ina and Milt, she pounced on an English word and trotted it out the way Ina had done on a more eventful day. 'You just aren't *supportive,* if you know what I mean.' 'You're nuts,' Amit retorted. But he took his notebook out of his pajama pocket and scribbled down a word. Dimple tried to sidle closer to him so she could make out what he had written. Could he be writing down *her* word, adding it to his list of words to show off in company? Revenge! Revenge!"[304]

In this regard, Gayatri Spivak argues that "[t]he will to explain [is] a symptom of the desire to have a self; the possibility of explanation carries the presupposition of an explainable (even if not fully) universe and an explaining (even if imperfectly) subject."[305] Yet, as Dimple's frail endeavour of identity-assertion is met with apathy, her language is appropriated by her husband. Although she is aware of this appropriation, her innermost being—that is her feminine self—does not seem to allow her to assess her gendered role or the power differentiation

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[303] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p 53.
[304] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, p 208. My italics.
[305] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, (London: Routledge, 1988), p 105.

between the male/female functionality. The novel concludes with Dimple imagining Amit's severed head on the dining table, musing whether his head would look better mounted. Indeed, Dimple's act—which could be taken for a signifier of her alienated self—is simultaneously a falsification and a verification of her perception of life in America, just as the television to which she is addicted reflects and recreates its own reality: not only a problematically transmuted being, but also as a victim of cultural displacement and patriarchal discourse. Thus, *Wife* externalises the negative impact of the marginalisation of the female immigrant by exploring the ways in which culture and ideology construct feminine identity.

Arab American Immigrants and the Metamorphic Experience of Identity Re-Formation in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*

As *Jasmine* and *Wife* have both dealt with identity crisis exhibited through two different Indian women—delineating the indispensable metamorphic experiences through which Indian female immigrants go to come to terms with their negotiated identities—so does *Arabian Jazz* in its representation of the conundrum of (re-)defining the self for the two principal characters: Arab-American daughters of a Jordanian patrimonial lineage. In fact, the text serves as an overture to shed more light onto the predicaments of discrimination, assimilation, and the ambivalence of the Arab-American identity as a socio-cultural construct. More significantly, the novel shows how issues like the socio-demographic change affecting not only the society itself, but also the lives of the diverse ethnic groups and the individuals alike has been associated with the larger-scale experiences of Arab immigrants in the United States. Before delving into a close analysis of *Arabian Jazz*, however, I aim in the following section to elucidate the immediate atmosphere from within which the problematic of the Arab(-American) identity—as depicted in the novel—invariably emanates.

Parallel to other identities in the States, the formation of Arab American identity took several years to crystallise; and there is much debate on the way it has been historically constructed. According to various scholars and critics, the pan-ethnic identity 'Arab American' is relatively new, dating to the early 1970s and manifesting only as an outcome of the a rise in political consciousness among people of Arab origin—whether immigrant or native to the United States. In his book, *The Arab Americans: A History*, George Orfalea maintains that the first appearance of the term "Arabic-speaking American" was in the 1946 publication by Habib Katibah and Farhat Ziadeh under the same title; he affirms that the term "Arab American" began to be used by the community itself around the same time.[306] Michael Suleiman traces the construction of the ethnic identity to the 1967 defeat of Arab forces and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank;[307] Louise Cainkar relates the rising political mobilization under the pan-ethnic identity to the US imperial aspirations in the Arab World around the middle of the twentieth century.[308] In this light, both Suleiman and Cainkar draw our attention to the political nature of Arab American identity (hence being postcolonial) and its relationship to global dynamics. Identical to other ethnic categories in the US, being Arab American is fraught with diverse origins, religions, orientations, and dispositions; this is owing to the fact that people originating in Arab countries are in no way homogeneous: they do not all consider themselves Arab.[309] More interestingly, and similar to other ethnic labels, an Arab American identity and community seem to be continuously and actively being constructed and reconstructed.[310]

[306] George Orfalea, *Arab Americans: A History*, (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2006).
[307] See Michael Suliman, *Arabs in America*
[308] Louise Cainkar, "The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. XXV, No. 2-3, (2006), pp 243–278.
[309] Kristine J. Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal, "Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans," *International Migration Review*, Vol. XLI, No. 4, (December, 2007), pp 860–879.
[310] Yvonne Yazbek Haddad, *Not Quite American? The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the US*, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2004).

Under the aforementioned conditions, identity formations take place through dynamics internal to the community itself, including (but not exclusive to) the activities of ethnic organisations, community centres, and political activists[311] and external developments that comprise the foreign and domestic policies of the American government, the political environment in Arab countries, and the interactions which members of the Arab American community have with other communities around them.[312] This being the case, I aim to depict in the following section of this chapter—and later in the forthcoming chapter—the socio-political worldview of Arab Americans; I trace representation of the development of an ethnic[313] political community among the different waves of immigrants by illustrating the global, transnational and national, social and political conditions shaping the context for the development of the community. This is done through the examination of the migratory patterns of the members of the community and highlights the dynamics that shaped their emigration, reception, and formation of identity and community.

Conventionally, analyses of Arab American communities in the US have been perceived through the assimilation–multiculturalism paradigm. On the one hand, assimilation refers to the ways members of an immigrant community became absorbed by the dominant society by means of different mechanisms such as language absorption, socioeconomic mobility, and intermarriage. Principally, assimilation is defined as a one-sided process of incorporating migrants into host societies; during the course of the process of adapting to the new setting, migrants are expected to give up distinctive cultural and social attributes so as to

[311] Caroline R. Nagel, and Lynn A. Staeheli, "Citizenship, Identity and Transnational Migration: Arab Immigrants to the United States," *Space and Polity*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, (2004), pp 3–23.

[312] Steven Salaita, "Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism: Arab Americans before and after 9/11," *College Literature*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (2005), pp 146–168.

[313] Ethnicity is defined as a group of people who identify with each other based on common ancestral, social, cultural, or national experiences. In other words, ethnicity (like race, and gender) is a socio-political, cultural and economic construct. Please see James Peoples and Garrick Bailey, *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 9th edition, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010), p 389.

become indistinguishable from members of the new society.[314] On the other hand, multiculturalism connotes a more plural context of reception, allowing immigrants, thus, to be incorporated into their new societies through multiple paths—where immigrant communities are accepted as ethnic minorities. In this light, multiculturalism stresses that ethnic groups retain their distinguishable character (such as language, culture, or social behaviour) from the majority population within a larger multicultural society.[315]

With my analysis of *Arabian Jazz* in this chapter (and *Crescent* in the next one), I aim to highlight the ways in which a representation of an Arab American community/individuals has either stressed the various processes through which the group and/or individuals mange an assimilation into the American mainstream; I also examine the development of an ethnic identity along with an awareness of difference within the structure of American racial ethnic hierarchies. Moreover, I approach 'diaspora' as a catalyst provider of a framework through which we can reach a better understanding of immigrants' integration that moves beyond traditional sociological models, such as assimilation and ethnic pluralism.[316] As an explanatory paradigm, diaspora possesses malleable qualities, such as the awareness of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion that complicates our understanding of immigrant communities and worldviews. The chapter concludes by underlining the contested nature of Arab American identity and the challenges faced by members of the community at present.

In an answer to how she perceives the complexity of her Arab-American identity, for instance, Palestinian-American poet and scholar, Lisa Suhair Majaj recounts how once she "claimed a past, spoke [her] history, told [her] name, the walls of incomprehension and hostility rose, brick by brick: unfunny 'ethnic' jokes, jibes about terrorists and Kalashnikovs,

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[314] Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).
[315] Linda Basch, et al., *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, (Basel: Gordon and Breach, 1994).
[316] Dalia Abdelhady, "Beyond Home/Host Networks: Forms of Solidarity among Lebanese Immigrants in a Global Era," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, (September, 2006), pp 427-53.

about veiled women and camels"; she states that while "searching for images of [her] Arab self in American culture [she] found only unrecognizable stereotypes."[317] Apparently, the genesis of such a dilemmatic situation seems to originate in the very semantic implication of the term 'Arab-American' which denotes the duality of belonging to two seemingly different worlds, resulting in a diversity of social, cultural, and politico-religious clashes that have ever kept recurring in the lives of the Arabs who have immigrated to and settled in the States. What adds further to an already haunting sense of uncertainty is the very tardily achieved recognition of Arab-Americans as a "recognized minority group"[318] which has obliged the Arab immigrants to re-construct an image of the self in a way that puts them in parallel to other ethnic groups living in the US. In this regard, however, it is worth considering how Mervat Hatem, a feminist and a renowned figure in political science, conceives of 'Arab-Americans' as:

> [m]embers of an ethnic minority, represent[ing] a break with older attitudes and strategies. [They] represent a new emphasis on their hybrid cultural character as at once Arab and American. The Arab component is not only shaped by the past and present history of their countries of origin, their diverse ethnic/cultural traditions, but also by the history of the Arabs' immigration to the US and the positions they occupy [there]. The American component is largely shaped by widespread intercultural marriage, the experience of being a cultural and a relig-

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[317] Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Boundaries: Arab/American," in Joanna Kadi, (ed.), *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists,* (Massachusetts: South End Press, 1994), p 67.
Majaj's critical essays on literature and women's writings have appeared in several journals and have resulted in three co-edited collections: *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist, Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers,* and *Intersections: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Women's Novels*.
Please see the following: Lisa Suhair Majaj and Amal Amireh, (eds.), *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist,* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc. Publishers, 2002).
Lisa Suhair Majaj and Amal Amireh, (eds.), *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000).
Lisa Suhair Majaj, et al., (eds.), *Intersections: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Women's Novels*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002).
[318] Nada Elia, "Islamophobia and the 'privileging' of Arab American Women," *NWSA Journal*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, (Fall, 2006), p 156.

> ious minority, and the treatment of Arabs and/or Arab Americans by the hegemonic culture as a cultural 'other'.[319]

It is from within this socio-historical context that Arab-American literature—under which Diana Abu-Jaber's writing is classified—emerges to aesthetically encapsulate, among other issues, the complexity of immigration and its concomitant impact on the immigrant's identity under the lashes of a continuum of estrangement, nostalgia, pain, and oppression.[320] Arab-American authors have been, thus, delineating the new confrontations, with which Arab immigrants were made to deal in the course of (re-)defining and integrating their identities into the American cultural ambiance.

Diana Abu-Jaber stands among the well-established authors in the world of the modern Arab-American literature; she has debuted her literary career with the publication of her award-wining novel *Arabian Jazz* (1993), tackling issues of identity, representation, and cultural ambiguity. Abu-Jaber was born in Syracuse, New York, to a Jordanian immigrant father and an American mother of Irish-German descent. When she was seven, the family moved to Jordan only to return to the States two years later. Having mostly taken residence in the States, since then, she obtained an MA in English from the University of Windsor in 1982 and completed her PhD in Creative Writing at the State University of New York, Binghamton in 1986. She is currently a Writer-in-Residence at Portland State University. With her writing "known for its skillful treatment of the Arab-American immigrant experience,"[321] she has constantly concerned herself with the conflicting nature of the Arab constituent of the identity of second-generation Arab immigrants in a conspicuously heterogeneous ambiance: the

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[319] Mervat Hatem, "The Invisible American Half: Arab American Hybridity and Feminist Discourses in the 1990s," in Ellah Shohat, (ed.), *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), p 370.

[320] Jopi Nyman argues that while migration is a long standing phenomenon especially in North America, its contemporary forms and volumes have generated cultural experiences and expressions from music and the visual arts to film and literature. Please see the following for a full reference: Jopi Nyman, *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p 10.

[321] Elizabeth H. Oakes, *American Writers*, (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2004), p 2.

oscillation between their 'Americanised' individual lives and the stipulations and expectations reinforced by the traditional extended family network. This has later crystallised in her later works such as *Crescent* (2003)—which is discussed in Chapter Four—*The Language of Baklava* (2005), a non-fiction work, and *Origin* (2007). Herself of a half-Arab, half-American origin, then, Abu-Jaber has undertaken depicting not only the confusion and frustration, but also the sense of spiritual homelessness and the hardship felt on the part of second generation migrants in the process of adjusting to US society—and other difficulties figures like herself seem to have been facing in their daily life in the States.

When asked about the ramifications of her cross-cultural background on both her stance and the way she conceives of herself as a member of an ethnic minority, Abu-Jaber declares that her father has always "raised [them] as Arab women, instilled with Arab values and beliefs. This was frequently a *confusing, frustrating,* and mysterious way to be raised, but it always offered lots of interesting material ... *I still have a 'divided' sense of self* and I try to visit Jordan and my friends and family there whenever possible."[322] Similarly does she express the very intricacy of whether or not she feels constrained by being categorised under the label of the 'Arab American author'; in an interview with Robin Field, she states:

> It can feel confining, absolutely. I have the sense that a lot of it is sort of the machinations of publicity and marketing. *You write from a kind of cultural perspective, and then your publisher, or the powers that be, decide that is the angle that gives them the handle on who you are*. *And it seems to mark you as different.* In a way it's good because it gives you a kind of specificity, which is always helpful; but it only helps in the beginning, and it only takes you so far. There is a sense of confinement about it sometimes. My work [that is the *Arabian Jazz*] comes out, and I get cranky responses from the Arab community. They're so maternal and paternal and disapproving, and the Americans are so welcoming. So you kind of feel like, 'What am I knocking myself out for?' But I don't delib-

[322] Diana Abu-Jaber as quoted in Elizabeth Oakes. Please see the following: Elizabeth H. Oakes, *American Writers*, (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2004), p 2. My italics

> erately choose my subject matter; it's just what comes up for me, whatever seems to be on my mind.[323]

Interestingly correlating to the sense of confinement on the part of its author, the disproportionate 'cranky' reception of the book intersects with the fact that at the time of its publication there were still few self-representations of Arabs in America.[324] In this regard, Abu-Jaber says about the novel that most people felt it was mocking—somehow slick—and were outraged it was not an authentic representation of their real stories.[325]

Set in the poor white-community of upstate New York, where Abu-Jaber herself grew up, *Arabian Jazz* explores a terrain fraught with intersecting cultural mores, confronting readers with racism, dismal paucity, female infanticide, and incest—all of which set against the background of the strife of one immigrant's family to demarcate a well-defined identity in an America of a seeming vestige of hostility. The novel illustrates the ravelled experiences of two second-generation young Arab American immigrant women—namely Jemorah and Melvina Ramoud—as they struggle to cope with a cultural conflict in their American community. On the one hand, they have not developed a strong bond with the Arab culture of the Jordan of their father; for instance, readers should consider the reluctance with which both Jemorah and Melvina respond to the announcement of the forthcoming "Family Function Season," where Jemorah never has "any fun in these things."[326] On the other hand, however, the American society does not seem to have perceived them as truly American—hence the novel follows their conflict in finding and establishing their real identity, especially with regard to the concept of 'home' as a signifier of belonging and identification.

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[323] Robin E. Field, "A Prophet in Her Own Town: An Interview with Diana Abu-Jaber," *MELUS*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, (Winter, 2006), p 213. My italics.

[324] There was a plenty of representations of Arabs in American mainstream culture, most of which was racially biased and ethnically stereotyped. Jack Shaheen (died on July 9th, 2017) was a writer and lecture who drew the attention to such misrepresentations in his book *Reel Bad Arabs* which was adapted into a documentary film in 2006.

[325] Robin E. Field, "A Prophet in Her Own Town: An Interview with Diana Abu-Jaber," pp 213-15.

[326] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2003), pp 5-6. All the subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from the same edition and will be referred to by page number.

Arabian Jazz shows different views, or experiences, of the Arab diaspora in the United States and the struggle to locate home as a signifier of belonging. The first one is the classic first generation experience, represented by Fatima—who is sure about where her home is as the place of origin, and whether one intends to return to it of not—by Matussem who is trying his best to adjust well to the American way of living; the second one is the conflictive second generation experience represented by Jemorah and Melvina. Even though the novel deals with three views, there seem to be four different approaches to the understanding of the characters' perceptions of their condition as Arabs (American) in America: one that is lived by Arab immigrants who refuse to change their ways, such as Fatima's; another more acceptant of the of their positions as migrants in a new, mostly hostile land migration, like Matussem's; one who seems to be living under the mercy of a grave confusion, as Jemorah's; and the fourth and last of those perceptions is Melvina's, who seems to have adapted greatly to being hyphenated.

Fatima's view, marked by the ambiguous desire to return to Jordan, represents the first generation migrants' view of diaspora; she holds tight to her family traditions as a means of not only keeping her culture alive, but also affirming affirm her identity as an Arab woman. While Fatima makes sure to follow the same rules that her mother in Jordan followed—thus emulating in America life in the country of origin, expecting her two nieces to do the same—Melvina and Jemorah are caught between two equally strong cultures: the Arabic culture of their paternal lineage and the American culture where they were born and live. The novel shows both women developing identity issues in a way that is different from their father and aunt's. For his part, however, Matussem is not bothered with what other people think of him; he knows that he is different and there is no way he can change that, mostly because he does not fully understand how the American society functions. For him Nora, his wife, was enough reason not to go back to Jordan; ever since her death, he has

worked on creating his own particular way of adapting to the American way of living. Jemorah, as a second generation migrant however, struggles to find a place where she belongs, and in this process she is caught between two completely different views of the world: one is represented by her mother and the other is represented by her aunt. Her inability to find where her 'home' and her 'people' are can plausibly be the *raison d'être* of her incompetence to start living her own life by making her own decisions.

Melvina, nevertheless, is a dedicated nurse who lives for her job; she does not seem to be troubled by her split vision, and seems to assimilate into the American culture better than her sister does. In fact, Melivina can be seen as a representative of a different perception of diaspora: the one where there is no desire to return to the homeland. She understands her hyphenated condition and is able to deal with its consequences by means of investing heavily in her career as a nurse, and keeping her relationships strictly professional, for the most part of the novel. This is mostly because Melvina feels that she has been deprived of information about her past, especially of who Nora was, insofar as neither Jemorah, nor her father shares their memories with her. The difference between Fatima, Matussem and his children is that their imagination created a host country while his children have to imagine a place where they belong, since they are both Arab and American. Matussem's imaginary home is Jordan with which he identifies and belongs to; to Melvina and Jemorah (in particular), however, however, they have to create a place of their own where they can feel whole–especially Jemorah who struggles to find a place where she belongs in the sense that she could never feel wholly American or wholly Arab.

Early in the novel, the two young women are shown as grief-stricken with the loss of their deceased American mother—who long died of typhus during a terminal visit to the father's family in Amman, Jordan. Gradually the book unfolds dramatically to make clear how Jemorah and Melvina suffer not only from their Arab background in their incessant

endeavours to embrace the American socio-cultural norms. They also equally undergo the often negative impact of their extended family on such attempts; this confusing problem seems to keep them in a precarious state of 'in-betweeness' which proves itself to be not only a "non-place," but also not "an alternative construction of territories and forms of belonging,"[327] as Denilson Lopes claims. Abu-Jaber appropriately sheds light on such a disconcerting aspect of the two girls' lives in a salient scene in which Aunt Fatima and their mother, Nora, impose their perception of where 'home' should be, with the former claiming it to be Jordan and the latter asserting the States as their true home:

> [Aunt Fatima:] *You come back to home* soon, *come back to Old Country*, marry the handsome Arab boys and make for us grandsons [...]
>
> [Nora:] *Your home is here* [that is the States]. Oh, you will travel, I want you to. *But you always know where your home is*.[328]

In this light, the two women have—early since their childhood—been concurrently claimed by both different sides of their familial lineage. As they consequently become caught between two dissimilar cultures, however, Jem and Melvie continue to uncomfortably search for their identity under the inexorable supervision of their aunt.

Jem and Melvie prove through their dual belonging the dilemmatic nature of what Abu-Jaber describes as "in the book of life, every page has two sides."[329] Apparently, the two have been leading a life that has two sides and principally brings about their identity problem. The opening of the novel shows how the then young school girls are confused about their own appearance and reality; they feel and act as "wild-American-girls," but their "names and complexions tell them otherwise."[330] This being the case, the only a viable solution left for

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[327] Denilson Lopes, "From the Space In-Between to the Transcultural," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Vol. XVI, No. 3, (December, 2007), pp 359-369. I accessed the article online via the following website: https://www.academia.edu/4959785/From_the_Space_In-Between_to_the_Transcultural

[328] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, pp 77-8. My italics.

[329] Ibid., p 6.

[330] Ibid., p 10.

Jem and Melvie when addressing the problematic of identity re-construction could possibly lie in what Salwa Essayah Chérif specifies as appropriating the present in "the making of the Arab American female self and creat[ing] a space of self-invention for Arab American women where they negotiate a new sense of self in the layers of a buried ethnic past."[331] In this regard, Salwa Chérif correlates between contemporary political events and their negative impact on the representation of Arabs. Regarding Arab Americans, she cites the Arab-Israeli conflict and its effects upon the Jewish American population in particular and the US population in general. She maintains that the long-standing struggle has immensely contributed to framing general public opinion in a way that simultaneously re-inscribes and reinforces the already negative stereotypes of Arab, as the "mysterious and inferior 'other,'" which have been constructed over "a long practice of the Orientalist mode of representation."[332] In the light of Chérif's argument, the articulation of a well-defined selfhood and/or the assertion of ethnicity entail for both Jem and Melvie a process of negotiation between an American present and an Arab past, in order to both inspect the implications of an ambivalent perception of the self and to formulate a constructive manner of dealing with the present. Hence *Arabian Jazz* comes out as both an exploration of the metamorphic power of narration and an attempt to break through the mélange of socio-historical factors with their confining impact on identity construction.

"I'm particularly drawn to examining the intersection between cultural and personal identity, especially with regard to linking my own experience as the child of an Arab immigrant to my American identity,"[333] Abu-Jaber states in one of her interviews. In this regard, *Arabian Jazz* offers a neat depiction of how the childhood memories of Jem and Melvie's are fraught with gloomy incidents of antagonism and hostility, expressed in derision and taunts,

[331] Salwa Essayah Chérif, "Arab American Literature: Gendered Memory in Abinader and Abu-Jaber," *MELUS*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, *Speech and Silence: Ethnic Women Writers*, (Oxford University Press, 2003), p 208.
[332] Salwa Essayah Chérif, "Arab American Literature: Gendered Memory in Abinader and Abu-Jaber," p 207.
[333] Diana Abu-Jaber as quoted in one of her interviews. Please see the following for full reference: Elizabeth H. Oakes, *American Writers*, (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2004), p 3.

physical aggression, or racist labels. In a well-delineated scene, the book shows Jem recalling with anguish her unpleasant daily bus rides to and from school; she was obliged to "learn how to close her mind, how to disappear in her seat, [and] how to blur the sound of searing voices chanting her name"[334] in order to rebuff the other children's upsetting comments on her name, her skin, and her total strangeness. To the physical violence, however, there seems to have been no viable way by which she could have prevented her hair from being pulled and torn, or her face from being scratched: no way to avoid getting pushed off the bus to face her 'shameful' family name painted on her home mailbox in what appeared to her "too big and too bright letters."[335] Even at home, which is supposed to be a source of relief, the voices would track her and haunt her disturbed nights. The remarkable irony of these episodes consists, however, in the very fact that the entire neighbourhood is socially a peripheral world in which her fellow bus riders and her "tormentors ... turned up poverty-stricken, welfare-broken, sick, crazy or drunk."[336] As she still makes her way to college, with the memory of the early pain still vivid, however, Jem comes to the distressing realisation that "*[s]he didn't fit in even with them*, those children that nobody wanted."[337] In this light, Jemorah's identity crisis seems to have intensified by what Roger Bromley specifies as experiences of "contra-dicttions and ambivalences, [of the] split between home and school, [and yet of being] physi-cally and racially marked as other"[338]—experiences that make her "marginal" or "between cultures."[339] Interestingly, Bromley's accentuation of the 'location' invokes Bhabha's *The Location* of *Culture*, in which the latter demonstrates that "the social articulation of differ-ence [manifests itself] in moments of historical transformation,"[340] through which a "dis-

[334] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, pp 92-3.
[335] Ibid., p 93.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid., p 94. My italics.
[338] Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp 104-5.
[339] Ibid., p 115.
[340] Homi. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p 2.

course of boundary" transforms into "a matter of 'becoming' (negotiation, per-haps) as well as 'being' (maintenance, perhaps)."[341]

In fact, Jemorah's feelings of hideous helplessness and lack of control have emerged following the bereavement of her mother; while the latter seemed to have struggled to clutch on to life, Jem—then only 9—has metamorphosed into someone immensely susceptible and powerless. A tough urge has become incumbent to paralyse time, lest she loses the reassuring safety engendered by the serene family image: obviously, however, she is doomed to a gruesome fiasco. Upon that grand failure, Jem has ultimately come to the belief that she has lost everything, including her sense of selfhood and her life. Since then, she has been rendered inefficient in making her own decisions with regard to her life and future, shockingly disregarding the fact that she is an independent woman with the security of a job. Nonetheless, the dilemma symbolically intensifies further as she is labelled with the stagnating *differentia specifica* of being a 'woman of colour': she is stuck in the same job for so long in a place designated as "the land that time forgot."[342] Thus, Jemorah has transformed into a woman who is disgracefully unable to proceed further in her life—neither on the personal nor on the social level. In this regard, the problematic of identity with Jem is exacerbated further insofar as she perceives herself as the "wild-American girl, painted and cunning" whom all Arab men desired, yet she finds herself at times acting like the "unwanted boring-Arab girls."[343] This very perception of the self proves itself challenging inasmuch as the American constituent of her identity is rather uplifted while the Arab one is seemingly downgraded. To make things even worse, moreover, even when Jemorah is offered help to restore her American identity, this was on the plain condition that she relinquishes any connection whatsoever

[341] Homi. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 9.
[342] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, p 135.
[343] Ibid., p 10.

with her Arab identity: "[n]ow if you were to change your name, make it Italian maybe, or even Greek, that might help some ... [to] make you *American*."[344]

An aspect of the female Arab-American immigrant problematic identity manifests in the struggle to not only coming to terms with, but also maintaining her 'Arabness'[345] and simultaneously gain acknowledgement from the immediate white community in which she lives. To Lisa Majaj, it is this "struggle to define a mode of agency capable of responding to the historical and political exigencies of the identity 'Arab American,' [which] resonates through contemporary Arab American literature."[346] On the one hand, this very exigency reflects how Arab-Americans deal with identity for both their ethnicity and their sense of 'Americanness.' In his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that the combination of socio-economical changes with increasingly rapid communications have resulted in new, potentially confounding cultural paradigms associated with humans and their relationships with history.[347] On the other hand, the complexity of identity formation intricately intersects with elements such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, or sexuality. Erik Erikson proposes that advanced identity formation is a process "deeply inflected by social features" which should make possible the ascendancy of the ego strength of fidelity.[348] In this light, cultural, demographic, political, and historical shifts greatly influence and construct the identity discourses, turning them into significant topics of debate and contemplation on the concept of the ideology of representation. For his part, Bhabha correlates the predicament of identity with the ascent of what he calls 'internationalism' and the establishment of a 'middle

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[344] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, pp 294-5. Emphasis is in the original.

[345] This insistence on maintaining the Arab quality is best manifested in the character of Aunt Fatima who always adheres to and sticks up for her Arabic roots, trying to inculcate the same mode of perception into her nieces' minds.

[346] Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab American Literature and the Politics of Memory," in Amritjit Singh, et al., (eds.), *Memory and Cultural Politics: New Approaches to American Ethnic Literatures*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), p 280.

[347] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983, reprint 1991), pp 43-44.

[348] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1968), p 27.

passage' within which a new 'imagined community' evolves. Hence emerges a community in whose ambiance cultures do not only interact; they also influence each other in the *modus operandi* of the 'third space', defined as "the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space" [rooted in] the politics of polarity, [and leading] people to emerge as others of ourselves."[349]

Thus, within the politics of the complex racial, socio-cultural, and economical situation of the time involving Arab-Americans, *Arabian Jazz* offers an aesthetically symbolic site in whose domain are ushered in paradigms of oppression and racial discrimination. In this regard, it is worth considering how associating the construct of jazz music as a culture-specific feature of African-Americans with the 'Arabian' category in the very title of the novel invokes an identity problem for the immigrant figure, especially when seen from the perspective of an imperialistic discourse of hegemony and intolerance. Such a complexity is well elucidated when Jemorah is bitterly insulted on the grounds of her background and present life as a young Arab American woman. A daughter of a Jordanian-Palestinian father and an American mother, Jemorah is identified neither as 'white' nor as 'black'. Her racial identity, however, is conspicuously problematic—if at least not looked-down-to—not only for her white American cousins, who connect her Arab heritage and skin complexion to 'something dirty', but also for her boss, Portia Porschman, who drastically externalises her racist and imperialistic discourse:

> Oh, sure, you're tainted, your skin that color. *A* damn shame ... I'm telling you, Jemorah Ramoud, your father and all his kind [that is, Arabs] aren't any better than Negroes, that's why he hasn't got any ambition and why he'll be stuck in that same job in the basement for the rest of his life. They'd never promote him any higher. He only got where he is now on my say-so, because I feel for you kids. And now you can go that way, too, or you can come under my wing and let

[349] Homi. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp 38-39.

> me educate you, really get you somewhere. We'll try putting some pink lipstick on you, maybe lightening your hair, make you *American*.[350]

Intimidated and shocked by such an explicit expression of enmity, Jem is struck paralysed that she ceases to follow the conversation with Portia. The hitherto familiar world is now seen through altered eyes, reflecting her growing realisation of the marginal position she occupies in the American society:

> It struck her ... that the thin breath in her lungs and the tightening sensation in her stomach were fear. Not merely fear of being caught, but of everything around her —of the way the strange face turned and rushed forward, of gestures and glances, of the world of people, who didn't know her or want to know her ... Somehow, the world had shifted; she'd entered a place that no longer felt benign.[351]

In this regard, it is worth considering that although Portia might have been introduced as a racist who wants to "scrub all the scum" off Jemorah, a close reading suggests that she has been implemented as a catalyst to raise the awareness of Arab-Americans for their precarious position, not by labelling the contrasts, but, instead, by focusing on what Pauline Kaldas specifies as how to "walk out of this space of racial stereotypes and self-hatred."[352]

Cultural hybridity constitutes another facet of the identity problematic for the immigrant of a 'hyphenated' origin. Edward Said conceptualises hybridity not only as a form of "protective enclosure," but also as a reaction against the stigmatising "imperial process."[353] In his *Narratives for a New Belonging*, however, Roger Bromley argues that "hybridised discourses are writing very much against the idea of a melting pot or mosaic ... and, if anything, are sites of cultural resistance and refusal."[354] Bromley relates his conception to Gloria

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[350] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, pp 294-5. Emphasis is in the original.
[351] Ibid., p 298.
[352] Pauline Kaldas, "Beyond Stereotypes: Representational Dilemmas in '*Arabian Jazz*'," *MELUS*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, (2006), p 179.
[353] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), pp xiv-xv.
[354] Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging*, pp 4-5.

Anzaldúa's notions of borderland and the new *mestiza*:[355] a process of synchresis which corresponds to the development of a context for "a tolerance for contradictions" or pluralities. Such pluralities originate what is conceived of as "hyphenated identities, living hybrid realities which pose problems for classification, [and raise] questions about notions of essential difference."[356] As far as the Arab-American identity of the female immigrant is concerned, Carol Fadda-Conrey claims that the hyphen in the term Arab-American "replicates [the] complexity of 'cultural realities,' instead of mirroring a 'well formulated synthesis'."[357] In other words, what Conrey suggests is that, representing a bridge between the two words, the hyphen implies that the word 'Arab' is not a modifier for the word 'American,' but is, instead, an equal part. With regard to *Arabian Jazz*, however, I argue that this does not seem to be the case; Jemorah is awkwardly ambivalent about her identity. The novel shows her oscillating between disturbing uncertainities: is she Arab? Is she American? Should she marry, and if so whom? Such ambivalence drives Melvina to be immensely concerned about the well-being of her sister: "Melvina smiled grimly; she made special exceptions for her older sister, who required extra care and attention. 'Validation therapy,' she called it. Her goal, she said, was to make her sister aware of reality."[358] As such, the hyphen may denote what Mervat Hatem specifies as "a well formulated and/or single synthesis of the Arab and American," but it does not seem to have resolved the "complex realities of the community."[359]

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[355] Spanish: it is the feminine form of *mestizo*. A *mestiza* is a woman of mixed racial ancestry, especially of mixed European and Native American ancestry. In her book, Anzaldúa states that from the "racial, ideological, and cultural crosspollination, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making–a new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands." Please see: Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987, reprint 2007), p 99.

[356] Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging*, p 5.

[357] Carol Fadda-Conrey, "Arab-American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*," *MELUS*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, (2006), p 204.

[358] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, pp 8-9.

[359] Mervat Hatem, "The Invisible American Half: Arab American Hybridity and Feminist Discourses in the 1990s," in Ella Shohat, (ed.), *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), p 386.

John McGowan argues about the re-construction of the 'individual identity,' approaching it as a construct which is intricately bound up with a sense of cultural and personal unfixity. In his *Postmodernism and Its Critics*, he maintains that one's identity is constructed as the individual is put through a network of relations. McGowan claims that the outcome is a self/identity that is distinctively the "product of a process, [and] is differentiated from other selves and possesses an identity that unifies its disparate experiences, guides the presentation of the self to others, and forms the context for the various choices that the self makes."[360] In line with McGowan's conceptualisation, one can argue for the possibility of identity construction in the context of relationships with others and with the environment. Identity, thus, alters or is caused to change in accordance with the situations or the 'intersubjective' settings one is 'thrown' into, irrespective of one's will or wish—and this is the case with Jem and Melvie. *Arabian Jazz* presents a salient example of the impact of an 'intersubjective' setting/ relation on the problematisation of their identity crisis in the pull and tug under which they suffered opposing messages about home, origin and affiliation:

> Their aunts and uncles ... *liked to remind Jem and Melvie that they were Arabs*, brushing out their mother's Irish-American ancestry in lectures and bedtime stories. Aunt Nejla would say, "Never mind about silly Fatima living over there; she's married. America is no place for young girls like you." Every summer one or more relatives arrived from the Old Country to tell the girls that America was a flight of fancy, their lives there a whim of their father's overactive imagination. The mirage would someday melt and *they would be back in the family home where they belonged*.[361]

While, on the contrary, Melvina considers herself American, Fatima insists that she is an Arab who lives among Americans, and "wants to keep herself, her family, and a few friends

[360] John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p 243.
[361] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, p 99. My italics.

apart from the rest."[362] With the stressful and distressing experiences of their daily life from childhood to adulthood, however, the two young women exhibit an identity ambivalence owing to what Roy F. Baumeister observes as "a strong personal and emotional commitment to two distinct identity components that [will eventually] become incompatible."[363] In this case, identity crisis emanates from the fact that the individual is faced with the conundrum in which different constituents of the self entail drastically incompatible behaviours.

Drawing on this approach, both Jemorah and Melvina could be seen enduring "an adjustment problem following change or transition of identity."[364] In this light, *Arabian Jazz* ends with an attitude of unresolved uncertainty externalised by the protagonists' confusing motivations towards the end of the novel. Melvina is depicted at the backroom of a local bar injecting Larry Fasco, her drug-addicted friend, and bringing relief and destruction to his submerged pleas. In fact, such an abnormality of the act—indifferently performed by the very life-saving and dedicated person, for which attributes Melvie is known at the hospital where she works—reveals her own ambivalence towards her life experiences, stumbled upon in a phantasmagorical manner with Larry's oscillation between life and death as "his veils would lift ... like the layers of death she had seen in her life."[365] Even though Melvina does not take any drugs herself, she simultaneously materialise the opposing roles of 'the healer' and 'the killer.' Subtly enough, Larry voices out her ambivalence over the duality of her life experience as he welcomes her to the "Room of the Absolute Present Tense,"[366] when the "tiny deaths rose and his face shin[ed] from the force of it."[367] This being the case, Larry seems to have removed her—though unrealistically—from both time and space.

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[362] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, p 360.
[363] Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self*, (New York: Oxford University Press Incorporated, 1986), p 211.
[364] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, p 211.
[365] Ibid., p 286.
[366] Ibid., p 286.
[367] Ibid.

A parallel vacillation is shown on Jem's part, materialising through the incongruity with which she comes to designate her final decisions with regard to visualising the entire orientation of her future. She first unpredictably declares her decision to be marrying her cousin and "com[ing] back with him to live in Jordan,"[368] precisely fulfilling her aunt's plans for her. Accounting for such a peculiar decision, from which a considerable amount of surprise among her family, including the very cousin whom she is marrying, however, Jemorah invokes both her alienation in America and the racist hostility she can no longer bear to put up with. In a conscientious act of recognition, Jemorah is found reflecting in harrowing details that she does not fit in the American society, nor has she put together a proper life: I'm still living at home, I've been working at a job I hate. I'm so tired of being a child, being good, wanting people to like me. *They don't like me. They don't like Arabs*."[369] Jem is likewise urged by the very same motives, and states later that her choice has altered to stay in her 'adopted homeland' and go back to school in order to "crack the mystery of this [racist] hate."[370] Such a metamorphic shift, exhibiting sudden shifts between the two opposite poles of surrender and struggle, exudes the painful level to which her identity crisis has ultimately brought.

Conclusion

Thus drawing on what has been demonstrated in this chapter, I can argue that both Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber have adroitly tackled the problematic issue of the female immigrant identity in a parallel mode of delineating different types of female immigrants, despite the difference in both the settings and characterisation. The three books show to advantage heroines who, aware of the legacy of either their hybrid entity or immigrant position, endure the complexity of (re-)producing an identity: itself a constant project of revision. In fact, all

[368] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, p 307.
[369] Ibid., p 328. My italics.
[370] Ibid., p 362.

the female immigrant protagonists—Jasmine, Dimple, Jem and Melvie—exhibit, though disproportionately, what Homi Bhabha describes as the intricacy of the "[re-]production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image."[371] In *Jasmine* and *Wife*, Jasmine and Dimple face the problem of loss of culture, the prospect of giving up their old identity, and the necessity of transforming and assuming a new one. Both novels, however, linger on this question: does the society which is free from the shackles of caste, gender and family offer these two different female immigrants the desired freedom? In parallel, *Arabian Jazz* presents the challenge of the dichotomy between the Arab and American components in Jem and Melivie's personalities, demonstrating that hybridity, as Homi Bhabha would have put it, is a space in which boundaries blur and traditions transform. In fact, Abu-Jaber depicts cultural hybridity as a significant problematic that necessitates negotiations and acceptance of requisite transformation to reach a better recognition of the self.

Through *Jasmine*, Mukherjee presents cultural hybridity as a cyclical process of constant identity construction and re-construction that is best expressed through different oppositional metaphors. Jasmine, like Mukherjee, views herself as a pioneer in America and represents the confrontational figure who defies the violence and destruction of identity construction. In an interview with Paula Marantz, held at and hosted by Drexel University, Mukherjee explains her personal discourse on the challenge of identity (re-)formation America by referencing her novel *Jasmine*:

> You're either here or you are there. You are choosing to let go some of your cultural origins and you're adopting some new ones. So *Jasmine*, the novel, like the characters in *Middlemen*, open [up] to America and feel that it has to be at the expense of the origins. I have talked about it because I felt this and still feel this in myself—making oneself over, as an American, requires a kind of murder of the

[371] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p 65.

> self—a slaughter of the old self that there is nothing benevolent or painless about that transformation.[372]

Some scholars like Kristin Carter-Sanborn read Jasmine's transformations as a bereavement of agency,[373] while others, including myself, contend that Jasmine's multiple transformations prove her agency. In *Wife*, the immigrant woman is portrayed in an alien land and is often recognised in terms of a great dismay and the loneliness that are distinctive to her condition. The novel chronicles her journey towards self-recognition, passing in the meantime through torturous physical, mental and emotional agonies that immensely affect her whole being to such extent that she is driven to violence. It is worth mentioning in this regard that if Jasmine starts her life in the States with a murder, Dimple rounds up her stay there with a murder: both experiences are a stark catalyst in the process of the character's self transformation.

In *Arabian Jazz*, however, Abu-Jaber introduces readers to hybrid protagonists who seem to undergo the experience of the "uneasy and agonistic self splitting,"[374] so common among cultural hybrid experiences. Werner Sollors, a professor of English and a scholar of ethnic communities in the US, maintains that the relationship between ethnic minorities and America is considerably characterised by the tension between dissent and consent, or the tension between the 'Old Country' perspectives on life and the acceptance of the values commonly held by the larger American society. Readers can discern this descent-consent tension in *Arabian Jazz*—and even in her later work, *Crescent* (discussed in the following chapter)—by means of the collision between ethnic identities and the new world's realities delineated in the book. Through Jem and Melvie, Abu-Jaber suggests that Arab Americans

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[372] This is transcribed from the interview with Paula Marantz Cohen, a distinguished Professor of English, in *The Drexel Interview*. Please see the full interview with Bharati Mukherjee via the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q02OsKJqzEo

[373] Kristin Carter-Sanborn, "We Murder Who We Were: *Jasmine* and the Violence of Identity," in *American Literature*, Vol. LXVI, No. 3, (1994), pp 573-94.

[374] Monika Fludernik, "Hybridity and Postcolonialism: Twentieth-Century Indian Literature," in Monika Fludernik, (ed.), *The Constitution of Hybridity: Postcolonial Interventions*, (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1998), p 19.

need to negotiate the differences between Arabness and Americaness, and only in so doing, they may revise the identity of both cultures.

IV. Chapter Four

Cultural hybridity/heterogeneity, agency, and the crisis of identity formation: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003).

> With the best of intentions, so many a time was I asked, since I had left Lebanon in 1976 to settle in France, if I felt "rather French" or "mostly Lebanese." I invariably answer: 'The one and the other!' This is not by any concern for balance or impartiality, but because responding differently, I would be lying. That I am myself and no one else is that I am so on the edge of two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. This precisely is what defines my identity. *Would I be more authentic if I cut off a part of myself?*[375]
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> When I am asked what I really am 'deep inside myself,' this supposes that there is, 'in the depths' of each one, a sole belonging counting as their 'profound truth,' that is in some way, their 'essence', determined once and for all at birth and that will not change; as if the rest, everything else—the trajectory of a free man, his acquired beliefs, his preferences, his own sensitivity, his affinities, and his life, in short—would never count for anything. And when we encourage our contemporaries to 'affirm their identity' as we often do today, what we imply to them is none but that they have to find deep inside themselves that alleged, fundamental association, which is often religious, national, racial or ethnic, and proudly brandish it in the face of others.[376]

In this chapter I intend to examine the intricate dilemma of the immigrant identity and how it is aesthetically delineated in three contemporary diasporic texts that have all been received with wide acclaim. Primarily focusing on Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (both published in 2003), my argument revolves around the inexorable challenges of identity re-construction, self-transformation, and the problematic of cultural heterogeneity and how such processes intersect with migration and the politics of identity performance. I discuss Lahiri's earlier work, *Interpreter of Maladies*, to refer to matching

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[375] Amin Maalouf, *Les Identités Meurtrières* (*The Deadly Identities*), (Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1998), p 6. My italics. The quote is my own translation of the original French, which reads as follows: *Depuis que j'ai quitté le Liban en 1976 pour m'installer en France, que de fois m'a-t-on demandé, avec les meilleures intentions du monde, si je me sentais "plutôt français" ou "plutôt libanais." Je réponds invariablement: 'l'un et l'autre!' Non par quelque souci d'équilibre ou d'équité, mais parce qu'en répondant différemment, je mentirais. Ce qui fait que je suis moi-même et pas un autre, c'est que je suis ainsi à la lisière de deux pays, de deux ou trois langues, de plusieurs traditions culturelles. C'est précisément cela qui définit mon identité. Serais-je plus authentique si je m'amputais d'une partie de moi-même ?*

[376] Ibid., pp 10-11. The original text reads as follows*: Lorsqu'on me demande ce que je suis "au fin fond de moi-même," cela suppose qu'il y a, 'au fin fond' de chacun, une seule appartenance qui compte sa "vérité profonde," en quelque sorte son 'essence,' déterminée une fois pour toutes à la naissance et qui ne changera plus; comme si le reste, tout le reste—sa trajectoire d'homme libre, ses convictions acquises, ses préférences, sa sensibilité propre, ses affinités, sa vie, en somme—ne comptait pour rien. Et lorsqu'on incite nos contemporains à "affirmer leur identité" comme on le fait si souvent aujourd'hui, ce qu'on leur dit par là c'est qu'ils doivent retrouver au fond d'eux-mêmes cette prétendue appartenance fondamentale, qui est souvent religieuse ou nationale ou raciale ou ethnique, et la brandir fièrement à la face des autres.*

themes and concerns; this, in fact, is done with two objectives in mind. I firstly want to shed some light on how Lahiri's writing has developed while undertaking the themes of migration and identity-in-crisis; my second objective lies in reinforcing how each of the three texts provides in its own scope parallel, metaphorical representations of the dilemma of the immigrant's identity, in particular when cultural appropriation entails an articulation of perturbing conceptions which accompany the process of constructing identities from the hybrid zone. Although the three works may differ in their setting, the cultural focal points, and experiences, they all, however, offer metaphorical representations of the immigrant's identity crisis, and an articulation of such quandary by means of highlighting the necessity of attaining agency in the course of re-constructing the self.

Interestingly, both *The Namesake* and *Crescent* portray a variety of themes such as the agony of identity loss, the initial inability to assimilate into different set of socio-cultural norms, the hope of acceptance, and the preservation of traditions in ways that defy readers to draw connections between objects and concepts that are not typically related. As "[p]ractices of re-presentation always implicate the position from which we speak or write—the position of *enunciation*,"[377] my line of argument addresses how issues ranging from the functionality of specific modes of discourses to identity performance and re-presentation have been articulated in two remarkable specimens of present-day postcolonial fiction. I argue that each text under discussion often involves not only an approach to how particular socio-cultural experiences translate into the context of what constructs one's identity, but also an endeavour to explore how postcoloniality influences the process of identity formation.

[377] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p 392. Emphasis is in the original.

In this regard, my analysis is to be carried out by means of the binocular perception of postcolonial theory and the immigrant's perspective; this allows for elucidating the mechanism by which the immigrant figure wades amongst the various networks of mostly conflicting burdens imposed both by their homeland culture and the new position as immigrants in the host country. While adjusting to such demands, nonetheless, the socio-cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities of the immigrant become inevitably bound up with the politics of agency and identity performance. In this regard, the challenges of exile, loneliness, and the incessant sense of alienation—alongside the awareness of and longing for a forfeited comfort zone—designate the phenomenal framework within which such characters strive to exploit immigration as a site of both appropriation and subversion of any established role while reconstructing their negotiated identities. Indeed, it may well be maintained that both *The Namesake* and *Crescent* serve as fictitious depictions of their authors' conception of agency —most noticeably the hybridised self that extends beyond the constrictive lines of social and cultural categorisation.

Migration and Identity-in-Transit, Dis-belonging and Cultural Confusion, and the Complexity of Naming/Renaming in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

A conspicuously enthralling voice in diasporic Indian fiction in English, Jhumpa Lahiri has distinguished herself among the plethora of new voices emerging towards the end of the twentieth century, and marking the crescendo in the category of Indian writing in English, labelled as the Non-resident Indian's—as opposed to the Stay-at-home Indian's.[378] She was born in London to a Bengali family under the name Nilanjana Sudeshna—but went

[378] See Nalini Iyer, "Embattled Cannons: The Place of Diasporic Writing in Indian English Literature," in Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare, (eds.), *Other Tongues: Rethinking the Language Debates in India*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp 3-4.

by her pet name (or the *daak naam* in Bengali culture)[379]—and grew up in Rhode Island, USA. She studied English Literature at Barnard College, New York City, from which she received her BA. She also has obtained three MA degrees (English, Creative Writing, and Comparative Studies in Literature and the Arts), as well as a PhD in Renaissance Studies, all from Boston University. The *Interpreter of Maladies*, a collection of short stories, stands as her literary debut, whose publication in 1999 won her not only the prestigious Pulitzer Prize 2000 for Fiction, but also the New Yorker Prize for Best First Book and the PEN/Hemingway Award. Growing up in America under a mother who wanted to raise her children as Indians, Lahiri places a significant emphasis in her works on what Mervyn Rothstein has appositely specified as "the complex and conflicted world of Indian immigrants in the United States, [that is] in what is for them a strange land."[380] Hence, her thematic and stylistic approach gives her quite a close slant to that of Bharati Mukherjee's—as discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. This can be seen in terms of Lahiri's preoccupation with the struggles inescapably taking place as soon as immigrants try to substitute a modern way of life for a traditional one in a country that is not their own. Apparently as it seems, nevertheless, the more one tries to change, the more one seems to remain the same; America comes in the way and old relationships and *modi operandi* come under considerable threats, which exacerbates the problem of identity further.[381]

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[379] When she began kindergarten in Rhode Island, Lahiri's teacher decided to call her by her pet name, Jhumpa, insofar as it was easier to pronounce than her proper name. In an interview about her Pulitzer-prize winning book, *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri recalled later that, "*I always felt so embarrassed by my name ... You feel like you're causing someone pain just by being who you are.*" This very ambivalence over her own name seems to be the inspiration for the incertitude of Gogol, the protagonist of *The Namesake*, over his unusual name.
For reference please see: Sandeep Gourkanti, "How to Be Left Speechless by a Pulitzer Prize Winning Author," *Thought Catalogue*, October 15th, 2013. Retrieved online via the following link:
https://thoughtcatalog.com/sandeep-gourkanti/2013/10/how-to-be-left-speechless-by-a-pulitzer-prize-winning-author/

[380] Mervyn Rothstein, "India's Post-Rushdie Generation; Young Writers Leave Magic Realism and Look at Reali-ty," in *The New York Times*, 3rd July, 2000. Accessed online via the following website:
http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/03/books/india-s-post-rushdie-generation-young-writers-leave-magic-realism-look-reality.html

[381] As will be discussed soon, consider, for example, how Ashima in *The Namesake*, proves to have not been able to reconcile with the social and cultural norms of the host culture.

In *The Namesake* (2003), *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), and most recently *The Low-land* (2013), Lahiri consistently offers a portrayal of what Jaydeep Sarangi calls "the gate-ways into the large submerged territory of 'cross-culturalism,' a metaphor to share cultures ... something that will allow them/us to share, instead of dividing, what is on either side."[382] Hence, the trajectory of her literary productions ranges from the conundrum of migratory, hybrid identities to what Salman Rushdie describes as the predicament of constructing a well-balanced identification of the self in the 'imaginary homeland' of the diaspora:

> The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radical new types of human being: […] people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves.[383]

Venkatesh Puttaiah demonstrates that the first short story collection mainly deals with first generation immigrants, while the second one, *Unaccustomed Earth*, shifts its concern to the second and third generations. *The Namesake*, however, stands as a "sustained exploration of Indian immigrants' transition from one generation to the next."[384] Hence, Lahiri's literary corpus brings out to advantage the colossally metamorphic experience of immigration and its exigent repercussions on the identities of Indian immigrants. She not only designates how the identity of a particular type of immigrant undergoes unavoidably cyclical transformations during the arduous process of integration/assimilation; but also, she projects the very extent to which such an integration may be a subliminal, individual/collective process. Yet equally, she examines the dynamics interfering in both the unattainability of an ideal of adaptation into a new culture, and the very compromise of native values with Western ideologies in the

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[382] Jaydeep Sarangi, "The Enigma of Cultural Multiplicity: A Study of the *Interpreter of Maladies*" in Suman Bala, (ed.), *Jhumpa Lahiri, the Master Storyteller: A Critical Response to Interpreter of Maladies*, (New Dehli: Khosla Publishing House, 2002), p 117.

[383] S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, (London: Granta Books, 1991), p 124.

[384] Venkatesh Puttaiah, "Paradoxes of Generational Breaks and Continuity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *Asiatic*, Vol. VI, No. 1, (June, 2012), p 85.

course of identity re-construction. In other words, Lahiri attempts to fictionally conceptualise why some Indian immigrants can manage to integrate successfully, while others cannot. More pertinently, she externalises how the search for belonging correlates with the quest for articulating and defining the self. Thus, Lahiri wields fiction as an aesthetically speculative medium through which diverse problematisation of different narratives of identity formation is artistically tackled.

The Namesake subtly showcases the "affective experience of social marginality [and] disjunctive, fragmented, displaced agency,"[385] insofar as it offers a clear-cut depiction of immigrants whose unremitting pursuit of a well-demarcated identity in an 'alien' land has constantly put them in jeopardy. The book also designates the phenomenal experience of re-inscribing the self by means of a hybridised interpolation of a set of discursive hierarchies through the construction of a space beyond the extant political and socio-cultural binarism—that is what Bromley calls the "space of revaluation."[386] In this light, the novel presents the life account of two generations of the Ganguli family: the Calcutta-born Ashima and Ashoke, who migrated as young adults to the US, and their children, Gogol and Sonia—who, while growing up, experience an escalating generational and cultural gap from their parents. Hence, "different attitudes, outlooks, and directionality in dealing with the [identity crisis]"[387] and the cultural estrangement on the immigrants' part have been brought to the fore when addressing how these characters have striven to come to terms with the traditions they have inherited and the day-to-day life to which they have to adapt. In so doing, the book conspicuously commences in a nostalgic mood, with Ashima in her advanced stage of pregnancy trying to prepare a traditional snack from American ingredients; yearningly, however, she exclaims in

[385] Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions*, p 1.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Sunita Agarwal, "Generational Difference in Diasporic Writing: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," in Malti Agarwal, (ed.), *New Perspectives on Indian English Writings*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Ltd, 2007), p 29.

a peevish manner that "*as usual, there is something missing*."[388] The taste not being quite the same brings her haunting memories of her homeland and how lonely, fissured, and misplaced she is in the States. Anju Bhatt argues that the novel "begins with a pathetic portrayal of anxiety, uneasiness, and various psycho-sociological problems such as nostalgia, rootlessness, [and] alienation."[389] In this light, *The Namesake* depicts Ashima recollecting how awkward she has felt at the hospital when taken there to check her aching stomach: although she has been a student of English literature, she ingloriously failed when trying to speak at ease or understand English with an American accent. It is no wonder, then, that when Ashima is taken to the hospital to give birth, she seems to have been irrevocably unable to find any connection whatsoever in America where "life seems so tentative and spare," insofar as "she is related to no one."[390]

With her immense sense of uprootedness, Ashima symbolises a sheer exemplification of the "islands of ethnic minorities who [not only] continue to exist even in multi-cultural societies,"[391] but also are considerably unsuccessful in adapting to a new way of life in an unfamiliar place. Ashima's middle-class family background prevents her from interacting with people or events within American mainstream culture; hardly ever is she shown observing cultural practices such as Christmas and Thanksgiving which are a culture-specific feature of her new 'would-be' home. Moreover, Ashima seems to have found the liberal, cultural atmosphere in the US quite incompatible with her upbringing: the "I love you, sweetheart" she heard in the hospital are "words [she] neither heard nor expects from her own husband; this is not how they are."[392] Such an indissociable dichotomy between the private and public sphere

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[388] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p 1. My italics. All the subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from the same edition and will be referred to, later on, by page number.
[389] Anju Bhatt, "Immigrant Experience in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," in Malti Agarwal, (ed.), *New Perspectives on Indian English Writings*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Ltd, 2007), p 39.
[390] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 6.
[391] Indira Nityanandam, *Jhumpa Lahiri: The Tale of the Diaspora*, (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2005), p 106.
[392] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 3.

ultimately turns out to be tormenting to an immigrant woman who undergoes a twofold dependence: both, as a traditional Bengali wife, on her husband and the dispersed compatriots on whom she puts much hope to obtain the solace of belonging in an alien land. Likewise, the complexity of coping with the diverse demands of two different cultures does eventually have its enormous impact on the Ashima's psychic identification. She is, therefore, found spending hours in her apartment slumbering, sulking, and re-reading her parents' letters and the same five Bengali magazines over and over again. Before long, hence, the novel depicts her coming to the appalling realisation of how "being a foreigner is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts ... [It] is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the combination of pity and respect."[393]

Grippingly enough, identifying foreignness with pregnancy may well be perceived as a metaphor to understand that "such an identification entails a burden, at once revered as the deliverer of the future—someone who guarantees the perpetuation of life-making practices that connect through time, so that the future is in fact the selfsame repetition of an ancient past—and held up as an anthropological curiosity."[394] So easily can privacy be infringed upon through curiosity: such as when outsiders would feel no proscription against touching protruding bellies of pregnant women or the cheeks of newborn infants. More yet disturbingly, curiosity may isometrically be confused with disdain, just as much as a maternal burden could be confused with a social one. Ashima is simultaneously pregnant and a stranger; however, this very perplexity enables her not only to "see the paradox of her situation more clearly than others, [but also] to imagine at once the range of meanings her particular pregnancy can represent and what it cannot ultimately guarantee."[395] This being the case, when

[393] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, pp 49-5.

[394] Min Hyoung Song, "The Children of 1965: Allegory, Postmodernism, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. LIII, No. 3, "After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary American Fiction," (Hofstra University: Fall, 2007), p 350.

[395] Min Hyoung Song, "The Children of 1965," p 351.

the obstetrician assures her that a "perfectly normal delivery"[396] is expected, all Ashima can do, nevertheless, is fret over what narrative pregnancy seems to unquestionably encapsulate: discomfort, loneliness, and being separated from those she loves. According to Lee Edelman's postulation, Ashima's apprehension is related to a "fantasmatic order of reality in which the subject's alienation would vanish into the seamlessness of identity at the endpoint of the endless chain of signifiers lived as history."[397] Contrary to her husband, who always remains busy in his professional career, Ashima spends her days in Boston pondering on the comfort zone of her past life in Calcutta: the nostalgia for her homeland almost consumes her.

For his part, Tejinder Kaur observes that the "shift to the suburban area makes Ashima feel more distress[ed] than the move from Calcutta to Cambridge [does]."[398] This being the case, during her pregnancy—and after the birth of her son, Gogol—Ashima craves a return to India insofar as she intensely feels the dearth of relatives: "I'm saying I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It's not right. I want to go back."[399] Home for her is the unfailing "mystic place of desire [and true identification]."[400] Typically in Indian families, the female relatives comfort and support a pregnant woman, offering her advice and company. Ashima finds it unnervingly difficult, though, to manage without her relatives around; she pensively recollects how she would not have been alone at such times, had she been at home:

> Nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all. It's not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow, she will survive. It's the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land. For it was one thing to be pregnant, to suffer the queasy mornings in bed, the sleepless nights, the dull throbbing in her back … That it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved,

[396] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 5.
[397] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p 8.
[398] Tejinder Kaur, "Cultural Dilemmas and Displacements of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," in Mohit K. Ray and Rama Kundu, (eds.), *Studies in Women Writers in English*, Vol. 4, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors Ltd., 2005), p 205.
[399] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 33.
[400] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p 192.

> had made it more miraculous still. But she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare.[401]

In spite of her efforts to the contrary, Ashima cannot but be pensive over the susceptibility and transience of her position. She remembers that when she was boarding the aeroplane for the US, there was more than a dozen of her family members at the airport to bid her goodbye; now all there is is only the gaunt looking Dr. Ashley to examine her, assuring that everything is normal, when to her it is anything but. Had she been in India, she would have been surrounded by innumerable relatives, but currently "she cries as she feeds [Gogogl]" and goes into a fit of depression as "there are no letters from Calcutta."[402] It is worth considering in this regard that Ashima's ties to her relations back home seem much stronger than her husband's —that is the very *raison d'être* from which her identity crisis originates. Immensely missing the familial warmth, her wistfulness and sense of loneliness are both manifested in her attempts to re-create an image of her homeland through memory and nostalgia.

When trapped in a space where heteromorphic socio-cultural and/or ethno-ideological otherness prevails, the identity crisis of an immigrant Bengali wife becomes inexorably aggravated: Ashima must contend with her own conflicted and marginalised identity. Stuart Hall argues that under such conditions, "identity is formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture"; this being the case, the immigrant "is always 'somewhere else': doubly marginalized, displaced, always *other* than where he or she is, or is able to speak from."[403] In accordance with Hall's postulation, one can maintain that Ashima's relatively stable world back in Calcutta has starkly metamorphosed soon after she moved with Ashoke to Boston. Her initial overwhelming

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[401] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, pp 5-6.
[402] Ibid., p 34.
[403] Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in Lisa Appignanesi, (ed.), *The Real Me: Post-Modernism and the Question of Identity*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987), p 44. Emphasis is in the original.

fondness of Ashoke's 'American identity'—as expressed in her irresistible urge to slip into his American shoes—has soon been subdued. This issue apparently relates to the fact that all of her composite identities as a daughter, a sister, a degree-level student, and a native Indian become immensely subordinated in the hegemonising American culture. The text shows how Ashima is roughly reduced to be like her necklaces, chokers and bracelets "kept in an extra-large safety deposit box in a bank in New England."[404] Notwithstanding this ephemeral satisfaction with having a minimal sense of security, the metaphorical depositing of the self into the impregnable vault of America soon gives way to a disheartening recognition. As time passes, her past gradually starts affecting her life in America: she is no longer autonomous to take her own decisions regarding her life, career, and future in the States, where she reluctantly keeps "the disappointment to herself."[405] More yet to her disconcertment, she is constantly reminded, in a manner of a self-imposed internalisation, how she should "not eat beef, or wear skirts, or cut off her hair or forget her family."[406]

Being in an uncongenially materialistic sphere, however, Ashima resorts to confining herself to household activities, observing the Indian tradition of making a good housewife. In her ceaseless efforts to preserve the home culture in the 'new land,' Ashima trains her children in Bengali the literature and history of their origin; she also exposes them not only to their own family lineage, but also to the religious customs, rites, beliefs, food tastes and traditional habits. In this light, the novel noticeably shows her teaching Gogol how to

> memorize a four-line children's poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities adorning the ten-handed goddess Durga during pujo: Saraswati with her swan and Kartik with his peacock to her left, Lakshmi with her owl and Ganesh with his mouse to her right. Every afternoon Ashima sleeps, but before nodding off she switches the television to channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch *Sesame Street* and

[404] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 9.
[405] Ibid., p 30.
[406] Ibid., p 37.

> *The Electric Company*, in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school.[407]

Thus hindered from exceeding her past identity and engaging with the present circumstances, Ashima not only suffers an excruciating state of dual existence, but also ends up leading a *trishanku*-like life.[408] Even towards the end of the novel, *The Namesake* depicts Ashima in a way that as per her name, which significantly means the 'limitless', "she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere."[409] Hence the book accentuates the "strategy of continual transformation as a necessary and historically contingent ethic of survival."[410] Such a mechanism seems to be the stratagem that the novel appears to allocate for second-generation immigrants, like Gogol, in their search for a more stable and well-demarcated identity—performing in the meanwhile different identities through different experiences until the most desired identity is possessed.

With regard to what has already been demonstrated, moreover, the quest for identity in the novel becomes, as Ritu Bhardwaj specifies, entangled with "a sense of inability to belong, [that is] all the more difficult and desperate."[411] This being the case, Ashima is shown crippled with the rather apathetic stance of the host culture; the sense of alienation from which she bitterly suffers verges on the brink of living in a continuum of haphazardness. In fact, she has undergone such jeopardy early in her life in America. The case has worsened, nevertheless, with Gogol's birth, insofar as the sense of helpless loneliness gets more overwhelming:

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[407] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 54.

[408] Trishanku is a character in the Hindu *Itihasa*, commonly referred to through mention of 'Trishanku's heaven.' The word *Trishanku* has come to denote a middle ground or a limbo between one's goals or desires and one's current state or possessions.

[409] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 276.

[410] F. Timothy Ruppel, ""Re-Inventing Ourselves a Million Times:" Narrative, Desire, Identity, and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*," *College Literature*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, "World Women's Inscriptions," (1995), p 182.

[411] Ritu Bhardwaj, "Identity and Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *The English Literature Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Winter, 2014), p 11.

> Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, *the baby's birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true*. As she strokes and suckles and studies her son, she can't help but pity him. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived.[412]

In this light, I argue that the very recognition of "the impossibility of recreating/ returning to the past and the futility of the excessive obsession with origins"[413] originates the identity crisis within the immigrant's psyche. This quandary may be overcome, however, by means of identity re-constructing through a network of intersubjective relations. In so doing, the self becomes the artefact of a systematic process that John McGowan describes as "radically non-autonomous"; more importantly, the self "possesses an identity that unifies its disparate experiences, guides the presentation of the self to others, and forms the context for the various choices that the self makes.[414] In fact, Ashima's irreversible trans-formation from an Indian housewife into an American mother begins as Gogol grows up. As of now, she should perceive herself as a wife, a mother, and above all, as an American—the hardest bit. In bringing all these constituent identities to a collective whole, however, she goes through immense personal, psychological, and habitual alterations. Hence, she is seen reshuffling herself in terms of her daily activities to the extent that she has begun "to pride herself for doing it [that is raising Gogol] alone."[415]

Despite getting used to becoming busy with her American life, the pangs of her challengingly diasporic identity haunt Ashima no sooner than she revisits her past, thus recreating a severe crisis deep inside her. Bruce King maintains that such a complexity can be related to her "continual movement between home and abroad."[416] Such an oscillation

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[412] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 25. My italics.
[413] John C. Hawley, (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), p 147.
[414] John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics*, p 243.
[415] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 34.
[416] Bruce King, (ed.), *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p 6.

eventually conduces to an annual going through the same chain of remembering—and intrinsically suffering from—her first arrival in the US:

> Once a year, she dumps the letters onto her bed and goes through them, devoting an entire day to her parents' words, allowing herself a good cry. She revisits their affection and concern, conveyed weekly, faithfully across continents—all the bits of news that had had nothing to do with her life in Cambridge but which had sustained her in those days nevertheless.[417]

Intricately enough, Ashima can neither give up her past life nor fully embrace her present one; she keeps hovering between the two heterogeneous worlds, like the letter sent by her grandmother with her son's name, which was lost and never arrived. Interestingly, however, Ashima never fails to display a willingness to adapt—though lugubriously—to what can be designated as the indispensability on the diasporan's part "to be prepared to modify and adopt their traditions and customs according to modern Western thoughts and practices."[418] It is, therefore, why she (and Ashoke, too) never interfere in Gogol's personal life and choices, including his relations with Ruth and Maxine, his living together with the latter at her home, and so on. She, instead, rather welcomes the novelty of Gogol's Americanised attitude; this very gesture, nonetheless, does not seem to stem from a totally permissive attitude. In an impressive vignette, Lahiri delineates this complex, indisposed stance in Ashima's mind as follows: "At forty-eight she has come to experience the solitude that her husband and [children] already know, and which they claim not to mind. 'It's not such a big deal,' her children tell her. 'Everyone should live on their own at some point.' But Ashima feels too old to learn such a skill."[419]

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[417] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, pp 160-1.
[418] Victor J. Ramraj, "Diasporas and Multiculturalism," in Bruce King, (ed.), *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p 219.
[419] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 161.

Slightly differing from his wife, Ashoke's problematic of identity seems to be less severe, inasmuch as he is considerably prepared to acculturate himself in the States. For him, the West has always been a source of fascination and admiration that go contrary to the uncertainty in India. In this regard, it is worth considering that the train derailment during his visit to his grandfather in Jamshedpur—in which he was almost to lose his life—allowed no room for his hesitation to leave India, the "place in which he was born [yet] in which he nearly died."[420] This being the case, Ashoke is cutting a figure that is keen about fleeing "from a situation of conflict and uncertainty"[421] to the metropolitan centre where his ambitions are more viably accomplished. His unwillingness to permanently return to India is self-evident in his undertaking a job at an American University and buying a home there. Despite all this, however, he can never completely forget his past life insofar as this aspect is more or less an indissociable phenomenon for the immigrant. In his "Diaspora and Multiculturalism," Victor J. Ramraj aptly states that "though diasporans may not want actually to return home, wherever the dispersal has left them, they *retain a conscious or subconscious attachment to traditions, customs, values, religions, and languages of the ancestral home*."[422] In accordance with such a perception, the novel presents Ashoke, though rather inconspicuously, vacillating between his past traditional life at home and his modern life—and its demands—at the present moment in the US. In the light of Ramraj's argument, moreover, Ashoke is seen holding on to his Indian self quite consciously during his thirty-two years in the US. He is noticeably motivated to send Gogol to learn Bengali; his respectful stance towards his ancestral traditions makes him enthusiastically visit Durga Puja and other revered festivities with his children.

[420] J. Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 20.
[421] John C. Hawley, *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*, p 146.
[422] Victor J. Ramraj, "Diasporas and Multiculturalism," p 215. My italics.

More interestingly, Ashoke's loneliness and sense of exile become more explicit as the novel draws attention to his fondness for Nikolai Gogol. Once he explains to his son that he feels "a special kinship with Gogol more than any writer [insofar as] he spent most of his adult life outside his homeland. Like me."[423] Thus, one can argue that the very origin of Ashoke's ordeal stems from an inexplicit anxiety over both his diasporic yearning and a lingering sense of apprehension he always has regarding his ultimate return home. He sometimes feels the urge to go back to India—especially when Ashima insists on so doing: "I'm saying hurry up and finish your degree … I want to go back."[424] Yet he can never promise to do so because he constantly remembers how Mr. Ghosh (the passenger he met on the train) has admitted only few hours before his tragic death that "it is my [that is Ghosh's] greatest regret, coming back [from London]."[425] Suchita Joshi considers Ashoke's character as a representation of a vulnerable immigrant who conceives of their nostalgia as a constructive force to go ahead and explore the world, creating a place of their own in a foreign land.[426] In this light, Ashoke seems more willing to bear up under a sense of deprivation as a diasporan in America but "with security and respect,"[427] than he would the financial, economic, and otherwise insecurity at home.

Shifting the narrative to the second-generation immigrants, the predicament of identity is best manifested in *The Namesake* through Gogol's character; hence, the book efficiently provides readers with the "different paradigms of life among people representing distinct cultures and worldviews."[428] On the one hand, the delineation of Gogol's entry into the world

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[423] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 77.
[424] Ibid., p 33.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Suchita Joshi, "*The Namesake*: Account of a Name Looking for Its Bearer," in P. D. Bheda, (ed.), *Indian Women Novelists in English*, (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons Ltd., 2005), p 107.
[427] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 105.
[428] Meenu Kumari, "Diasporic Predicament of Binary Identity and Cultural Struggle in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *IJELLH: International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, Vol. I, No. 4, (December, 2013), p 163.

as "so alone, so deprived"[429] adroitly lays out the foundation of the very dilemma he experiences and suffers from throughout his life. On the other hand, the hectic and upsetting situation involving naming him is itself a metonymic signifier that exudes the ambivalent feeling of both the diasporic and hybrid subjects. In accordance with Indian rituals, naming new-born children is performed by the elders: Ashima's grandmother has got the honour of "naming the family's first sahib."[430] With the letter containing the name not being received, however, and the indischargeability of the baby without a birth certificate, the initial alteration of a tradition has taken place when Ashoke and Ashima resort to a "backup name" so that his birth certificate may be issued; "it's only a pet name, not to be taken seriously, simply something to put on the certificate for now to release them from the hospital."[431] Early in the novel, young Gogol does not seem to be aware of his name's heritage, and he proves to have accepted it simply as a signifier of who he is for his family.

However, when the time has come to enter kindergarten, Gogol's parents want him to use his 'good name,' that is "Nikhil", the name meant for the outside world and those who are beyond the circle of familial affection. Strikingly enough, the young boy does not want this new name insofar as "[h]e is afraid to be Nikhil, *someone he doesn't know*."[432] For her part, Iffat Sharmin observes that Lahiri "uses Gogol's name to show the duality of immigrant experience" and the "always-already" identity in crisis owing to his birth on "a foreign soil."[433] In this light, it is worth considering that to the parents the naming process denotes negation and disapproval of making public of a 'pet name'; their reaction to the typed name of 'Gogol' on the prescription has been immensely stark insofar as "it doesn't look right; pet

[429] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 25.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid., p 29.
[432] Ibid., p 57. My italics.
[433] Iffat Sharmin, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *Journal*, Vol. 2, (2011), p 35. Accessed online via the following website:
http://dspace.ewubd.edu/bitstream/handle/123456789/383/Iffat_Sharmin.pdf?sequence=1

names aren't meant to be made public in this way."[434] This being the case, what apparently seems to have been the "perfect pet name"[435] for Gogol proves to have always been incurring a conflicting impact on its bearer. This problematic issue could indeed be ascribed to the fact that not only the name reflects neither his Indian, nor American identity, but also it implies a dimension of tension that overtly articulates a disapproval of the present. Therefore, Gogol remains immensely unnerved with his eponymously unconfirmed identity earlier in his life. Significantly then, the syllogistic dilemma of the name escalates into the remarkable decision of changing it, especially after knowing more about the biography of his very namesake, i.e. Nikolai Gogol: "[his] lifelong unhappiness, his mental instability, [and] how he'd starved himself to death."[436]

As often is the case in diasporic literature, the identity crisis for a second-generation immigrant emanates from the double vision of being in a state of 'inbetweenness'. For Gogol, his hybridised name always interlinks with stress and anxiety over his acculturated identity, entailing, thus, a ceaseless shuffling and re-shuffling of his perception of his dual identity. Edward Said—who, despite being an Arab, was named after the Prince of Wales—has best described such a condition in his outstanding essay, "Between Worlds":

> Besides, with an unexceptionally Arab family name like Said connected to an improbably British first name (my mother very much admired the Prince of Wales in 1935, the year of my birth), *I was an uncomfortably anomalous student* all through my early years; a Palestinian going to a school in Egypt, with an English first name, and American passport, *and no certain identity at all*.[437]

[434] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 36.
[435] Ibid., p 28.
[436] Ibid., p 100.
[437] Edward W. Said, "Between Worlds," in *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p 557. My italics.

Said postulates that those who are found in such a limbo-like condition usually yearn backward and simultaneously look forward; they are torn between a hold to the homeland culture and the struggle of adjusting their life according to the normative stipulations of the country of their birth. Although not obviously exhibiting the very intensity of Said's affliction with his identity, Gogol's crisis becomes acutely tormenting while he attempts an acculturation of the self with the American society: befriending American girls, for instance, changing himself thoroughly to match up to Maxine's American life, and doing daily activities in an American style.

More intensely, Gogol has even endeavoured to break through his parent's ambiguous practices in an attempt to make his relationship with Maxine take on an extra-authentic appearance. The book stresses, therefore, how Gogol does not "want to attend his father's alma mater, and live in an apartment in Central Square as his parents once had and revisit the streets about which his parents speak nostalgically."[438] Determinedly enough, moreover, he no longer wants to "go home on the weekends, go with [his parents] to Pujas and Bengali parties, [or] to remain unquestionably in their world."[439] Also, he refuses to be called Gogol insofar as he identifies himself with the name 'Nikhil', his childhood name, and later with Nicky—that is the more Americanised version of his childhood name. Yet having already had a rather hard American life at Ratcliff House with Maxine, Gogol suffers further an inferiority complex with Maxine's family. In addition to such disturbance, nevertheless, the very nerve-racking sense of a non-firm belonging has led to a crescendo of an anxiety that is much resulting from the asymmetricality of the ambivalent cultures within him. He neither feels himself fully Indian, nor yet completely American, and such uncertainty entails an identity loss for Gogol; Mahesh Bhatt observes that in his constant endeavour to acculturate, Gogol finds himself "belonging everywhere and nowhere at the same time; an unanchored

[438] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 126.
[439] Ibid., p 126.

soul."[440] In this light, it is the very stressful incertitude of his *modus operandi* that Gogol has to address in order the better to come to terms with his identity crisis.

In her argument on the predicament of Asian Americans, Uma Segal observes that "[f]or the second and subsequent generations, identity formation becomes even more perplexing, for they must decide the level at which they will become Asian."[441] In this regard, *The Namesake* offers a portrayal of how identity may not be the mere sum of Asian and American identities, nor the inclusion of certain American characteristics and the preservation of some Indian ones. As far as the problematic of identity is concerned, however, the complexity consists in the "synthesis of both American and Asian identities, in fact neither Asian nor American but a unique amalgam of both."[442] This being the case, the namesake in the novel may indeed be read as a metaphor epitomising such amalgamation. In Gogol's case, nevertheless, the process of nominal alteration is quite essential in the course of seeking his true identity. This very modification could be related to the plight of bearing a name that is quintessentially alien, whereas a name should be "the window on his identity, culture, [and the] self."[443] Moreover, the name symbolises not only how he sees himself, but also how he wants to be seen by others. Hence the significance of changing the name manifests itself in externalising Gogol's struggle to transform and emancipate himself from the traditions of both his family and the community of Indian immigrants to which his parents belong, while he does not.

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[440] Mahesh Bharatkumar Bhatt, "Struggle to Acculturate in *The Namesake*: A Comment on Jhumpa Lahiri's Work as Diaspora Literature," *International Migration and Diaspora Studies Project Working Paper Series*, No. 18, (New Delhi, 2008). Accessed online via the following website: http://www.jnu.ac.in/library/IMDS_Working_Papers/IMDS_Sept_2009_WP_18_37-490001.pdf

[441] Uma A. Segal, *A Framework for Immigration: Asians in the United States*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p 8.

[442] Uma A. Segal, *A Framework for Immigration: Asians in the United States*, p 10.

[443] Asha Chouby, "Jhumpa Lahiri's Gogol: In Search of Identity for the Nowhere Man," *Linguistic and Literature Studies*, Vol. I, No. 1, (Horizon Research Publishing, 2013), p 3.

Torn apart between the pet name and good name, Gogol's life mutates into an endless pursuit of and search for a name that could be his: a name that has the potential to substitute his fragmented identity for an authentic identification. For Gogol, a name is his being and apparently one does not compromise with this aspect. While at birth an uncongenial identity has been imposed on him, it was his sojourn in a graveyard as a school boy that has rendered him sullenly conscious of the disaster facing his very own being. When he is fourteen, his identity crisis intensifies, for

> [B]y now he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything "in Indian"… He hates that his name is both *absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with what he is*, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second.[444]

In this light, his name is seen as a catalyst that speaks of his fragmented identity, in the sense that he finds it an extreme mismatch for his personality, or "somehow disgusting, meaning-less and shapeless,"[445] as Suchita Joshi insightfully observes. Growing up in America, Gogol realises that his identity is an imposed construct which could be negotiated insofar as a Russian name has nothing Indian nor American about it. It is only very suffocating, merely impertinent, preposterous, and lacking both dignity and gravity—and it better be altered. With a name like this, Gogol feels that his personality is neither rooted in America nor in India. His name is no more than a deconstructing constituent that distorts his whole being into a confused mayhem and his mind into an indistinct anonymity. He therefore sets his mind onto changing it from 'Gogol' to 'Nikhil' inasmuch as he thinks the latter better reflects his dual identity, and may better lead to reaching an identity that is well-constructed and defined by means of what Andrew Gurr maintains as attaining "identity through self-discovery or

[444] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 76. My italics.
[445] Suchita Joshi, "*The Namesake:* Account of a Name Looking for Its Bearer," p 91.

self-realization."[446] However, the very feat does not simply pass by without its grave corollary: an immense sense of alienation would never cease, even after changing the name. Conceivably, he is more confused with his dual identity as 'Gogol' for family, and 'Nikhil' for the outer world. Apparently as it seems, even the new name comes concomitant with its own dilemma and conflicts, leaving him feel as if in the middle of nowhere. To alleviate the anguish, however, he eventually tries to erase anything whatsoever that relates to Gogol, becoming more detached from his family and home.

Migration and Identity Crisis in Selected Stories from the *Interpreter of Maladies*

Lahiri, however, has initially interrogated the dilemmatic experience of the immigrants' identity crisis in her Pulitzer Prize winning *Interpreter of Maladies*. In this collection of short stories, she adroitly depicts the South Asian diasporic community in its haunting ordeal of exile and identity loss, where the diasporic subjects are constantly faced with "a permanent state of uprootedness [and] are condemned to a *de facto* deterritorialization."[447] In her reading, Suchita Joshi observes that "[b]oth books, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* locate the issue of identity-crisis in a host culture," and that "the idea of exile runs constantly throughout Lahiri's oeuvre."[448] What Joshi seems to have been oblivious to, however, is that the preliminary cause of that problem consists in the very inability of the characters to reconcile with an immensely different set of socio-cultural (and sometimes economic) norms in the host land. Conspicuously enough, the stories centre on the postcolonial condition of the lives of Indians and Indian-Americans whose hyphenated identities have let them to be stranded between Indian and American traditions. They equally emphasise the centrality

[446] Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature*, (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981), p 14.
[447] Françoise Král, *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p 39.
[448] Suchita Joshi, "*The Namesake*: Account of a Name, Looking for Its Bearer," p 86.

of cultural translation in the simultaneity of possessing and re-possessing the past and the present—both chronologically and spatially—in a useful way. In this light, *Interpreter of Maladies* exhibits how the quandary of displacement and the consequent pain of cultural alienation continue to pinch not only the immigrants but also their children who are rendered victims of a predicament of belonging. Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero clarifies that "[n]early all of these stories deal with the lives of Indian immigrants, rendering the difficulties of making personal connections across cultural boundaries—and sometimes even within families—palpable to readers."[449] This being the case, the book accentuates how the tragic experience of alienation is felt as much by the immigrants as the next generation insofar as the sense of estrangement is more intense in proportion to the sense of affinity with roots. More significantly, some of the stories can be seen as representative of a diasporic located-ness. They chart a possible resistance to the overriding narratives of hybridity in the postmodern theoretical discourse, thus offering what Ashutosh Dubey specifies as a "double perspective —between the ancient traditions and the sometimes baffling prospects of the new world."[450] It is in the interstitial spaces of the diasporic narratives of the *Interpreter of Maladies* that a possible politics of resistance and deferment can be formulated. The narratives not only operate within the traditional categories of binary oppositions, but also relocate these binaries within a more problematic paradigm, as if the stories are directed towards the questioning of bipolar opposites whose conflicting repercussions become ineluctable at the interface of cultural encounter.

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[449] Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero, "Immigrant Motherhood and Transnationality in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction," *Literature Compass*, Vol. IV, No. 3, (March, 2007), p 852.

[450] Ashutosh Dubey, "Immigrant Experience in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*," *Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol. XXX, No.2, (Feb., 2002), p 26.

"When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," the second story of the collection, is set in North America and is told from the point of view of Lilia, a ten-year old Indian-American child. The story starts with Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence, offering a commentary on the history of the Partition. The narrator belongs to a Hindu, Indian-Bengali family and Mr. Pirzada is a Pakistani-Bengali in the process of becoming a Bangladeshi; the incongruity of their citizenship plays a significant role in the story, especially when put against the linguistic and cultural oneness of the Bengali community. Lilia's father corrects her when she calls Mr. Pirzada an Indian: "Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered Indian … Not since Partition"; this does not make sense to the little Lilia, however, since both "Mr. Pirzada and her parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, and looked more or less the same."[451] By showing her a world map, nevertheless, her father insists that she "understand the difference."[452] Probed from the naïveté of a young girl's perception, the story unsettles the broader adult presumptions behind nationality and citizenship; it also depicts the relative marginalisation of Lilia's family as an ethnic minority in the United States by underlining the strained access to the Indian/Bengali part of Lilia's culture. Not dissimilar from Mr. Pirzada's, however, Lilia's intricacies of identity and belonging ineluctably become a matter of negotiation and hazards of nationality and citizenship; Lilia gradually comes to understand the pain triggered by separation from one's family as she finds herself caught between the traditions of her parents and the American culture. She does not recognise her parent's complaints about the unobtainability of ingredients for Indian food, or their lament that neighbours "never dropped by without an invitation."[453]

[451] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, (London: Flamingo, 1999), p 25. All the subsequent quotations from the book are taken from the same edition, and will be referred to by page number.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Ibid., p 24.

With Mr. Pirzada's presence, however, Lilia feels rather like a stranger in her own home: the sweets he brings her every evening feel "inappropriate … to consume."[454] Indeed, Lilia's contact with him brings her to appreciate the significance of other cultures and other people's fight for independence as she learns about the plight of Pakistan, the history of India's fierce Independence experienced by her parents, and the war between the formerly united countries. After the war, Mr, Pirzada is returning home to his family, and he will never revisit America; it is through his experience that Lilia realises what it means "to miss some-one who was so many miles and hours away."[455] For Lilia—and similarly for Mr. Pirzada—the relationship between identity and nationality is fluid and unstable. Lilia's mother is proud that her daughter was born and will be raised in America; she embraces American traditions while maintaining the traditions of her own upbringing in Calcutta. Contrasting with his wife, the father encourages his daughter to learn about India, as it appears she is only taught American history in school. He wants his daughter to know about the world of her parents' upbringing. In such an ambiance as this, identity becomes inescapably interpolated. The case is more intense with Mr. Pirzada, however, insofar as he proves to be still confined within the spatiality of his native land while he is in the US; Judith Caesar has adroitly observed that "it is almost as if a shadow of Mr. Pirzada is trapped there in New England, while the true Mr. Pirzada goes about his life in East Pakistan."[456] The text conspicuously shows Lilia detecting how "[u]nlike the watch of his wrist, the pocket watch ... was set to the local time in Dacca, eleven hours ahead."[457] In this light, both Lilia and Mr. Pirzada can be considered as universals that surpass the history and geography connecting the two Bengals; yet equally, such a connection is a sign of the individuality of human experience.

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[454] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 29.
[455] Ibid., p 42.
[456] Judith Caesar, "Beyond Cultural Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*," *North Dakota Quarterly*, Vol. LXX, No. 1, (Winter 2003), p 82.
[457] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 30.

Opening up to new traditions and customs, while simultaneously upholding old ones is part of the quintessential assimilation process for immigrants towards a more stable identity. On the one hand, Mr. Pirzada is seen puzzled by Halloween: the pumpkins, the costumes and the candy all mystify him. This may partially be ascribed to the fact that he worries a lot over his daughters and the thought of Lilia freely inviting danger is too much for him. On the other hand, however, Lilia and her parents are on either edge of a rift in which identity issues are typically compounded generation to generation. Though the parents re-collect their own experiences in India intensely, Lilia is an American and therefore a step removed from the culture of her parents. Her father is dismayed that she is ignorant of the current events in India. Lilia does, nevertheless, attempt to study the history of Pakistan but she is unable to do so in school time; this stance best manifests in the scene in which her teacher asks her to discard a book that has nothing to do with her report: "[i]s this book a part of your report, Lilia? 'No Miss Kenyon.' 'Then I see no reason to consult it,' she said, replacing it in the slim gap on the shelf.' 'Do you?'"[458] Apparently, Lilia does have an interest in her parents' world, but she is completely enmeshed in her bewilderment over its socio-cultural norms, just as Mr. Pirzada is noticeably perplexed at the quintessentially American Halloween celebration—which further exacerbates the question of identity.

As the Indo-Pakistani War is witnessed from a distance both geographically and emotionally, the figures of the story respond to it differently. Lilia's parents are fretting over a skirmish thousands of miles away, while she is more concerned with her own life. Her awareness of the contrast between her situation and Mr. Pirzada's daughters, however, prepares her to open her eyes to the complicated political struggle on a personal level. This being the case, the lessons learned by Lilia are the same learned by the reader but in a more literary, less didactic manner. More importantly, time is a complicated construct in this story.

[458] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 33.

Lilia observes that events are unfolding eleven hours ahead of her time zone; this gives her the impression that events are being played out in the future whereas her life is somehow a ghost life. Such a complication is bound to bear two distinct meanings for Lilia; first, there is a huge cultural disparity between herself and the Pirzada girls, as she is a first-generation American born to immigrant parents. Second, since it is also a coming-of-age story, Lilia struggles for a semblance of maturity. As a young girl, she feels as though her life had already been experienced by others who have gone before her. Yet, she narrates from the present, adding thus another layer of distance into the story. All that is taking place in the time-frame of the story has already happened: the facts of the war, she says, were a "remote mystery with haphazard clues."[459] The story is, therefore, narrated from the remoteness of childhood, and only understood after many years have passed.

The eponymous "Interpreter of Maladies" denotes interpreter of emotional pain and psychological affliction. The story revolves around an Indian-American couple, Raj and Mina Das, coming to India along with their three children. They hire a tour guide, Mr. Kapasi—who, besides working as a tourists' guide, serves as an interpreter in a doctor's office. Here Lahiri peculiarly presents the plight of identity by means of the challenging adaptation incurred upon the first generation of Indians immigrating to America. This is a process which is best manifested through the requisite assimilation into the American culture, whilst still attempting to retain their heritage. The portrayal of the Das family best exhibits such an intricacy: Mr. Kapasi, the narrator, disapprovingly exclaims that "the family looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did, the children in stiff, brightly colored clothing and caps with translucent visors."[460] Adroitly enough, the word 'looked' indicates that while on the surface they may have Indian features, the Dases are not truly Indian insofar as having been "born

[459] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 40.
[460] Ibid., pp 43-4.

and raised … in America,"[461] they have lost their heritage. Moreover, the words 'foreigners' and later 'tourists' both hold connotations of the family not belonging in India.

With equal significance, the story explores the themes of expatriation and cultural hybridity, delineating the traumatic forfeiture of identities in a clash of cultures—that is the enormous impact of two heterogeneous worlds and their cultures on the American born Indian couple. The family has travelled to India on a holiday to enjoy the traditional grandeur of Orissa. The story, perceptively, contrasts the narrator's nostalgia for traditions—expressed through the use of Indian words like 'Astachala' for a 'setting sun' and 'Hanuman' for a monkey—and the Dases' ignorance of their native cultural codes along with their embrace of the American *modus vivendi*, which set them at abeyance. Like Americans, Mr. Das calls his wife by her first name when speaking to Tina, his little girl; and Mrs. Das—also in the manner and style of American women—has clipped her hair short while her dress looks exactly like theirs (and this is all met with Mr. Kapasi's increasing discontentment). On the way to Konarak when the children see some monkeys, they shout "monkeys"; Mr. Kapasi immediately corrects them, however: "*we* call them hanuman."[462] More pointedly, cultural ambiguity is also seen when Bobby, observing that their guide is sitting on the right side of the car, asks his father incredulously "Daddy, why is the driver sitting on the wrong side in this car, too?"[463] Indeed such instances exemplify the intense cultural gap between the visiting Indian-American family and the native locals which, in turn, contributes to an increasing sense of alienation on the former's part.

[461] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 45.
[462] Ibid., p 47. My italics.
[463] Ibid., p 48.

Knowing that their guide is also an interpreter to a Gujarati doctor, Mrs. Das considers having some private moments with him to unburden herself of a cumbersome sense of guilt that has been considerably troubling her for a very long time: Bobby is not "Raj's son. I've kept it a secret for eight whole years. But now I've told you."[464] She confesses to him how her isolation and boredom—which can be seen as symptoms of her unhappiness in America, as "she was left at home all day with the baby ... Always cross and tired"[465]—have rendered her into a prey to the lust of a Punjabi friend of her husband's and brought about the birth of Bobby. And she hopes he could provide a remedy for that encumbrance. During the course of exposing her secret, Mrs. Das indicates that it is the American constituent of her identity which has urged her to plunge into that extramarital affair rather lightly; but it is her Indian consciousness, nevertheless, that keeps haunting her, reminding her of the sanctity of marriage, making her feel sick in exile. In his *Indian Society*, sociologist and anthropologist Shyama Charan Dube argues that "the ideology of subordination (of women) ... is pervasive and has invaded the worldview and ethos of almost the entire Indian society [where] women's sexuality is controlled much more strictly than men's."[466] Owing to what she has been through as a young, lonely housewife and mother, Mina Das cannot simply accept that it is her guilt which makes her enormously suffer. Both her dilemma and psychological trauma are the corollary of her confused bi-cultural identity. Well aware of the fact that socio-cultural norms in India are incongruous with those in America, she feels that her problem—or rather her 'guilt'—is compounded once she is in India. On his part, however, and because of his typical Indian background and patriarchal ideology, Mr. Kapasi cannot understand the complicated and taxing situation through which Mrs. Das has been. This being the case, one can argue that the problematic of Mrs. Das's affair implicitly results from her hybrid identity, mixed cultures, and cultural uprootedness, and has to be perceived along a cultural matrix not

[464] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 62.
[465] Ibid., p 64.
[466] S. C. Dube, *Indian Society*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1990, reprint, 2001), p 107.

only as an individual's behaviour. This is, therefore, why Mrs. Das ignores Mr. Kapasi and his diagnosis completely, and seeks refuge, at the end of the story, in her maternal duties, nursing the injured Bobby, her illegitimate son. In this light, Lahiri makes it clear that the thematic conclusion is conceived in the understanding that in order to overcome the maladies, one has to interpret them and seek refuge within one's own self.

The sixth story of the collection, "Mrs. Sen's", provides a delineation of an expatriate Indian Bengali housewife who is trying to make a mini India in her house. The story follows not only the trajectory of the psychological upheavals and reactions through which an immigrant wife ineluctably goes in an alien land, but also the constant collisions caused by cultural transplantation which ultimately leads to cultural alienation, estrangement, and identity crisis. Subtly enough, Lahiri insinuates how before coming to the States Mrs. Sen seems to have enjoyed a joyful life amongst her family and friends. She is shown yearningly ruminating on her experience of joint cooking with her neighbours in Calcutta while she ponders over the comfort the letters from India bring; she pensively tells the young boy of whom she is in charge that "when I was your age I was without knowing that one day I would be so far [from home]."[467] In the States, things are different, however, and her comfort zone is shattered; Mr. Sen works as a university teacher and spends much time at his workplace. As a result, Mrs. Sen remains lonely and alienated at her home, spending time doing house-hold work; and the main reason for her alienation seems to stem from the fact that "[she] did not know how to drive"[468] while driving is an essential skill in America. In a situation such as this, therefore, she cannot but sceptically looks at her new homeland as an outsider, and with a lingering feeling of something being lost. She is a Hindu woman struggling to become an American by adjusting to her new pan-American life—"Yes I am learning. But I am a slow student. At

[467] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 123.
[468] Ibid., p 111.

home, you know, we have a driver"[469]—but at the same time she is not ready to leave her inherited Indianness. The fact that she is a 'slow' learner of driving skills may well signify that Mrs. Sen is rather reluctant to accepting America as her new home.

Mrs. Sen looks after an eleven-year old boy, named Eliot, while his mother is at work; in this regard, it is worth mentioning that despite the fact that Mrs. Sen—who remains unnamed in the story[470]—is the main character of the story, Eliot plays a vital role. Not only does his figure serve as an illustration of the balance between cultures—developing as a character by means of experiencing different cultural customs—but also, he functions as an anthropomorphic catalyst that "demonstrate[s] Mrs. Sen's inability to assimilate into American culture."[471] In this light, the text shows how her daily activities pivot around the notion of escape; contrary to her delaying of the driving practice which is a requisite for her new life, Mrs. Sen steadily observes her quotidian Indian-cooking and cooks enthusiastically irrespective of the fact that by now there only exist she and her husband to consume all the food. This being the case, the insistence on preserving her cooking style along with her interest in buying and having fresh fish—which both have links with her conception of the homeland—can be read as a metaphor for an attempt of asserting her own cultural identity. Such a close attachment to traditional norms, however, blocks the "acculturation process," which M. J. Esman specifies as "acceptance and adaptation of basic elements of the local culture, its language, and lifestyle."[472] Her willingness to inquire about the musician in her broken English with Indian accent—"[i]s it Beethoven?' she asked once, pronouncing the first part of the composer's name not 'bay,' but 'bee,' like the insect"[473]—may be interpreted as a sign of her initial acceptance of the 'other' culture.

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[469] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 113.
[470] Readers do not have the chance to know her first name.
[471] Priyanka Sharma, "Bewildered Relations in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*," *LLILJ: Lapis Lazuli, An International Literary Journal*, Vol. II, No. 2 (Autumn, 2012), p 7.
[472] M. J. Esman, *Diaspora in the Contemporary World*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p 103.
[473] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 120.

Still, there are many elements of her life, like holding onto the colourful collection of her out-of-place saris from her homeland, that remain in the way of transition and acceptance. Hence, the text depicts Mrs. Sen as physically in America but mentally and emotionally in India. Conflictively enough, 'home' for her is always India; and to little Eliot's surprise, he comes to recognise that "when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables."[474] The urge to go back to her homeland is best manifested in her interrogative statement to Eliot: "[c]ould I drive all the way to Calcutta? How long would that take, Eliot?"[475] It should not pass unnoticed, however, how the very act of taking the plunge to learn driving (so that she can be independent from a seemingly busy patriarchal figure of a husband who is not always there to help) is a revolutionary one on her part. She has come to learn that in order to survive in her new surroundings, she needs to open up the self to the 'Other's' culture—symbolically represented by the car—towards which she initially shows a great fear: a fear that is much triggered by the encounter between the Self/Other. Despite the fact that her primary experience of crossing cultural boundaries fails, it enables her to "face the trauma and possibly release herself from the vicious cycle of escape and avoidance"[476] by means of being more open to adapt to the different culture. In so doing, Mrs. Sen is proving practicality in crafting and negotiating her new diasporic identity, which in turn conduces to a smoother embrace of her new life in America.

Remarkably, Mrs. Sen and Eliot are contrasted against each other in order the better to draw out the pathetic loneliness from which each suffers. On the one hand, Eliot seeks hospitality and warmth which are unreservedly provided by an Indian woman, Mrs. Sen, who embodies concern, love, and care—all of which are lacking in his mother, who is caught in the Western lifestyle. Mrs. Sen, on the other hand, is homesick and always talks elaborately

[474] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, p 116.
[475] Ibid., p 119.
[476] Bahareh Bahmanpour, "Female Subjects and Negotiating Identities in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*," *Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. I, No. 6, (2010), p 46.

about her country and culture. When referring to weddings in India, she pensively remembers how

> Whenever there is a wedding in the family … or a large celebration of any kind my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night … Not everybody has a telephone. But just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news [and] help with arrangements.[477]

For Mrs. Sen, the motherland is associated with her real identity. By means of recalling the experience of an Indian wedding, she tries to reclaim her cultural past in an alien land; she, thus, uses memory and fantasy as agencies to find cultural linkage with her homeland. Emotionally alienated in the new land, Mrs. Sen's happiness exists in India but not in the States: her memories, dreams and pleasant moments are there in Calcutta. The story clearly shows that "[t]wo things made Mrs. Sen happy. One was the arrival of a letter from her family."[478] And the other thing was fish from the seaside;[479] both the letter from India and fish are major symbols in the story that signify deep identification with home insofar as 'fresh fish' is an emblem of the homeland.

With equal significance, the car accident she had confirms her helpless incapability to integrate into the American society: it asserts how she will constantly remain the traditional wife who cooks fish in America without green banana. In her alienation, she craves for her true identity as an Indian Bengali lady who would like to work and share her experiences with other women and friends while her husband is at work. Jennifer Bess has aptly observed that:

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[477] Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*, pp 115-6.
[478] Ibid., p 121.
[479] Ibid., p 123.

> If the commonality [Mrs. Sen] found in communal cooking fostered her identification with others and her own sense of purpose, then the despair with which she abandons her cutting blade in favour of peanut butter and crackers after the accident exposes the fact that she has lost the only identity she has ever known—nurturer, homemaker, [and] wife of Mr. Sen.[480]

Mrs. Sen's experience of immigration is a complicated one in the sense that she perpetually finds herself in a transit mode of existence that is fraught with memories of the original home which are starkly incongruous with the reality of life in the new world. In the light of Bess's postulation, one can argue that, ensnared by the baits of deep remorse and emotional/social alienation, Mrs. Sen—in her effort to adapt—loses herself to the silence of isolation and the clamour of the modern life in America. She is, therefore, seen constantly suffering the symptom of what Homi Bhabha specifies as "the past-present [which] becomes the part of necessity, not the nostalgia, of living."[481] Therefore, and in the light of what I have illustrated, loneliness, a deep sense of remorse, along with emotional isolation from which some of the fictional characters enormously suffer, serve as the central themes of the *Interpreter of Maladies*. With a conspicuously remarkable insight, Lahiri delves deep into the psychological depths of her characters, revealing their inner world in a fascinating yet deceptively simple style; this being the case, readers come across more reality than fancy in her fiction. Indeed, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that her interpretation of the maladies itself acts like a potent medicine, insofar as it often makes an astute, perceptive, yet humorous, study of the immigrants' life.

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[480] Jennifer Bess, "Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*," *Explicator,* Vol. LXII, No. 2, (2004), p 125.
[481] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p 7.

Arab American Immigrants, Cultural Heterogeneity, and the Archaeology of Agency Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*

While *The Namesake* and *Interpreter of Maladies* investigate the life experiences and identity crises of Indian and Indian-American immigrants, *Crescent* explores through recalled memories the multi-faceted dilemmas of the Arab-American identity as a socio-cultural construct, which is greatly affected not only by the archaeology of agency and representation, but also by the politics of hegemony and prejudice. Each of the three texts delicately touches on intricate issues like diasporic migrant identities, cultural hybridity, and the dilemmatic situation of being 'Arab-American'[482]/Asian-American whose genesis proves to stem from the very semantic implication of the term, that is a hyphenated self of a diasporic identity.

Studies about Arab identity in the diaspora focus on the ethnic, religious, and cultural identities of Arabs; the majority of these studies look at the attributes that signal the retention of identity, and the degree of the assimilation of this identity through successive Arab generations in the diaspora. For instance, the studies conducted by Kristine Ajrouch (1997) and Paul Eid (2002)[483] indicate that a second generation of Arab immigrants retains most of the attributes of Arab identity. Amongst the cultural traits that contribute to the retention of Arab identity are popular cultural forms such as dance, food, and music, which are significant manifestations of a collective identity.[484] Other studies conducted by Arab scholars highlight the relationships between ethnic and cultural identities on the one hand, and the self-esteem

[482] Mervat Hatem, a renowned figure in political science, observes how—as an ethnic minority—Arab immigrants represent both a disruption with older attitudes and strategies, and an emphasis on their hybrid cultural character as at once Arab and American. For full reference, please see the following:
Mervat Hatem, "The Invisible American Half: Arab American Hybridity and Feminist Discourses in the 1990s," in Ella Shohat, (ed.), *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), p 370.

[483] Kristine J. Ajrouch, Ethnicity, *Gender and Identity among Second-generation Arab Americans: Growing up Arabic in America*, (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1997).
Paul Eid, *Ethnic and Religious Identity Retention among Second-generation Arab Youth in Montreal*, (Montreal: McGill University, 2002).

[484] Kellie D. Hay, *Immigrants, Citizens, and Diasporas: Enacting Identities in an Arab-American Cultural Organization*, (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2000), p 17.

of Arab American Muslim adolescents (Suha Mansour, 2000),[485] or the academic achievements of Arab-American students, (Luay Shalabi, 2001)[486] on the other hand. These studies show that there is a substantial correlation between the affirmation of belonging and self-esteem (Mansour, 41), and a distinct relationship between the level of interest of Arab-American students in retaining both their unique Arabic cultural identity and their academic achievements (Shalabi, 142).

Issues pertaining to the intersection between identity and diasporic experiences[487] and aspects of integration into the host society[488] have been among the paramount concerns of a third group of scholars, who have mostly explored these issues from a variety of organisational, societal and subjective perspectives. From an organizational perspective, the production and maintenance of identity appears as one of the Arab organization's paramount goals.[489] From a more socio-cultural view of the diasporic experience, however, Jenny Wannas-Jones scrutinises the dissonant and hybrid identities of Arab youths, exploring the process of identity formation "in the light of the socialization forces of the home, the school, and globalized mass media."[490] Wannas-Jones finds out that reducing exclusionary practices among youths "could be avoided through greater societal and educational awareness of the Middle East in general."[491] The inter-subjective experience of Arabs in the diaspora reveals that Arab-American writers have reflected similarly horrific experiences in their collective

[485] Suha S. Mansour, *The Correlation between Ethnic Identity and Self-esteem among Arab American Muslim Adolescents*, (Morgantown: West Virginia University, 2000).
[486] Lauy Shalabi, *The Relationship between Cultural Identity and Academic Achievement of Arab American Students in Reading, Mathematics, and Language in Suburban Middle and High School*, (Montreal, McGill University Press, 2001).
[487] Kellie D. Hay, *Immigrants, Citizens, and Diasporas*, 2000.
[488] Caroline R. Nagel, *Identity, Organizational Participation, and Geographies of Segmented Integration: The case of London's Arab Immigrant Communities*, (Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado at Boulder, 1998).
[489] Kellie D. Hay, *Immigrants, Citizens, and Diasporas*, p 20.
[490] Jenny Wannas-Jones, *Globalization and the Reconciliation of Dissonant Hybrid Identities*, (Edmonton, Alberta, University of Alberta, 2003), p 2.
[491] Ibid., p 6.

unconscious.[492] Al-Samman's study shows that the diasporic narrations of Arab women can serve much more functions than solely that of identifying and retrieving personal spaces in which Arab women can prosper. Rather, it was maintained that they reclaim the nation for all citizens by calling for an immediate restructuring of individual Arab identity, tradition, and national politics—thus paving the way for an overall advancement of the collective Arab self.[493]

"Several years ago," states Abu-Jaber, "I decided I wanted to write something 'true.' I wanted to write about growing up in my Arab-American family… to run my hands over the texture of childhood, of family dinners, conversations, and travel."[494] In fact, the book not only serves as a narrative of the predicament of diaspora and exile, but also unfolds as a search for identity, both individual and collective. In his reading of the book, Jopi Nyman demonstrates that "[w]hat distinguishes the narratives of memory in Abu-Jaber's novel from accounts of early immigrant life is that both Sirine and Hanif [the two main figures in the book] negotiate their identities through these narratives, and thus also assist each other in working through their individual traumas."[495] The novel, thus, exquisitely provides a depiction of a postmodern struggle with identity conflicts, especially among Arabs and Arab-Americans in the US, who according to Joanna Kadi's description are "the Most Invisible of the Invisibles."[496] Whereas in her earlier work, *Arabian Jazz* (discussed in Chapter Three), Abu-Jaber has introduced the intricate conundrum of members of one single—though yet extensive—Arab family, in *Crescent* she expands the scope comprehending what is being 'Arab' in a culturally heterogeneous milieu; this measure is accomplished by means of

[492] Hanadi AI-Samman, *Diasporic Na(rra)tions: Arab Women Rewriting Exile*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), p 240.
[493] Ibid., p 250.
[494] Diana Abu-Jaber, "Netting the Clouds," *Multicultural Literature in the United States Today*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, (Feb. 2009), p 42.
[495] Jopi Nyman, *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction*, p 191.
[496] Joanna Kadi, "Introduction," in Joanna Kadi, (ed.), *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, (Boston: South End Press, 1994), p xix.

presenting numerous characters of diverse Arabic backgrounds and connections. The title being derived from the image showing only a small segment of the moon may be read as symbol that culture-specifically represents the Muslim realm; as such, it significantly becomes the eponym of a book that aims at showcasing a multifarious repre-sentation of Arab Americans' experiences.

As well as being the second in the trajectory of Abu-Jaber's works, it is worth considering with regard to *Crescent* that, on the one hand, what Abu-Jaber has previously written of Matussem in *Arabian Jazz*—that is "his displacement as a feature of his personality"[497]—is similarly true for most of the characters in *Crescent*, who yearn for their home which is thousands of miles away. This being the case, the novel, as a diasporic text, "asserts a sense of belonging to the locality in which post-colonial subjects have grown up, and, at the same time, expresses the specificity of the actual historical experience of being "ethnic" in a particular society of immigration."[498] On the other hand, the novel is an exemplary text of reference as pertaining to the problematic quest for a well-demarcated identity which often involves the intricacy of making a sense of identification amidst the ambiance of a culturally confusing heterogeneity. The book approaches such a challenge from both a conceptual and ideological perspective, demystifying the myth around the discourse which America sets out to accomplish. It offers, moreover, a reflection upon a psycho-cultural understanding of the immigrant dilemma by means of scrutinising the characters' perception of what defines an Arab American identity in the turn of the twenty-first century. I argue that *Crescent* embodies a diasporic world in which the characters endeavour to transmogrify their inertiatic experience of alienation, exile and cultural hybridity into a sensual one as a counter-action to cast away the spell of futility of their existence. In this light, it should not pass unnoticed that the

[497] Diana Abu- Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2003), p 98.
[498] Igor Maver, "Introduction," in Igor Maver, (ed.), *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Post-Colonial Literatures*, (Plymouth, Lexington Books, 2009), p ix.

focal site throughout *Crescent* is Nadia's Café, which functions as a diasporic space, that is, "a contested site of translocation, a space that imagines itself through creative spatial re-mappings of locatedness and displacement to become a migratory place."[499] The Café is attended by "many exchange students and immigrants from the Middle East,"[500] people who remember their homes by eating the Arabic food cooked by Sirine, the novel's protagonist.

Crescent is centred on Sirine, the thirty-nine year old daughter of an American mother and an Arab (Iraqi) immigrant father. The narrative is divided into two parts and has two narrating voices: the omniscient narrator that enjoys an unrestricted access to Sirine's mind in part one and Han's in part two, and Sirine's uncle, whose chronicle of the 'The Moralless tale of Abdelrahman Salahdin' commences almost every chapter of the novel. The content of the latter's story often parallels the actions unfolding in Sirine's life and, hence, serves as a reservoir of metaphors from which Sirine draws a conceptualisation of Arab culture. The narrative delineates Sirine as the beloved Iraqi-American chef at Nadia's Café which is located in a predominantly Iranian neighbourhood. Sirine lives with her Arab uncle for almost twenty-one years owing to her parents having been killed in Africa when she was only nine years old. A romance starts with Hanif Al Eyad—later on called Han—which considerably instigates her to recover her connection with her Arab heritage, insofar as Han triggers the realisation that she is more American than Arab. More pertinently, he proves to have motivated Sirine to make balance between her American and Arab identifications, insofar as his appearance on the scene of events not only reminds her of her Iraqi roots but also makes her "feel ashamed that she has taken so little interest in her father's home country."[501] In this light, through her passion for cooking, her uncle's stories, and her love affair with Han, Sirine

[499] Brinda Mehta, "The Semiology of Food: Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*," *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p 250.
[500] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2003), p 19. All the subsequent quotations from the book are taken from the same edition and will be referred to by page number.
[501] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 52.

sets off on the journey of re-constructing her ethnic identity which is hidden beneath "her pale skin, wild blond head of hair, and her sea-green eyes."[502]

Despite the fact that Sirine has not undergone the turbulence of displacement, a lingering sense of being somehow misplaced is constantly found loitering deep inside her, which correlates to her dilemma as a second-generation migrant. "I guess *I'm always looking for my home,* a little bit. I mean, *even though I live here, I have this feeling that my real home is somewhere else somehow*,"[503] Sirine admits as she speaks of her family roots. Nevertheless, she is still different from Ashima and Gogol in *The Namesake* as she does not suffer the intensity of the former characters' cases: that is cultural uprootedness and the name-specific issue. Sirine was brought up in the States by her Arab uncle following the death of her parents; she initially thinks of herself as an American woman and is trained to be an American chef in the "French, Italian and 'Californian' restaurants."[504] Also, she does not speak Arabic, nor does she have a substantial knowledge about Arabic culture, particularly religion. Only has she got inspired, however, to learn about an essential constituent of her Arabic lineage and culture—that is food—when she has started her job at Nadia's café; that is why the novel shows how she is perceived as an American in 'mid-Teherangeles', at least from the perception of all those misplaced immigrants and students who daily visit the café. The same issue is best manifested in Han's first endeavour to cook for her when—as a pledge of his love—he has made his decision in real traditional American food. Only when Sirine falls in love with Han does she recognize how detached she is from her Arabic roots. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that, unlike Jem in *Arabian Jazz*—and to some extent Ashima in *The Namesake*—whose identity crisis stems from a bitter sense of misplacement and the frequent humiliations from which she suffers owing to other people treating her as an Arab

[502] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 17.
[503] Ibid., p 118. My italics.
[504] Ibid., p 19.

but not American, Sirine's home is the States and she never considers the notion of leaving. Nonethe-less, her increasing encounters with the Arabic world, which are enhanced by her love for Han, bring about the necessity to undertake a journey—though spiritual—not only to Iraq, but also to her childhood, in order to find her proper place again in America.

Dissimilar from other narratives of cultural hybridity, *Crescent* introduces readers to a hybrid protagonist who does not seem to have greatly suffered the "uneasy and agonistic self splitting,"[505] so common among cultural hybrid experiences. Hence, it is quite important that readers first encounter Sirine when she is thirty-nine years old, insofar as at this stage in her life she is a woman with a solid sense of the self and is respectively comfortable with who she is. This being the case, the opening dialogue between Sirine and her uncle, stands as a reminder of her American identity as he humouredly calls on her "Miss Hurry Up American."[506] As an Iraqi immigrant, the uncle discerns differences between Sirine's American and non-American attitudes; his reminders significantly reinforce her sense of 'Americanness.' In this light, Sirine does not seem to have experienced a severe identity crisis owing to the fact that the figures surrounding her lovingly remind her that she occupies the Bhabhaian 'third space.' As long as characters such as her uncle, Mirielle, Um-Nadia, and the regulars at Nadia's Café welcome both herself and her cooking, the 'third space' proves to be a desirable place; significantly, Sirine announces her beliefs that "as long as she could cook, she would be loved."[507] Undoubtedly, her uncle would accept her irrespective of her American appearance and her talent for cooking; these two characteristics, however, allow her to temporarily usurp the contentious formulations of hybridity for nine years—a remarkably great amount of time for a hybrid individual to comfortably occupy the third space.

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[505] Monika Fludernik, "The Constitution of Hybridity: Postcolonial Interventions," in Monika Fludernik, (ed.), *Hybridity and Postcolonialism: Twentieth-Century Indian Literature*, (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1998), p 19.
[506] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 17.
[507] Ibid., p 218.

However, irrespective of being a stimulator of bonds amongst the diverse Arab and non-Arab ethnic groups, Sirine considerably undergoes the limiting influences brought about by the affirmation on the part of mainstream culture in line of which ethnic subjects are categorised into noticeably outlined identities. With her Iraqi father and American mother, Sirine's hybridity becomes an emblem of incongruity for both Americans and Arabs/Arab-Americans. In her reading of the novel, Carol Fadda-Conrey argues that "Sirine's role as a bridge facilitating interethnic ties is not without its inherent tensions and contradictions" in the sense that "questions related to cultural identity, national belonging and citizenship [are] deterring any simplistic forms of identity."[508] Therefore, in the scene where she looks at herself in the mirror, all that which Sirine can do is perform an act of self-criticism which is resonant with W. E. B. Du Bois' notion of "double consciousness."[509] In so doing, Sirine's problematises further the fact that her 'ethnic' identity is confirmed—and yet contested—through the racial lenses of a perception delivered to her by the mainstream white culture:

> All she can see is white … She is so white. Entirely her mother. That's all anyone can see; when people ask her nationality they react with astonishment when she says she's half-Arab. I never would have thought *that*, they say, laughing. You sure don't look it.[510]

In the light of the above-quoted excerpt, the complexion of Sirine's skin becomes a significant—though yet inaccurate—racial and ethnic indicator. This being the case, race becomes

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[508] Carol Fadda-Conrey, "Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Dian Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*," *MELUS*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, *Arab American Literature*, (Winter, 2006), pp 196-7.

[509] 'Double consciousness' describes the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society. The term was coined by Du Bois in reference to African American "double consciousness," including his own, and was first introduced in his autothenographic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. The term originally referred to the psychological challenge of "always looking at one's self through the eyes" of a racist white society, and "measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt." The term also referred to Du Bois' experiences of reconciling his African heritage with an upbringing in a European-dominated society.
Please see: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New Jersey: Gramercy Books, 1994), p 81.

[510] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 205.

"both a marker of exclusion and a site of contestation."[511] Such a stance has, in fact, been conveyed in the underlying presumption ("You sure don't look it") which indicates whiteness as the *differentia* of the mainstream American identity and non-whiteness as a label of Arab identity.

To override the aforementioned conundrum, Sirine is shown at the Café cooking, not only to remember her deceased parents, but also to refresh her memories of them insofar as she will "only be able to know them through [her] memory now."[512] Such undercurrent of motivation for cooking proves to have translated into the comfort food she provides for the Café's clients who crave for a sense of belonging. In this light, and in accordance with Jopi Nyman's conceptualisation, one can argue that both Sirine and her immigrant customers, especially the exchange students, not only share an experience of loss but also the occupancy of a "liminal space of identity, as a space where various transnational forces, both local and global remould identity."[513] Those students, coming to the States in hope of improving themselves through education, are found trapped between the promise of a better future and the security of home left in the past. In this regard, Nyman observes that "diasporic identity can be addressed as a form of hybridized identity, as it is in this space of in-betweeness where the diasporic subject reconstructs itself."[514] On her part, Sirine attempts to reconstruct her origins by means of performing the lessons her parents taught her about food. The novel depicts her idolising her mother as an example of how to occupy the hybrid space as both American and Arab in the sense that "her father always said his wife thought about food like an Arab"[515]—a statement suggesting that Arabic cooking is rather an attitude than simply a matter of ingredients and recipes. More interestingly, Sirine reflects upon her mother's ability of summoning

[511] Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab-American Literature: Origins and Developments," *American Studies Journal*, No. 52, *Arab-American Literature and Culture*, (2008). Accessed online via the following website: http://www.asjournal.org/52-2008/arab-american-literature-origins-and-developments/
[512] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 210.
[513] Jopi Nyman, *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction*, p 22.
[514] Ibid.
[515] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, pp 49-50.

her father to the kitchen with just the smell of food: "[i]f the smell alone could lure him, then surely the satisfaction of eating the food would anchor him to her mother's side."[516] This being the case, each time Sirine cooks, she re-enacts the power that is inherent in food to fortify the physical and emotional bonds within families; and her food gives diasporic immigrants an opportunity to reconstruct their memories of family and home. With her parents' sudden death, Sirine has had to relocate and live with her Uncle, which itself might have left her feeling 'un-homed'. As long as she seems to be able to assert her identity as a chef of different cultural cuisines, any kitchen will operate as her 'home'. Hence, the Café, apart from being a home away from home, becomes the locus on whose premises the past can be simultaneously renewed and preserved.

In her endeavours to learn more about her cultural lineage, moreover, Sirine resorts to numerous stratagems. She listens to an Arab poet's poetry reading (that is Aziz's); goes—though secretly—to Han's lecture on Arabic Literature at UCLA; attends the exhibition that displays photos of Iraq taken by Han's weird student, Nathan; and even becomes interested in the news on the contemporary political situation in Iraq. Her most effective strategy to bridge the distance between her two identities, however, remains in cooking, which functions as an affirmation of agency. Brinda Mehta maintains that "*Crescent* establishes the important link between cuisine and identity in which the preparation of food provides the protagonist Sirine with the basic ingredients for healthy negotiations of her mixed-race, Arab American identity."[517] In this light, Sirine confronts the intricacy of her hybridity in her cooking as she reflects on her own ontological duality as an Iraqi-American. In other words, her culinary explorations in the kitchen reveal the 'in-betweenness' of her position as the daughter of an American-Christian mother and Arab-Muslim father who is, nevertheless, deprived of both

[516] [516] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 52.
[517] Brinda Mehta, "The Semiology of Food: Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*," *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p 229.

sources of parental identification as a result of their untimely death in Africa. Positioned within the tentativeness of interstitiality, Sirine seeks roots in the preparation of Arab and fusion cuisine, finding new meaning for the pain of loss and death in culinary creations. This being the case, the very performativity of cooking "builds a special relationship between Sirine and [cookery], allowing readers to see the chef as a natural woman and, therefore, as a character developed from the prototype Jem [in *Arabian Jazz*] provided."[518] Indeed, Sirine's gastronomic instincts prove to be evidently associated with her Arab heritage; such association, however, is not merely because it is Arabic food she cooks, but because the act of "cooking the favorite—but almost forgotten—dishes of her childhood"[519] is concomitant with the process of remembering.

Throughout *Crescent*, the crisis of identity is not solely that which relates to the conceptual and ideological disruption of the hegemonic *differentia specifica* of the American discourse of representation; it is equally a psycho-cultural one, insofar as it also intrigues the characters' discernment of what defines an Arab American identity in the turn of the twenty-first century. As the majority of the characters in the novel are either intellectuals or have links with intellect,[520] *Crescent* offers an adequate framework for the discussion concerning the complexity of making a sense of well-established identification in a heterogeneous and culturally perplexing milieu. Nonetheless, the issue is not only pervasive in the orbit of academia insofar as many other figures—including Sirine, Um-Nadia, Mireille—take part in consolidating decisive controversies in the plot and restoring meaning to certain concepts. On the whole, the dilemma is intrinsically related to discerning one's identity as an American with an Iraqi/Arab heritage; the book aptly provides many scenes in which such complex a

[518] Ildikó Limpár, "Narratives of Misplacement in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz, Crescent,* and *Origin*," *HJEAS: Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, Vol. XV, No. 2, (Fall, 2009), p 255.
[519] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 19.
[520] There are, at least, four intellectual figures in *Crescent*—Sirine's unnamed uncle, Han, and Aziz, all of them are Arab University professors at UCLA, and Nathan, an American student of sociology—serving as a triggering force in giving the identity crisis a further prominent significance.

query is promulgated through the venture to discuss politics and the attempts to dig deep into the notion of the United States being the exporter of justice to the world, offering thus an interrogation of the dominant perception of Arabs. For an Arab American, what brings this ideological crisis to the fore is the very fact of inhabiting an in-between world, which is not often a blessing, inasmuch as it equally involves not being "wholly one thing or another," that is, in a way, "situated somewhere between Arab and American cultures—never quite rooted in either, always constrained by both."[521]

Hence comes the significance of *Crescent* as a text that offers an encapsulation of a painfully uncongenial realm for the Arab immigrant and the efforts to transmogrify it via diverse tactics. In this light, exiles—like Han and Aziz in the novel—stand out as an existential trait of the identity crisis, given its identification with loss and shadowy existence. This being the case, the venture which *Crescent* attempts is more awkward than the transmission of the prevalent undecidability of a firm identification, insofar as it also "helps make sense of the senselessness of our days."[522] As a counter-narrative, the book aims at metamorphosing the immigrants' world cast under the spell of a conflictive existence into a sensual experience by means of entering the contested arena of identity re-construction where questions of hybridity, exile, diaspora, and the politics of representation have a significant role to play in that process. This is why, therefore, Abu-Jaber seems to have chosen to delineate the scene in which Aziz—in full humour—responds to Victor's inquiry when they were discussing the representation of Arabs as terrorists: "[t]hey think we're [Arabs] all terrorists anyway."[523]

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[521] Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Boundaries: Arab/American," in Joanna Kadi, (ed.), *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, (Boston: South End Press, 1994), p 79.
[522] Gregory Orfalea, "The Arab American Novel," *MELUS*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, (Winter, 2006), p 117.
[523] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 197.

The significance of *Crescent* being published almost two years after the catastrophic incidents of the *annus horribilis* of 2001, featuring the September 11th attacks, lies in the fact of a global crisis for Arabs/Arab-Americans being ushered in the wake of that tragic event.[524] In fact, the beginning of the new millennium is ideologically marked by the disputes about American democracy as opposed to Arab terrorism. In his description of the amalgamation of such crises, Peter McLaren refers to the entry of "a reality zone already captured by its opposite: unreality."[525] In this new phase of history, the world has become one in which order has given way to disorder, and reason has given way to its antithesis; reality has been compromised by truth, guilt is presumed over innocence, and "[p]ublic school teachers across the country eagerly prepare new courses on the glory of Western civilization, elevating the United States to its shining pinnacle."[526] McLaren's statement destabilises the common-sense agenda of Americanism, which in turn is challenged throughout *Crescent* with a meticulous focus on the inconsistencies emerging from an imperial democracy. In this light, *Crescent*—and apart from its ostensible love-story—unfolds a second plot whose premises is conceived in interrogating the exemplary image of the role of America in international pacifism. The book digresses into the propagandist statement of restoring stability in the Middle East, reconceived in terms of a rhetoric which is as devoid of its original or intended meaning as slogans like "manifest destiny," "the white man's burden," and the "civilizing mission."[527] However, that intended achievement was concomitant with the embargoes following the First Gulf War—aimed to punish the Iraqi regime for attempting to annex Kuwait—that prove themselves to be no less devastating than "the trope of war-as-a-lesson" which consists in

[524] In fact, Abu-Jaber submitted the manuscript of *Crescent* just before 9/11, but the book did not see its way to publication until April 2003, just as American bombs started showering on Bagdad. Please see Robin E. Field, "A Prophet in Her Own Town: An Interview with Dian Abu-Jaber," *MELUS*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4 (Winter, 2006), p 207.
[525] Peter McLaren, "The Dialectics of Terrorism," in C. Boggs and Ted Rall, (eds.), *Masters of Wars: Militarism and Blowback in the Era of American Empire*, (New York: Taylor & Francis Books Inc., 2003), p 149.
[526] Peter McLaren, "The Dialectics of Terrorism," p 149.
[527] Chédlia Zagrouni Hamouda, *Roots of American Culture and Identity: Connecting the Present with the Past*, (Tunis: Centre de Publication Universitaire, 2007), p 288.

teaching the native "how to behave" and acting "as schoolmaster" to an "unruly pupil."[528] In an atmosphere such as this, *Crescent* shows that any claims of reinstating order into the region are bound to forfeit their overt implications, turning out to be no more than a hollow variable of a hidden imperial project.[529]

In addition to providing a scrutiny on the pivotal referential issues of politics and representation, *Crescent* prompts readers to look at identity crisis from within the critical trajectory incorporated in the Arab/Arab-Americans' endeavours to negotiate and comprehend their diasporic, exilic identities. In this regard, the narrative shows that in effect such attempts are not always pertinent to specific codes or ideologies—as solely encompassed in the politico-historical interpretations—but also are principally internal, if not existential. To this end, the novel offers the character of Hanif (or Han) as an exemplary illustration of the overlapping process of deciphering the interior struggle inhabiting the exiled self, without losing sight of other minor exiled characters. In the following discussion, I will focus on the inner workings of a person to whom Sirine's unnamed uncle refers as someone who "*needs someone to show him how to live in this country and how to let go of the other.*"[530] What grabs the reader's attention with regard to this character here is its striking awareness of veering towards a dilemmatic state of mind that is painfully occupied with intricate quandaries.

In fact, Han's susceptibility to exile as an ambivalent predicament serves as an effective example of the cultural crisis of a rupture with one's roots. Significantly enough, only at first does exile loom to Han as the *panacea* for a situation in which free expression, security and survival were substantially at stake. While still in the Iraq of Saddam Hussein's totalitarian control, Han dreams of "a new place, away from the new president, as far away as the other side of the world, a place where he will no longer have to look at his brother and sister

[528] Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism 1880-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p 27.
[529] For a full-account description, see for example *Crescent*, pp 169, 288.
[530] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 47. My italics.

not-sleeping, where he will not have to count his heartbeats, his breaths, the pulse in his eyelids."[531] Not only representing his one and only chance to escape persecution, exile also looks like Han's single occasion to evade his guilt-ridden conscience for endangering the life of his two siblings and the wholeness of his family. Unpredictably, nevertheless, the fact of being forced to leave Iraq and live in England and, later on, in Los Angeles has allowed room for grasping—unquestionably—the ironies that are latently encapsulated in the alternative of exile as a replica of dislocation and alienation. What charts the emergence of identity crisis to Han is the re-conception of his exilic experience as being intricately bound up with a sense of losing direction. The note he has left to Sirine prior his sudden resignation stresses the under-tone of how "[t]hings are broken. The world is broken."[532] Aptly enough, Abu-Jaber depicts Han reconfiguring exile as a shadowy, dim-lit room that is redolent with sounds and shadows, but without anything real or actual inside it. The note reads as follows:

> You're constantly thinking that you see old dreams. You go up to people, certain that they're members of your family, and when you get close their faces melt away into total strangers. Or sometimes you just forget this is America and not Iraq. Everything that you were—every sight, sound, taste, memory, all of that has been wiped away. You forget everything you thought you knew.[533]

Significantly, such painful contemplations best function as a reflection of the dark world of pointlessness and ghostly presence from which Han enormously suffers; indeed, such nuisance bounds Han's fractured sense of the self throughout the book, manifesting itself in what Anderson Tepper specifies as the "ever-wandering soulful ache."[534]

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[531] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 14.
[532] Ibid., p 296.
[533] Ibid., p 162.
[534] Anderson Tepper, "Review of *Crescent* by Diana Abu-Jaber" in *The New York Times Book Review*, (June, 2003), p 24.

Moreover, the loss accompanying Han's first-hand experience of imposed immigration ranges in spectrum from the physical contact with the homeland to the religious scope. This being the case, his enforced journey to the West is rendered almost concomitant with a certain loss of faith represented by the fact of "cutting with praying."[535] Owing to a lack of practice, the prayer beads are reduced into mere relics of his Iraqi identity as a Moslem. Hence, his first response to Sirine's query "do you believe that your religion—that Islam—defines who you are?" is only a vaguely equivocal statement; "[f]or me it's more complicated than that. I've heard of people defining them-selves according to their work or religion or family. But I pretty much think *I define myself by an absence*."[536] Even his consequent demonstration, "I don't believe in a specific notion of God. But I do believe in social constructions, notions of allegiance, cultural identity,"[537] does not reveal the portrait of a person who still sees meaning in his religious identity as a Moslem. This being the case, he soon proves to have lapsed from spirituality to the only meaningful void overwhelming his sense of being; aptly enough, Abu-Jaber delineates Han's intrinsic conflict in terms of deeming exile as the broadest truth in his miserable life:

> *The fact of exile is bigger than everything else in my life*. Leaving my country was like—I don't know—like part of my body was torn away. I have phantom pains from the loss of that part—I'm haunted by myself. I don't know—does any of that make any sense? It's as if I'm trying to describe something that I'm not, that's no longer here.[538]

Apparently, uprootedness seems to be the only thing which Han ends up gaining from his experience of exile; more painfully, it has been fused with an undercurrent of an absurdist consciousness of non-existence, that is far worse than a shadowy existence of which he becomes starkly aware. In his seminal work, *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays*, Edward

[535] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 71.
[536] Ibid., p 161. My italics.
[537] Ibid., p 162.
[538] Ibid. My italics.

Said appositely clarifies that "[e]xile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted."[539] This being the case, *Crescent* delineates how the most demonstrative trope of exile—conceived as a devastating self-alienation, rather than safety—is engulfed in the image of inhabiting the world of the down-and-out, which is common on American pavements. In a pensive mood, Han says to Sirine that:

> Sometimes when I see some of those homeless people on the street—you know, the ones walking around talking to the air, shuffling around, an old torn-up clothes—sometimes I think I've never felt so close to anyone as those people. They know what it feels like—they live in between worlds so they're not really anywhere. Exiled from them.[540]

Owing to a *modus operandi* of non-belonging as such, Han starts doubting his work ethics, including his passion for translation. When he describes the tasks he exercises in class with his students, he states that "[h]alf the time I don't know what I'm saying. I throw out some thoughts and then hope one or two of them sticks. It's all words to me."[541] In this light, Han's statement can be seen as symbolic of how both the arbitrariness and meaninglessness of life turn out to be solid tokens of cultural displacement. Yet more disturbingly, leading a life as such is impregnated with a sense of an irretrievable loss that verges on the brink of compromising his academic principles.

Nonetheless, Han is not the only figure in *Crescent* who inhabits the world of non-belonging; instead two other characters share it with him, namely Sirine and Nathan. Having been an orphan since the age of nine, Sirine—now thirty-nine—demonstrates a condition of symbolic exile. In a self-mirroring reflection, Sirine is found stating "what Han says reminds

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[539] Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p 173.
[540] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 162.
[541] Ibid., p 93.

her of a sense that she's had—about both knowing and not knowing something. She often has the feeling of missing something and not quite understanding what it is that she's missing."[542] In his interview with Abu-Jaber, Robin E. Field shrewdly draws attention to how the absence of Sirine's parents has affected "her sense of who she is as an Iraqi-American."[543] In a conspicuous similarity to Han, Sirine is shown undetermined about what faith she has, especially when she ventures her reply to his questioning: "I suppose I don't actually have one [religion]," adjoining, "I mean, my parents didn't, so ..."[544] Sirine lets her statement trail off, as if echoing Han in a sense, and then she only adds "[w]ell I believe in lots of things."[545] However, when such a statement recurs in a workshop on 'Women in Islam', it seems to have best rendered Sirine's dilemma. More pertinently, Abu-Jaber's delineation of Sirine's hyper-sensitivity to the failure of language in making any sense as to console Nathan for his dire circumstances evokes Sirine's internal struggle and indicates her complex crisis. Having listened to Nathan's traumatic experience in Iraq—that is the execution of his beloved, who turns out to be Han's sister, and his subsequent displacement—Sirine appears to have reached an inference similar to that which has flicked through her mind upon hearing about her parents' tragic death. She, as of now, wistfully wishes that she

> knew how to say something wise or consoling to him, something that wouldn't sound frightened or awkward. But then she remembers the time after her parents' death when people would approach her and try to explain her loss to her; they said things that were supposed to cure her of her sadness, but that had no effect at all. And she knew then, even when she was nine years old, that there was no wise or consoling thing to say. There were only certain helpful kinds of silences, and some were better than others.[546]

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[542] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 62
[543] Robin E. Field, "A Prophet in Her Own Town: An Interview with Diana Abu-Jaber," *MELUS*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, (Winter, 2006), p 216.
[544] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, 171.
[545] Ibid.
[546] Ibid., pp 88-9.

In this light, one can argue that on both occasions the only truth perceptible to Sirine is the fact of being failed (or defeated) by verbal language; in itself such a failure can be read as metaphor signifying the peak of a conundrum in whose framework one tries to make sense out of an enormously senseless realm.

With regard to Nathan's context, however, the dilemmatic situation of identity is not less intricate; it actually goes deeper than a mere interrogation of the ambiguity—and to some extent, even the unintelligibility—of certain notions in order to make a sense of who he is as an American. When he speaks of himself, Nathan refers to an "overgrown student in search of a life, may be."[547] Shortly afterwards, he pensively adds that he is only "made out of powder."[548] More yet interestingly, Sirine compares him to "a monk—sunken cheeks, hungry lunar shadow eyes, a body inhabited by an old spirit."[549] In fact, the analogy denotes a state of 'death-in-life,' that is isometrically perceptible in his photographs which are symbolic of a world close to a wasteland, reaching the onlooker as "gray dreams, full of accusation and a lingering sense of emptiness."[550] Apparently as it seems, these shots only make sense from the perspective of a person who is separated from his beloved due to a death execution and an essential civilisational cultural clash. Beyond this perception, however, the pictures convey only disfiguration, emptiness and absence, which are indicative of the capturer's dilemma.

Yet, this is not to say that the fictional world spun in *Crescent* is utterly problematic without hope. On the contrary, its representation of both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—though yet much deprived of consistency and short of intelligibility—is simultaneously indicative of optimism with regard to regaining a well-negotiated identification in life. The book traces life-changing itineraries of how to surpass crises instead of letting them lead to self-defeat. The mechanisms proposed range in magnitude from nurturing oneself

[547] Diana Abu-Jaber *Crescent*, p 54.
[548] Ibid., p 55.
[549] Ibid., p 329.
[550] Ibid., p 253.

with food and art to reconciling with both one's homeland and cultural roots. In this sense, *Crescent* reiterates a tactile perception of the world as a major means of making peace with oneself. Thus, if there is anything that saves Sirine from a desperate awareness of the incongruities around her, it is the unfailing power she is able to derive from cooking to others (or eating together with them). Significantly, Sirine's attentiveness to taking care of this skill and forging it recalls Carolyn Korsmeyer's understanding that "the intimacy of eating is part of what knits together those who eat—the mutual trust presumed, the social equality of those who sit down together, and the shared tastes and pleasures of the table."[551] For Sirine, as long as she can cook and nurse her tactile, olfactory, and gustatory expertise, she not only exists; she also concurrently figures out her sense of being and changes what sounds pointless and worthless into something meaningful. Hence emerges the significance of food in the novel insofar as it accentuates its pertinence in bridging "the gap that may look like chaos and add[ing] structure to the narrative."[552] This being the case, the narrative in *Crescent* imparts feeding and eating with the potential of establishing a well-articulated identity.

For Sirine, food is simply the embodiment of patience as well as existence, since "she was also born with an abiding sense of patience, an ability to live deeply and purely inside her own body, to stop thinking, to work, and to simply exist inside the simplest actions, like chopping an onion or stirring a pot."[553] It is more than sufficient to her to grasp life, the love and richness she can find which is impregnated in a forkful of sweet potatoes melting inside her mouth:

> The potatoes are soft as velvet, the gravy satiny. It is as if she can taste the life inside all those ingredients: the stem that the cranberries grew on, the earth inside the bread, even the warm blood that was once inside the turkey. It comes back to her, *the small secret that was always hers, for years, the only truth she seemed to*

[551] Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Makings of Taste: Food and Philosophy*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p 187.
[552] Lorraine Mercer and Linda Storm, "Counter Narratives: Cooking up Stories of Love and Loss in Naomi Shihab Nye's Poetry and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*," *MELUS*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4, (Winter, 2007), p 39.
[553] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 19.

> *possess—that food was better than love: surer, truer, more satisfying and enriching.* As long as she could lose herself in the rhythms of peeling an onion, she was complete and whole. And as long as she could cook she would be loved.[554]

With the taste, she identifies the essential ingredients with precision; her belief is that "food should taste like where it came from. You can sort of trace it back. You know, so the best butter tastes a little like pastures and flowers, that sort of stuff. Things show their origins."[555] When Aziz asks her to "consider the difference between the first and third person in poetry" in relation to "the difference between looking at a person and looking through their eyes," Sirine picks up on the analogy saying, "that's how I feel about eating."[556] Moreover, she maintains that "tasting a piece of bread that someone bought is like looking at that person; but tasting a piece of bread that they baked is like looking out of their eyes."[557]

Suggestively, *Crescent* yokes the physical feeding with the spiritual one by means of contrasting Sirine and Han's incongruent responses to food as a metaphor of how identity can be negotiated. Whereas Sirine "tastes everything edible, studies the new flavors, tests the shock of them; and she learns, every time she tastes, about balance and composition, addition and subtraction," Han is only content with "watch[ing and], eyeing the strange foods. When she offers him a taste, he closes his eyes and shakes his head."[558] Seemingly, the book accentuates such discrepancy insofar as it underpins the impact of Sirine's awareness of the communicative secret in feeding on enhancing Han's passage from crisis to reconciliation. Actually, she drags Han from his impending sense of exile towards the pleasure of an unforgettable sharing: "nobody loses sight of their collaborative making of baklava, a sweet cake based on almonds and other fruits."[559] Similar episodes in the novel, moreover, allow the reader to keep in mind that Sirine conceives of food as "a contact language—a medium to

[554] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 194. My italics.
[555] Ibid., p 69.
[556] Ibid., p 196.
[557] Ibid., pp 196-7.
[558] Ibid., pp 185-6.
[559] Ibid., pp 59-60.

translate experience and create a meaningful world," as a synonym "with love, prayer, creativity, and healing."[560]

In light of this reading, Han's progression from a stark exilic state of emptiness to a meaningful existence is, to a large extent, fashioned by his reminiscences of Iraq and its landmarks. Remembering the homeland and its grandeur not only enhances self-reconciliation, but also expresses a continuing struggle, on the part of the exile, for some sense of identification: that is for a feeling of being safely at home. In her "Arab American Literature and the Politics of Memory," Lisa Suhair Majaj clarifies that

> [m]emory plays a familiar role in the assertion of identity by members of ethnic and minority groups; family stories frequently ground ethnic identification, and the popularized search for 'roots' is often articulated as 'remembering who you are' […] Memory functions on both a cultural and a personal level to establish narratives of origin and belonging; myths of peoplehood, like memories of childhood, situate the subject and make agency possible. It is thus no surprise that Arab American literature turns repeatedly to memory to explore, assert, critique, and negotiate ethnic identity.[561]

In light of Majaj's postulation, if there is anything that still relates Han to a meaningful world, then it is his ability to infuse life into the relationship with his family. In a very subjective manner, the novel shows him reflecting how "for a moment, I forgot where I was. I forgot that this America. I was on the banks of the Tigris. I could see the sun through my eyelids. My sister was about to call me in to eat. It's like the light broke for me and brought it all back and then I had to return to this place."[562] With every act of recollection, therefore, one can argue that Han proves to go through a process of rebirth restoring his early childhood in Iraq, irrespective of the dread of an incommensurable loss of his present life to the past. In

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[560] Lorraine Mercer and Linda Storm, "Counter Narratives," p 40.

[561] Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab American Literature and the Politics of Memory," in Amritjit Singh, et al., (eds.), *Memory and Cultural Politics: New Approaches to American Ethnic Literatures*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), p 266.

[562] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 187

so doing, however, he alludes to a cumbersome fear that what meanings memory could re-construct for him may prove themselves insufficient as a guarantor of wholeness: "sometimes when I start remembering … sometimes I'm afraid I won't be able to stop."[563]

As a result of an incompleteness as such, Han's recuperation of an authentic sense of his Iraqi identity becomes bound up with an inexorable return to Iraq. "*It's like there's some part of me that can't quite grasp the thought of never returning*. I have to keep reminding myself. It's so hard to imagine"[564]; his statement declares visiting the homeland as the sole prerequisite for comprehensiveness. In a letter to Sirine, he writes: "I'm driven by the prospect of return: my country won't let go of me—it's filled me up. You know that. And a certain fear—an emotional fear—has suddenly lifted and freed me."[565] In this light, when Han abstains from inaction and ventures into re-entering Iraq, he expresses the dismay of losing the last thread that could re-establish his grasp over his identity as an Iraqi—that is, the likelihood of not seeing his mentally-disturbed mother prior to her death. This daring act, however, illustrates the thin affinity between logicality and practicality, given the recklessness of homecoming despite the strong probability of a death execution.

Conclusion

In the light of the argument presented in this chapter, one can argue that both Lahiri and Abu-Jaber have provided a parallel artistic externalisation of the problematic nature of migrant identity despite the difference in the socio-cultural setting and characterisation. This being the case, however, all the three books do not seem to offer a self-contained discussion of and/or solution for identity crisis, but rather they have introduced an understanding of how different characters negotiate the dilemma of their identity. Moreover, the texts have often

[563] Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*, p 188.
[564] Ibid., p 62. My italics
[565] Ibid., p 312.

involved not only in an approach to how certain socio-cultural experiences prove to translate into the context of what constructs one's identity, but also in an effort to explore how post-coloniality conspicuously influences the process of identity formation and/or negotiation. Through Ashima and Gogol in *The Namesake*; Mr Pirzada, Mrs Das, Mrs Sen in the *Interpreter of Maladies*; Sirine and Han in *Crescent*, the complexities of exile, alienation, and the recognition of and longing for a seemingly forfeited comfort zone demarcate the phenomenal *modus operandi* via which both Lahiri and Abu-Jaber have constructed their characters in their struggle to exploit immigration as a site of appropriating the reconstruction of their contested identities.

On the one hand, Gogol's incessant attempts to re-define his identity and come to terms with cultural roots may well perceived as corresponding to Sirine's search for agency by means of the requisite negotiation of her culturally mixed background. This being the case, both authors prove to be delineating the problematic of identity for second-generation immigrants in terms of a cultural translation that distinguishes the perplexing articulation of one's identity from the hybrid zone. On the other hand, Ashima's tenacious sense of estrangement and alienation and here failure at reconciling with the socio-cultural norms of the States resounds with Han's perturbing experience of a self-imposed exile. In each case, Lahiri and Abu-Jaber accentuates the agony of losing a sense of belonging on the part of first-generation migrants, which leads to an exacerbation in the character's identity problem. In this regard, the two novelists seem to have written in favour with the hope of acceptance and the preservation of traditions and native norms to override the dissent/consent binarism or the tension created by the collision between ethnic identities and the new world's requirements and realities depicted in both *The Namesake* and *Crescent*.

V. Chapter Five: Conclusion

As has been elaborately debated in this thesis, the problematic concept of migrant identity can be approached and analysed via various perspectives, such as cultural, social, ethno-political, and personal or individual identities. In their study, Avram Taylor and Donald MacRaild observe that "the problem of [migrant] identity is especially important nowadays, so it may be considered a postmodern subject matter … It is concerned with particular styles, description of the world and the nature of 'truth.'"[566] Throughout my case studies, I have engaged in an endeavour to investigate how migration and postcoloniality have considerably affected the exigent process of identity (re-)formation in a sample of Arab and South Asian postcolonial migrant literature. All the works that I have dealt with have aesthetically represented the (im)migrant experience, the pain of loss, the suffering of exile and dislocation, along with the immigrant's quest for stability and a sense of belonging—problematising in the meanwhile their struggles, hope, and aspiration. And since "roots, language, and social norms" are the major three constituents of what defines a human being —according to Salman Rushdie's conceptualisation—migration entails a "triple loss"[567]: of roots, of language, and of social and cultural codes of performance. No sooner is the migrant subject denied one or all three components of identity as a result of migrating to a socio-culturally heterogeneous land, than it becomes essential on their part to find and negotiate new mechanisms of re-defining and re-constructing the self. In fact, all the texts that have been discussed in my study portray migrant figures whose identities are often subject to variable mutations, a situation that necessitates a re-configuring of the self in the light of the life conditions in the new land.

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[566] Donald MacRaild and Avram Taylor, *Social Theory and Social History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p 76.

[567] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981*-1991, (London Granta Books, 1992), pp, 124-5.

In my analysis of the texts, I have shown how they have reflected the resulting socio-cultural rift—which is bound up with migration—between identity performance at home and the politics of functionality in the host culture. The works have provided various imaginings of the characters, places of experience, their upbringing, adulthood, and their migrant families' origins—some of these details can be traced to the authors' personal experiences as (im) migrants. In each case, the novelists have revealed how the process of re/dislocation proves to have reshaped their individual emotional experiences and intellectual perspectives; in so doing, they have offered an exploration of what being in the new place represents for the characters. Indeed, all the narratives examined in this thesis do, in fact, present not only their protagonists' agonising search for belonging as they constantly negotiate their identity in relation to the new places and communities in which they operate; but also they highlight the pressures and expectations of these sites and communities on them. In this light, one can conclude that the respective tension between the individuals and their families, their diasporic communities, the mainstream society of the host country, and the traditions of the native land is palpable in my chosen narratives and invites an evaluation of the strategies that each character adopts in order to live and function. This being the case, the fictional characters seem to traverse the lines that demarcate zones of belonging and/or non-belonging; and by focusing on their experiences, the authors fictionalise an investigation of their feelings of separation and alienation from family or community while, at the same time, attempt to provide them with a creative territory of self-fulfilment.

Moreover, as it has been demonstrated through the theoretical conceptions of Bhabha, Hall, and Said—amongst other significant scholars—I have argued that the literary texts I have studied show that forms of identification are conspicuously shifting, and immensely based on human agency, where the immediate community may prove itself to be either a

space of support or a site of oppression.[568] In this light, I have investigated how both Arab and South Asian authors have endeavoured to interrogate not only how the archaeology of power and agency intervenes in the politics of identification, but also how subjectivity persistently wrestles with, revolts against, and/or conforms to the existing (mis-)representations. Indeed, all the novels discussed in my thesis have artistically externalised identity formation as a process through which—some times more successfully than others—diasporic subjectivities not only are obliged to transgress racial, gendered, social and cultural categorisations, but also are simultaneously bound to the effects of those socially constructed categories. This being the case, and in accordance with the critical conviction that the significance of deconstruction lies in its interest in strategic exclusions,[569] I have shown how some of the fictional works have—disproportionately—raised questions with regard to a racially-biased dissimulation, or misrepresentation of the migrant figure. In this light, also, I conclude that the narrative form has been used as a means of denouncing and opposing such a lingering legacy of colonial systematic removal.

More importantly, the eight novels—along with the *Interpreter of Maladies*—allow us as readers to better grasp how diversified the South Asian and Arab experiences are insofar as the characters populating these books differ in many aspects; these include class, gender, ambitions, religious belief, generation, level of education, place of upbringing or provenance in the respective homeland, place of upbringing and residence in the UK/US. Also, the degree of the characters' acceptance or rejection of their native cultural traditions varies noticeably; so is the case with accepting or rejecting the cultural *modus vivendi* of the host country and the degree of the migrants' exclusion or inclusion in the wider social reality of the country of migration. When featured in the narratives, furthermore, diasporic communities proves to

[568] James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. IX, No. 3, (August, 1994), p 314.
[569] Gayatri Charkavorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Sarah Harasym, (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1990), p 43.

have been delineated as very complex and of diversified realities, which itself adds further to the problematisation of identity formation.

In chapter two, I have examined the challenging question of identity formation in *The Enigma of Arrival*, *The Mimic Men*, and *Season of Migration to the North*. In each book, the predicament of identity proves to have overlapped with displacement, postcoloniality, and cultural hybridity. In these texts, Mustapha Sa'eed, Ralph Singh, and the unnamed narrators have undergone a preliminary damage of a valid or dynamic sense of the self that has resulted from migration. Through different tropes and characterisation, both Naipaul and Salih have dealt with the problematic of migrant identity in a parallel way; given the fact the two narrators are nameless in *The Enigma* and *Season of Migration* highlights the indication that identity is still to be established and reconstructed. Moreover, their professions as a writer and a literary scholar and the reflections on the courses of their lives have played a significant role in the way both characters come to understand their identity crisis; interestingly enough, the two novels have shown that the professional identities of their protagonists are enormously linked to their colonial history and identities. The resemblances between these two novels in the way they have approached the issue of dislocation and its effect on identity realisation proposes that they are rooted in the very similar backgrounds of both their protagonists and writers. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the journeys taken in both books highlights in what ways they influence the lives of the narrators. An observant reading of the two texts leads to the conclusion that the journey is central to the development of both characters; more specifically, it becomes clearer throughout the course of *The Enigma* and *Season of Migration* that not only is the journey inevitable for the migrant narrators, but also it does have an impact on them differently and leads them to different paths in life.

With Ralph and Mustafa's experiences, *The Mimic Men* and *Season of Migration* cross-culturally relate to each other in the sense both figures suffer from the consequences of a seemingly self-imposed exile; more correspondingly, the migrant subject represented through these two specific figures grievously succumb under the intricate effects of cultural hybridity in the way they perceive their identities. Nevertheless, the unifying challenge in the lives of the four major figures in the three books is that they all live in a state of separation from home. In this light, Naipaul and Salih provide portrayals of migrant characters who add a dimension to the categories 'emplaced' and 'out-of-place'; the protagonists are not in forced exile in England, but have, mainly for professional reasons, chosen to go there. Their situation, however, is still akin to that of the exile in the sense that they are in a location that is not their home, and they have all felt it necessary to leave their respective countries of birth to find themselves in an alien and rather hostile land—a condition *per se* contributing to the further destabilisation of the process of re-constructing and re-defining one's identity.

My third chapter has offered a critical comparative exploration of the dilemmatic metamorphosis of the female immigrant identity in three major works of diasporic women writings: *Jasmine*, *Wife*, and *Arabian Jazz*. In this section of the thesis, I have examined the impact of migration and cultural heterogeneity on the immigrant woman and how they vastly influence the process of identity re-construction. By means of the twofold lenses of post-colonial theory and the immigrant's perception, I have analysed how Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber have inventively externalised the manner in which their heroines find themselves navigating through the numerous and mostly contradictory burdens imposed both by their homeland culture and their new position as (second-generation) immigrants in the United States. As it has been illustrated, each of the three texts palpably displays that while adjusting to such demands, the gendered and cultural identities of the female immigrant become unalterably bound up with the politics of performativity and self-perception.

Furthermore, the three novels have depicted how the ordeal of isolation and the never-ending sense of alienation—along with the awareness of and longing for a lost comfort zone—all designate the phenomenal context within which such characters have bitterly striven in their attempts at negotiating and re-defining their contested identities. Remarkably, all the four immigrant protagonists—Jasmine, Dimple, Jemorah and Melvina—reveal, though at different levels, not only the necessity of reproducing an image of identity, but also the concomitant transformation of the immigrant subjects while embracing that image. In fact, each book has provided its own distinctive representation of the complexity of adapting to the specificity of re-constructing the self within the framework of intricately different socio-cultural norms and intersubjective relations. In my argument, I have demonstrated that the three texts serve as approaches to both Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber's conception of agency, most remarkably the hybrid heroine who tries to surmount the restricting lines of specific categorisation.

In *Jasmine* and *Wife*, Jasmine and Dimple encounter grave issues such as the loss of culture, the prospect of giving up their old identity, and the inevitability of transforming and assuming a new one. Both novels, however, seem to have lingered on this question: does the society which is free from the shackles of caste, gender and family offer these two different female immigrants the desired freedom? In parallel, *Arabian Jazz* presents the challenging dichotomy between the Arab and American components in Jem and Melvie's personalities, demonstrating that hybridity, as Homi Bhabha argues, is a space in which boundaries blur and traditions transform. Indeed, Abu-Jaber depicts cultural hybridity as a significant problematic that necessitates negotiations and acceptance of requisite transformation to reach a better recognition of the self. In her two novels, Mukherjee presents cultural hybridity as a cyclical process of constant construction and re-construction of identity that is best expressed through different oppositional metaphors. Jasmine, like Mukherjee, conceives of herself as a

forerunner in America and represents the confrontational immigrant who challenges the violence and destruction associated with identity re-formation. *Wife* presents the reader with the immigrant woman in an uncongenial land who is often recognised in terms of a great dismay and loneliness that are distinctive features to her condition. The novel chronicles its heroine's journey towards self-recognition, passing in the meantime through torturous physical, mental and emotional agonies that hugely affect her whole being to such extent that she is driven to violence. In *Arabian Jazz*, nevertheless, Abu-Jaber introduces readers to hybrid second-generation immigrant protagonists who seem to undergo the disturbing experience of self-division, which is not uncommon among culturally hybrid figures. Through Jem and Melvie, Abu-Jaber suggests that Arab Americans need to negotiate the differences between Arabness and Americaness, and only in so doing, they may revise the identity of both cultures.

In my fourth chapter, I have engaged in a critical analysis of a modern, literary representation of the crisis of migrant identity and how it has been aesthetically depicted in three contemporary diasporic texts that have all been received with wide acclaim. In this chapter, I have primarily concentrated on Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*, examining the literary delineation of identity re-construction, self-transformation, along with the challenge of cultural estrangement and how such processes intersect with migration. I also have referred to similar thematic concerns in Lahiri's earlier work, *Interpreter of Maladies*, to show the development in Lahiri's writing and underscore how each of the three texts provides in its own scope parallel, metaphorical representations of the dilemma of the immigrant's identity. My line of argument in this chapter has been in showcasing that all three works under discussion have offered an impressive portrayal of a variety of themes such as the agony of loss, the hope of acceptance, and the preservation of traditions in ways that confront readers to draw connections between objects and concepts that are not typically related. I

have argued that each work involves an approach to how specific socio-cultural practices of the immigrant figure translate into what constructs one's identity.

As it has been illustrated in my discussion of Lahiri and Abu-Jaber's works, one can come to the conclusion that both authors have provided a parallel artistic externalisation of the problematic nature of migrant identity in spite of the variation in the socio-cultural setting and characterisation. This being the case, however, the three books do not seem to offer a self-prescribed discussion of or a solution for the notion of identity-in-crisis; rather they have introduced an understanding of how different characters endeavour to come to terms with the dilemma of their identity. With a variety of characters such as Ashima and Gogol in *The Namesake*; Mr Pirzada, Mrs Das, Mrs Sen in the *Interpreter of Maladies*; and Sirine and Han in *Crescent*, the complexities of exile, alienation, and the recognition of and longing for a seemingly forfeited comfort zone demarcate the phenomenal *modus operandi* via which both Lahiri and Abu-Jaber have constructed their characters in their struggle to exploit immigration as a site of appropriating the reconstruction of their problematic identities. Interestingly, Gogol's ceaseless attempts to re-define his identity and come to terms with his cultural roots may be well perceived as corresponding to Sirine's search for agency by means of the requisite negotiation of her culturally mixed background. In this light, it can be concluded that both authors prove to be delineating the problematic of identity for second-generation immigrants in terms of a cultural translation which differentiates the perplexing articulation of one's identity from the hybrid zone. Moreover, Ashima's tenacious sense of estrangement and alienation and her fiasco in reconciling with the socio-cultural norms of the United States resounds with Han's perturbing experience of a self-imposed exile. In each case, Lahiri and Abu-Jaber accentuates the agony of losing a sense of belonging on the part of first-generation migrants, which leads to an exacerbation in the character's identity problem. In that regard, the two novelists appear to be writing in favour with the hope of acceptance to override the

dissent/consent binarism or the tension created by the collision between ethnic identities and the new world's requirements and realities depicted in both *The Namesake* and *Crescent*.

In the light of what has been presented, therefore, this thesis suggests the Arab and South Asian authors—whose fictional works have been critically discussed and analysed—have embarked upon a significant attempt of addressing the plight of migrant identities in their fiction. In so doing, they are externalising the indispensable re-configuration of such intrinsically problematic identities within the challenging framework of the socio-cultural relations prevailing in the host society. The texts enjoy the capacity of articulating a certain knowledge or experience into a plausible stratagem of overcoming the severity of a specific reality, such as the complexity of identity formation in an alien culture or a hybrid space. Although the protagonists in these migrant works do not share the same points of departure or arrival, they, however, share the facts that they are all migrant subjects created by authors who, themselves, have first-hand experience of migration and its associated difficulties. This allows room for a more authentic representation of how migrant characters should operate, live and interact with others, and ultimately re-define their identities under the conditions of the new world.

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