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**REWRITING THE *BILDUNGSROMAN*: A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS
OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE* AND *THE LOWLAND***

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ÖZET.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I. <i>THE LOWLAND</i>	12
1.1. From India to the United States.....	12
1.2. Settling Identities.....	25
1.3. Conclusion.....	40
CHAPTER II. <i>THE NAMESAKE</i>	42
2.1. Cultural Hybridity and the First and Second Generation of Immigrants.....	42
2.2. Confronting the ‘Other’ and Other Confrontations.....	60
2.3. Conclusion.....	77
CONCLUSION.....	80
WORKS CITED.....	88

ABSTRACT

This study will analyze the cultural change and identity development in the novels of the Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (2003) and *The Lowland* (2013), through exposure to an alien culture by immigration. The notion of dual identity, cultural colonialism, postcolonialism and the form of the Bildungsroman will be discussed and analyzed in detail. The aim of this study is to underline that the concept of identity is not national or pre-given, and that it is an alterable and re-creatable notion through cultural exchange and cultural differences. The cultural transformation and the identity development of the first and second generation immigrants and the immigrant experience will be discussed in the light of Homi K. Bhabha's theories on identity, culture, cultural colonialism, and in relation to the structure of the Bildungsroman which contributes to the notion of development as it depicts the life span of its protagonists. The final phases of the characters' identity development and self-maturation will be analyzed in detail in the study.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, *The Lowland*, Immigrant Identities, Bildungsroman

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Hint asıllı Amerikalı yazar Jhumpa Lahiri'nin 2003 tarihli romanı *The Namesake* ve 2013 tarihli romanı *The Lowland*'de tasvir edilen göçmen karakterlerin yaşadığı kültürel değişim ve kimlik değişimini incelemektir. Bu çalışma, kimlik kavramının aktarılan ve milli bir kavram olmadığı, aksine kültürel değişim ve kültürel farklılaşma aracılığı ile kazanıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu süreç romanda tasvir edilen birinci ve ikinci kuşak göçmen ailelerin Amerikan toplumunun içinde yaşayan Hintli göçmenler olarak geçirdikleri değişim ve edindikleri yeri, Amerikanlaşmış kimlikler aracılığı ile tartışılacaktır. Bu tartışma, Homi K. Bhabha'nın kimlik ve kültür üzerine olan teorileri ışığında yürütülecektir. Romanların Bildungsroman formatına uygun yazılmış olmaları ve bu formatın kullanıldığı eserlerdeki karakterlerin hayat çizgisini ve hem fiziksel hem duygusal gelişim süreçlerini yansıttığı göz önünde bulundurularak, karakterlerin gelişim süreçlerinin takibi daha da gözle görülebilir halde gelecektir. Bu iki romandaki karakterlerin Amerikan toplumunda geldikleri son nokta, yaşadıkları başkalaşım ve edindikleri yeni kimlikler detaylı olarak tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, *The Lowland*, Göçmen Kimlikleri, Bildungsroman

INTRODUCTION

Every American is in some sense an immigrant –even the Indians who came millennia before Colombus, and by another ocean.

Esmond Wright, *The American Dream*

Jhumpa Lahiri is an American writer of Indian¹ descent. She was born in 1967 in London, when her family migrated from India to London, and later she was raised in Rhode Island, America. After studying at Barnard College and Boston University, in the fields of English Literature and Postcolonial Studies, her first book *Interpreter of Maladies* was published in 1999. The book was composed of nine short stories and brought Lahiri the Pulitzer Prize and the Hemingway Award. Her first novel *The Namesake* was published in 2003 and was adapted into a movie in 2007. Her second short story book *Unaccustomed Earth* was published in 2008 and listed number one in *New York Times*' Best Sellers. Her second novel *The Lowland* came out in 2013 and was announced the National Book Awards finalist ("Jhumpa Lahiri"). Considered as one of the leading voices of immigrant writing, Lahiri analyzes the immigrant experience in the United States and depicts how her characters adjust themselves to the American culture and the identity development and cultural struggle they experience as a result of their immigration. As Field comments: "In her fiction, Jhumpa Lahiri delicately explores the complexities inherent in the formation of cultural identity for the second generation of immigrant families in the United States" (2004: 176). In this study, two of her novels *The Namesake* and *The Lowland* will be analyzed within the framework of the immigrant experience and cultural formation as Field notes.

Jhumpa Lahiri's two award-winning novels *The Namesake* (2003) and *The Lowland* (2013) suggest a reconsidering of the questions of belonging and identity and the idea of a pre-given culture. She challenges the notion of a national identity by transforming her characters' cultural identities throughout their stories. During an interview, Lahiri reveals her point of view about national identities:

¹ The term "American-Indian" primarily refers to Native Americans. However, in the context of this study, as in some sources, the term will be used to refer to Indian immigrants in the United States.

I spend half the time in interviews trying to explain to people that I'm not from India. And I think there's a large population of readers out there who, when they see my book, see the jacket, see the design, see the motifs, see my name – assume certain things about me. They assume that I'm Indian. Or that I'm Indian in the way that they want to think of me as Indian, having been born and brought up there, and that I'm a foreigner in this country. (qtd. in Leyda 2011: 74)

From Lahiri's perspective, it can be claimed that she does not see the immigrants simply as individuals who are born or who live in an alien culture, but she believes their identity alters and is re-created by underlining the fact that she does not approve of being simply seen as Indian, like she also reflects in her characters, she has a more complex identity. In her article "From Hybrids to Tourists: Children of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," Natalie Friedman discusses Jhumpa Lahiri's style of narrating the immigrant experience:

Instead of shedding the trappings of the home culture and throwing himself headlong into the work of Americanizing, the protagonist of the contemporary immigrant novel –whether an immigrant or a child born to immigrants– is more concerned with his or her dual identity as it manifests itself in America and in the shrinking global community. Lahiri's depictions of the elite class of Western-educated Indians and their children's relationship to both India and America dismantle the stereotype of brown-skinned immigrant families that are always outsiders to American culture and recasts them as cosmopolites, members of a shifting network of global travelers whose national loyalties are flexible. (2008: 112)

As Friedman points out, in the novels, Lahiri's characters live a welfare life in the United States and re-invent their identities and cultures, adapt themselves to its culture instead of dealing with discrimination, racism and the economic survival the reader encounters in the usual immigrant narratives. Lahiri rather deals with the issues of dual identity and self

development under an alien culture. Friedman comments on the progress of Lahiri's characters:

I claim that Lahiri, as part of this growing Asian American author group, is less interested in the pursuit of the American Dream as it was traditionally rendered in older immigrant narratives than she is in focusing on what happens once that dream (in its variety of incarnations) is achieved, not only by the generation of immigrants but also by its children. (2008: 112)

Lahiri's characters in the novels draw attention to the fact that the concept of being colonized and postcolonialism are not simply facts of the past, but are still ongoing processes. The novels depict their characters starting from their childhood into their adulthood and illustrate their identity split throughout their immigrant experience in the United States. In her article "Immigrant Writing: Changing the Contours of a National Literature," Mukherjee dwells on the concept of immigrant writing:

In the past, scholars have not recognized "literature of the immigrant experience" as distinct in its aims, scope, and linguistic dexterity from postcolonial literature, and have misapplied literary theories that are relevant to colonial damage, nation-building, dispersal, exile, voluntary expatriation, and cultural and economic globalization but are inappropriate templates for a literature that centers on the nuanced process of *rehousement* after the trauma of forced or voluntary *unhousement*. (2011: 683)

The "immigrant experience" that Mukherjee defines is highly visible in Lahiri's works. Her characters start their journey as 'exiles,' gradually become 'voluntary expatriates' by adopting an alien culture voluntarily and finish their quest by defining for themselves a new identity through amalgamating American culture and their Indian heritage.

Both of the novels are designed as *Bildungsroman* as they depict their characters' life span. The *Bildungsroman*, as a form, contributes to the frame of cultural hybridity and

identity development as this form allows the reader to follow the characters from their childhood to adulthood. Known as “the novel of development” or “the-coming-of-age-novel,” the *Bildungsroman* is a German-originated literary form (Redfield 2006: 192). It focuses on its protagonist’s moral and psychological growth from his/her childhood into adulthood. In this form, the protagonist usually takes a journey through which he/she looks for answers to the questions of life and searches for freedom and maturity (Redfield 2006: 191). At the end of the journey, the protagonist finds some of the answers, completes his/her maturation process and accepts and becomes accepted by the society. In a nutshell, the *Bildungsroman* portrays its protagonist from the very beginning to a specific period in his/her life when he/she reaches a wholeness and maturity (Morgenstern and Boes 2009: 654).

The *Bildungsroman* can also be hybridized with other narrative forms. One of the most significant of these hybrid matchings is using the *Bildungsroman* style in postcolonial narratives. The purpose of using the *Bildungsroman* in postcolonial writings can be best explained by Jussawalla’s definition: “Postcolonial novelists needed a genre to define the birth of their new nations and define their experiences in relation to colonialism. They chose the genre of the *Bildungsroman* or the novel of ‘growing up’ to signify their national birth” (1998: 29-30). When this kind of *Bildungsroman* form is used by European and Eastern authors, it usually depicts a nation gaining independence from a mother country and developing a self-identity by allegorizing the emerging country through the novel’s major character(s). Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901) and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) are considered to be two important examples of this mixture. The general characteristics of postcolonial *Bildungsroman* are explained by Jusawalla as follows:

1) The interaction of an indigenous people and cultures with a foreign or dominant or colonizing culture and its language; 2) the interaction of the protagonist with the colonizing religion, most often Christianity; 3) the coming to a “political” knowledge of one’s indigeness, for example that of Indianness or Kenyanness – whether in India as being particularly Indian or as with diasporic characters such as Bapsi Sidhwa’s Feroza as being Indian within the context of America; 4) that despite the condition of postcoloniality often equated in theory with postmodernity, as a hybrid flux and

merging, or the problematizing of cultures at various interstices, postcoloniality constitutes a rejection of hybridity and a turn towards nationhood; 5) this knowledge often comes to the protagonist (and can we speculate –the author?) by involving certain literary devices and old fashioned archetypes, such as a journey involving a river/sea, a companion/guide, and educational process or schooling involving language learning and/or religion. (1998: 35)

The first article of the characteristics defined above is the most visible one in Lahiri's novels as her characters interact with a dominant and foreign culture in America.

American authors' use of postcolonial discourse in the *Bildungsroman* differs from that of European and Eastern authors in terms of defining a new kind of colonialism and postcolonialism. America, as the land of opportunities, offers a better life, thereby embodying justice and fair play (Yun-yo 1997: 283). Thus, this kind of writing defines "Americanness in a new world" (Juswalla 1998: 29) rather than a familiar economic or military colonialism, and this American kind of colonialism can be regarded as 'cultural imperialism.' As Yun-Yo argues, "America does not use force to spread her favorite tenets. Yet they have almost everywhere been successful" (1997: 284). From Yun-Yo's perspective, it can be claimed that the United States is one of the leading figures of cultural imperialism. John Tomlinson defines the concept of cultural imperialism as follows:

Cultural imperialism is conceived as 'how we live' threatened by the imposition of 'how they live.' What this leaves out of account is the essentially dynamic nature of culture. 'How we live' is never a 'static' set of circumstances, but always something in flux, in process. The political discourse of national culture and national identity *requires* that we imagine this process as 'frozen' and this is done via concepts like the 'national heritage' or our 'cultural traditions.' (2002: 90)²

The fact that America manages to export its culture throughout the world leads the readers of these novels to the conclusion that American culture has been successful in dominating the major characters in the novels in terms of cultural imperialism. The protagonists of

² Emphasis original.

these novels can be regarded as the ‘colonized’ and America as the ‘colonizer’ as they have accepted America’s cultural domination by adopting an American identity at certain stages of their lives and at the end of both novels.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* deals with the issue of dual identity. Chifane also classifies the novel as a depiction of the experience of dislocation and an exploration of identity crisis and the sense of alienation (2015: 8). In this novel, the split between identities is clearly visible and more striking than it is in Lahiri’s later novel *The Lowland*. Named after a famous Russian writer, Gogol, the protagonist, is born in the United States to Indian parents Ashoke and Ashima. Growing up within both Indian and American culture, Gogol seems to be keen on adopting an American identity when it comes to choosing a side. As a second generation immigrant, Gogol discovers American culture more closely than his own Indian culture and, as a result, he chooses to take on a more Americanized identity. About the second generation immigrants, Field notes: “This generation will decide, consciously and unconsciously, which pieces of their cultural inheritance to incorporate into their lives as Americans, which parts to alter, and which practices to adopt” (2004: 167). As Field underlines, Gogol has the chance to choose which parts of American culture to adopt and adapt to his identity.

Although his mother, Ashima struggles to stay connected with her roots, she witnesses Gogol’s process of Americanization which starts by his refusal of his non-American name. The novel leads to an open ending at which point Gogol sits on his childhood bed and looks at the Russian writer Gogol’s book which his father gave him as a birthday present. The transformation Gogol and the Ganguli family go through and the identity progress of the second-generation immigrants under the influence of American culture may best be analyzed in the light of a postcolonial reading. About this award-winning novel, Heinze remarks: “*The Namesake*’s accomplishment is in analyzing how personal and cultural identities and processes establish differences and differentiation, including the recognition of something by a name” (2007: 200). The cultural identities and the process of cultural difference Heinz underlines are to be analyzed within the framework of postcolonialism. Tamara Bhalla comments on the novel and Lahiri’s use of the “Literature of New Arrival”:

Because *The Namesake* provides such a relatable representation of second-generation South Asian American experience, it requires the reader (particularly readers invested in South Asian American identity formation) to reckon with authenticity of that depiction. Such reckoning is not as straightforward as it may seem; rather, it invokes the duality of literary recognition wherein identification with the text may illuminate some material realities, such as the historical moment in which it was produced, and obscure others, such as the generalization of ethnic experience through a male protagonist. (2012: 112)

In that sense, it can be claimed that Lahiri's depiction and narration is not a usual description of immigrant experience, but a more detailed development and transformation of what an immigrant goes through.

The Lowland focuses on two brothers: Subhash and Udayan. Born in India, the two brothers stand in sharp contrast with each other. Set in the 1960s, the novel follows them through their childhood to maturity. During the Naxalbari events in India, Udayan, a determined rebel, takes part in the events whereas Subhash is ready to leave for the United States for higher education and a better life. The gradual change in Subhash's character after his immigration to the United States is highlighted throughout the novel. While Subhash becomes more and more Americanized, he also becomes a part of the American society by interacting with American culture and slowly rejects his roots and shifts to another life style and culture. After his brother's sudden death, Subhash marries his brother's pregnant wife and takes her to the United States to become a husband for his brother's wife and a father for his baby girl. Subhash, similar to Gogol in *The Namesake*, finds himself questioning his life and the choices he had made. The new American identity which Subhash adopts in the United States can be best analyzed through a postcolonial reading in order to show the reader the identity and culture split that the protagonist goes through.

As such, it can be said that the main characters of *The Namesake* and *The Lowland* go through a search for identity in a culture and society that they are not familiar with and complete their journeys into maturity in that culture while, at the same time, being dominated by it. The characters of both novels struggle to find a place for themselves in

the American society and to be accepted in it by drifting away from their own Indian origins. In order to illustrate an identity search and development under the influence of an alien culture, the postcolonial reading of these novels will be carried within the frame of Homi K. Bhabha's theory on postcolonialism. Bhabha argues against the purity of culture by claiming that each culture has fragments of one another. David Huddart underlines Bhabha's approach to culture: the 'Self' (West or the dominant culture) and the 'Other' (East or the colonized subject) interact and are intertwined through any kind of cultural exchange (2006: 4- 5). In this sense, there cannot be a pure culture in either the East or the West, thus a fixed, stable and national identity for an individual is not possible. Instead, Bhabha believes, (as explained by David Huddart) it is 'cultural hybridity' that shapes one's identity (Huddart 2006: 5). 'Cultural hybridity' for Bhabha is a meeting point (or a third space), a crossing of more than one culture. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha explains his notion of culture as follows: "we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge" (Rutherford 1990: 211) , in other words it shapes the emergence of another cultural forms such as identity. Edward Said also discusses in his book *Culture and Imperialism* that the cultural forms are hybrid, impure and mixed (1994: 14). The term is also discussed by Kuortti and Nyman in the book *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition* as a concept "denoting intercultural transfer (2007: 4). In this light, hybridity will emerge as an agent that allows a new identity to develop in this study of the novel.

Also the key word of "fixed identity" plays an important role in this context as it suggests "rigidity and unchanging order" in one's identity (Bhabha 2004: 95), and therefore, it poses a problematic frame for its formation as it prevents cultural variety. Bhabha comments: "Finally the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, 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" (2004: 64). As a result, Bhabha asserts that forming an identity is a life-long process which requires encountering different points of view and cultures. In *The Empire*, Bhabha's perspective of identity is also discussed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri as follows: "Bhabha's refusal to see the world in terms of binary divisions leads him to reject also theories of

totality and theories of the identity, homogeneity, and essentialism of social subjects” (2010: 2626). Thus, Bhabha undermines the idea that individuals must bear or act according to the culture in which they are born and believes that culture cannot be classified or reduced under the notion of nation or to binaries such as East and West. This notion of an identity consisting of various elements is also explained by Amin Maalouf in his book *In the Name of Identity* as follows:

Each individual’s identity is made up of a number of elements, and these are clearly not restricted to the particulars set down in official records. Of course, for the great majority these factors include allegiance to a religious tradition; to a nationality –sometimes two; a profession, an institution, or a particular social milieu. But the list is much longer than that; it is virtually unlimited. A person may feel a more or less strong attachment to a province, a village, a neighbourhood, a clan, a professional team or one connected with sport, a group of friends, a union, a company, a parish, a community of people with the same passions, the same sexual preferences, the same physical handicaps, or who have to deal with the same kind of pollution or other nuisance [...] All are components of personality –we might almost call them “genes of the soul” so long we remember that most of them are not innate. (2003: 10-11)

In this respect, both of Lahiri’s novels dwell upon the idea of dual identity, cultural hybridity and a sense of alienation from national roots, or as Mukherjee refers to it, “erosion of homeland legacy” (2011: 681). Major and some of the minor characters of these two novels go through a process of alienation towards their own legacy within another culture. It can be claimed that, from the perspective of Homi Bhabha, the main characters are developing, creating a new cultural identity for themselves. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explains the postcolonial individual’s identity struggle: “In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image –the missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, its Other” (2004: 66). The “Other” here can be understood as the white Western profile and the “Oriental stereotype” as the immigrant.

For these novels, the “Other” can be acknowledged as the United States of America, whereas the “Oriental stereotype” as the Indian protagonists. From this standpoint, since there cannot be one and pure national identity, one can argue that the characters of these novels do not become assimilated individuals, but gain their own identities through hybridity. The idea of cultural hybridity will also be discussed as an alternative to national identity. It will be illustrated that Bhabha’s idea of culture and nation may take one to a point where the main characters in these two novels are trying to find where they belong to and complete their quest within the framework of the *Bildungsroman* as they go through a life-time experience.

As one of the main points of the study, possibility to adapt to an alien culture will also be a focus point. To what extent the adaptation of an alien culture would form an identity will also be a discussion point. The characters’ adopted alien cultures and their shaping identities’ reflection and acceptance in the American society would create a framework for their maturation and identity development progress. At this point, the notion of “ambivalence” would surface. “Ambivalence” is an in-between situation as Bhabha defines it (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007: 10). This in-between situation stems from the fact that the colonial image (as mentioned before, in this context the colonial image can be accepted as the novels’ Indian characters) cannot be an exact representation of the authentic and can only emerge as a mimicry of it. Bhabha explains this situation as follows:

Paradoxically, however, such an image [mimicked image] can neither be ‘original’ –by the virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it –nor ‘identical’ –by the virtue of the difference that defines it. Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. (2004: 153)

This point of view can take the colonial subject to being “almost the same, but not quite” of the original representation of the culture (Bhabha 2004: 122). In that sense, the uniqueness or wholeness of the characters’ developed identities will be a topic of argument. Both novels depict the identity formation and life span of their characters in an

alien culture. This process, when read in the light of Homi K. Bhabha and in the postcolonial framework, would lead to a transfiguration and relocation of the characters' cultural and identity notion.

Since Lahiri's later novel *The Lowland* focuses on the first generation immigrants and her earlier novel *The Namesake* deals with second generation immigrants, the analysis of the novels in a non-chronological order (by not following their publish dates) would create a flux of immigrant generations. For this reason, this study is conducted in a customized chronology by following Lahiri's later novel by her earlier novel. In this regard, in the first chapter, Lahiri's later novel, *The Lowland* will be analyzed. The experience, cultural change and adaptation to a new culture of Lahiri's first generation immigrant characters, especially through Subhash and Gauri will be underlined. The final point of their maturation and their identity will be analyzed through the theory of Homi K. Bhabha and in the frame of the *Bildungsroman* to illustrate the immigrant experience in an alien culture and to illustrate the alterable nature of identity.

In the second chapter, Lahiri's first novel *The Namesake* and the experience of second generation immigrants, through the character Gogol, will be analyzed. Similar to her other novel, the adaptation and the cultural change of the characters will be underlined as well as the concept of dual identity. The final phase of the characters' maturation and the transformation process will be highlighted through the theory of Homi K. Bhabha and in the frame of the *Bildungsroman* form.

The conclusion will state the comparison of the characters of both novels and the ending of their maturation journey by underlining the idea of challenging the notion of a fixed identity. The transformation and the experience of the characters, their identity development and the final point of their life will be discussed. The events and the characters that shape the identity of the protagonists will be emphasized in comparison to illustrate the immigrant experience in an alien culture also by highlighting the contrast between first and second generation immigrants.

CHAPTER I: *THE LOWLAND*

With all its tensions, immigrant is a central theme in the story; the United States
is a society of immigrants.

Esmond Wright, *The American Dream*

Jhumpa Lahiri's 2013 novel *The Lowland* portrays an Indian family which falls apart due to choices made by the family's two sons: Subhash and Udayan. The novel, similar to Lahiri's first novel *The Namesake*, is built around the themes of self-development and forming a new, non-nationalist identity. The characters' lifelong journey is presented in the frame of cultural domination of the Western culture and the notion of dual identity. When the novels are read in the light of Homi K. Bhabha's theory that cultures and identities cannot be pre-given and fixed, together with the nature of the *Bildungsroman* form, it can be concluded that the characters of the novel, at the end of their journey, develop a new notion of culture and identity. The novel portrays the progress of more than one character and thus, by the end, it is possible to highlight the characters' identity development throughout their immigrant experience. Characters such as Subhash and Bela come to a point of completing their quest by adapting themselves to a new culture whereas characters, such as Gauri, do not come to a point of maturity as she cannot decide upon a certain identity to define her.

1. From India to the United States

The Lowland introduces two brothers, Subhash and Udayan, who live in Tollygunge in India in the 1950s. The two brothers spend their childhood days playing games outside their house, going to school and watching the town's famous Tolly Club from outside its fences in curiosity. Ever since they were children, they have stood in a sharp contrast to each other: Subhash as the obedient child and Udayan, the rebel (Lahiri 2014: 11). Their mother never had to run after Subhash, yet Udayan was always "blind to

self-constraints” (Lahiri 2014: 12). The difference between them grows in parallel with their growth. In 1967, while they are college students, the Naxalbari uprising breaks out (Lahiri 2014: 23). The villagers in Naxalbari were standing their grounds against their landowners. Udayan supports the villagers while Subhash favors staying on the safe side: “Do you think it was worth it? Subhash asked,’ Udayan answers: ‘Of course it was worth it. They rose up. They risked everything.’ Yet Subhash could not see if it would make a difference” (Lahiri 2014: 25). In fact, this brief conversation between them gives away the widening gap between the two brothers and how their characters begin to transform.

“Geography is destiny in *The Lowland*” as Pius comments in his article “Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland*: A Critical Analysis” (2014: 101) Geography is an agent in the center of all immigrant stories as the destiny of all immigrants take shape in the geography they start their lives in. As he suggests, in the novel, the two brothers’ lives are to be shaped in parallel with where they reside. After his graduate program, Subhash decides to pursue a Ph.D. program in the United States where his destiny will change forever whereas his brother Udayan remains in his homeland where he would be killed due to his political opinions. Since Subhash and Udayan have grown old enough to understand and interpret the events occurring in their country, it has always been Udayan who took a step and voiced his opinions, not Subhash. Subhash has always been more reserved, more concerned about himself rather than his homeland or politics. When he comes to a point of choosing to set his future in a foreign country, after immigration laws being changed and allowing Indian students to enter the United States easily (Lahiri 2014: 36), he does not hesitate. Given his character and world-view (by how he is described as a person who always follows his personal goals up to this point in the novel), his choice is hardly surprising. When Udayan protests, in disbelief that his brother can easily walk away from what is going on in the country, Subhash is indifferent to his protests, and his mind is made up believing he has found a great opportunity for his future. The reason why he believes going to America is the best for his future is partly because of the political restlessness in India and partly because he does not feel that he fully belongs to India. If Subhash felt a part of his homeland, his choice would be perhaps to stay in India and be involved in the events shaping India’s future as his brother does. Yet Subhash is already being drawn away. Given the conditions and turbulences in India, the distance Subhash needs to set between his homeland and himself stems from the idea of finding a better future in another

part of the world. At the time Subhash makes this decision, India is portrayed as a country of turmoil and uprisings, still trying to establish itself after its independence from Britain in 1947. These facts push Subhash to make a decision. In fact, it is always such anxieties and uneasiness that plant the seeds of immigration. John Tomlinson describes this anxiety in his book *Cultural Imperialism* as follows:

In societies and at times in which there is uncertainty, dissent, or active struggle over national or regional identity, or where the nation is under external threat, the ‘distant imaginings’ of national or regional identity may become foregrounded in consciousness and the threat of cultural imperialism becomes more immediate. (2002: 88)

As Tomlinson argues, the immigrant grows a ‘distant imagining’ under hard conditions at his homeland and that imagining is usually the idealization of another country. The United States presents this idealized image, life and opportunities for Subhash. The ‘distant imagining’ is more appealing for him than staying in India and supporting his brother’s ideologies or fighting for his country’s benefits. Udayan, who knows his brother better than Subhash himself does, can predict his brother’s future: “If you go, you won’t come back...I know you” (Lahiri 2014: 36). Therefore, with this decision, the two brothers are separated forever and Subhash’s future choices are foreshadowed. Their fate begins to be shaped: Subhash chooses to go to the United States and Udayan chooses to join the rebels to fight for justice he believes they defend. Therefore, Subhash meets his first turning point by becoming an immigrant in the United States.

After arriving in the United States, Subhash is struggling to adjust to this new world, yet he is happy with his decision:

But he was no longer in Tollygunge. He had stepped out of it as he had stepped so many mornings out of dreams, its reality and its particular logic rendered meaningless in the light of day...Here was a place where humanity was not always pushing, rushing, running, as if with a fire at its back. (Lahiri 2014: 41)

The word “dream” seems to be a deliberate choice by Lahiri. By saying Subhash has left India as he used to wake up from a dream in the morning, it is implied that it was Subhash’s long-lasting dream to leave his country. The word ‘dream’ stands both for a bad

dream which signifies India's current situation and a dream such as finding better opportunities which Subhash yearns for. While Subhash is discovering his new home, enjoying his new life in this new land, he develops a sense of gratitude towards the United States more than he has for India: "He knew that the door could close just as arbitrarily as it had opened. He knew that he could be sent back to where he'd come from, and that there would be plenty to take his place" (Lahiri 2014: 44). From this perspective, it can be said that Subhash has already closed the door to his life back in India and does not intend to go back. The more Subhash discovers America, the more he feels attached to it. During one of his walks, he passes by a church in the middle of a wedding ceremony, and stares in wonder only to come back later: "One day, when the church was empty, Subhash walked up the stone path to the entrance. He felt the strange urge to embrace it" (Lahiri 2014: 48). The "strange urge" is the first step of his adapting to a new culture, which stands for an undefined feeling that he cannot interpret. It is gratitude and adopting this alien culture with all it has to offer to Subhash. By observing every ornament in the church, he begins to think about the married couple he saw earlier at his first visit to the church. While becoming more romantic and attached to the things he discovers around him, he starts imagining his own marriage and the possible bride his parents would choose for him, though the idea is not pleasing as it implies going back to India:

Getting married would mean returning to Calcutta. In that sense he was in no hurry. He was proud to have come alone to America. To learn it as he once must have learned to stand and walk and speak. He'd wanted so much to leave Calcutta, not only for the sake of his education but also- he could admit this to himself now- to take a step Udayan never would. (Lahiri 2014: 48)

Here, Subhash compares and contrasts his culture and American culture for the first time and the idea of going back to his homeland one day disturbs him. In that sense, Subhash is already embracing his new home, at the same time establishing a wall separating him from his past and the ones he left behind. By comparing himself with Udayan, Subhash challenges India. For Subhash, Udayan now represents India. Everything India means is personified by his brother. He tries to overcome his brother, his family, his people, his attachments to India and his customs which are very different from American ones. He builds himself an identity apart from Udayan, thus India, as being only Subhash alone: "He

was sick of the fear that always rose up in him: that he would cease to exist, and he and Udayan would cease to be brothers, were Subhash to resist him” (Lahiri 2014: 35). His being overshadowed by Udayan and Udayan’s determined and rebellious nature that is portrayed since their childhood seems to be fading away gradually with every minute he spends in the United States. “Here, in this place surrounded by sea, he was drifting far from his point of origin” (Lahiri 2014: 48), because Subhash is to become someone new. While talking to his roommate, Richard, Subhash makes a comment about India: “an ancient place that was also young, still struggling to know itself” (Lahiri 2014: 50). This definition of India is a symbol of his establishing life in America: a young man in America, struggling to discover who he really is. He is new in this alien culture, yet he is discovering it and feeling attached.

One day, Subhash receives a letter from his brother, Udayan. In the letter, Udayan lets Subhash know about the events in India. He also wants to know why Subhash has not been writing to them since he left. Yet he already knows the answer, so does Subhash. He says: “No doubt the flora and fauna of the world’s greatest capitalist power captivate you” (Lahiri 2014: 51). In fact, Udayan is right. Subhash is already drawn to the United States and the life it presents. Chandrasekhar explains, in “Indian Immigration to America,” about Indians who migrate to the United States: “Some Indians who came to the United States as temporary residents, as students, professors, traders and ministers, were attracted by the American way of life and became naturalized citizens” (1944: 142). Subhash’s situation is not different. Subhash decides to burn the letter. It was Udayan’s advice due to political reasons yet, Subhash burns the letter in order to destroy every possible emotional connection: “He felt their loyalty to one another, their affection, stretched halfway across the world. Stretched to the breaking point by all that now stood between them, at the same time refusing to break” (Lahiri 2014: 52). The loyalty Lahiri describes between the brothers stands as a symbol of being linked and attached to India for Subhash and he does not want or need that connection anymore. On the contrary, it is exactly what he wants to avoid. He needs the “stretching” bond to break in order to move on with his new life. Becoming a new person requires making decisions and leaving some aspects of one’s current identity behind. When an immigrant encounters the alien culture, he would struggle, feel a yearning for his accustomed life in his homeland. The immigrant experience involves missing many things left behind; it means being out of one’s comfort

zone which generates a feeling of being alone. For Baharati Mukherjee, this feeling is a sense of “loss.” She explains:

For immigrants who have fled to the US to escape or to protest oppressive regimes in their homelands, immigration is loss of community, of language, and of extended family. It is to give up on the dream of a better future in one’s home country. It is to cut oneself off from history and to condemn oneself to a world of ghosts and memories. (2011: 689)

Yet this sense of ‘loss’ that the immigrants experience, as mentioned by Mukherjee, is exactly what Subhash yearns for, because he does not see this situation as a loss; on the contrary, it is only a start in order to re-define himself. Subhash is aware that he needs to break away from what he has had so far in order to have a new life and identity.

Days pass by and Subhash gets another letter from his brother, informing him he got married recently with a girl of his own choice without the family’s consent (Lahiri 2014: 56). The idea disturbs Subhash somehow. It is partly because Udayan did something Subhash still cannot think of doing. Although he made a choice and left for America, it is still not a subject of discussion to arrange a marriage by his own decision: “On his own he’d taken a step that Subhash believed was their parents’ place to decide. Here was another example of Udayan forging ahead of Subhash, of denying that he’d come second. Another example of getting his way” (Lahiri 2014: 57). Udayan’s choice and his rebellion is something Subhash would do as he has a new identity in a new free land. Nevertheless, his brother made a choice Subhash has not dared so far. In a way, Subhash is still connected to his homeland culture, he still cannot break his bonds completely. His first stage should be to defeat, metaphorically, his brother on his way to maturity. Subhash feels a need to outrun his brother, by taking several steps he believes his brother would not. Yet his brother’s marriage overshadows what Subhash has been doing so far; his rebellion is the most shocking as usual, more shocking than Subhash’s decisions. However, while Subhash is trying to deal with this fact, he meets a young woman at the seaside, Holly, a beautiful American woman, mother of one. At this point, Holly would pose a sharp breaking point for Subhash. With Holly, Subhash will start discovering American culture through ‘mimicry.’ He will try to learn and to embrace the culture by “imitating the colonial power” (Bhabha 2004: 123). The “colonial power” here is a cultural colonial

power rather than a traditional understanding of the colonizer. The immigrant meets its “Other” as Bhabha would refer to the culturally dominant power (2004: 122). America poses this role of the culturally dominant power as the immigrant (Subhash) believes he has found the land of better opportunities and he is ready to embrace it with all its aspects. During their small talk, Holly asks where Subhash is originally from and whether he likes America. Subhash answers: “There are times I think I have discovered the most beautiful place on earth” (Lahiri 2014: 77). Although Subhash gives her the impression that he perfectly fits in the United States –his dominant power –he is still partly connected to India, still divided between two places because he is still trying to find his place in the society he has just settled in: “He didn’t belong, but perhaps it didn’t matter. He wanted to tell her that he had been waiting all his life to find Rhode Island. That it was here, in this minute but majestic corner of the world, that he could breathe” (Lahiri 2014: 78). A part of Subhash needs approval from an outside observer, needs that someone, from America, to tell him that he fits in and he belongs so that Subhash can take a step towards building a new identity for himself. Being in-between does not help Subhash as he already felt the same way back at home: being in-between his homeland and a “distant imagining” (Tomlinson 2002: 88). Now he is in between leading a temporary life in America and being an Indian who is destined to go back and staying and belonging to America. However, Subhash is not very sure of the future he dreamt of for himself once: “Will you return to Calcutta? ...What do you miss about it?” Holly asks and he answers: “It is where I was made” (Lahiri 2014: 79). By answering Holly’s question, Subhash actually admits some facts about himself even he himself is not aware of: “it was assumed, by his family, by himself, that his life here was temporary” (Lahiri 2014:79). Yet Subhash, feeling nothing more than a biological connection to his homeland, feels closer to establishing a life America. In America, he will not be an obedient son or a shadow of his brother; instead he will become visible by living according to his own choices instead of a fixed culture and ideas he was given.

Subhash finds himself in a relationship with Holly. Holly has been living apart from her husband for a while now and Subhash does not mind the fact that she is legally still married. Holly’s husband is an important figure although he is not a round character in the book. Holly’s husband will become Subhash’s model to mimic. Holly’s husband is an American who established a family and a life in the United States, not a temporary visitor

who is destined to go back to a far away homeland. In this case, he represents the point Subhash wants to reach. Thus, for Subhash, he becomes a “fetish” as Bhabha would define it (2004: 107). He is a fetish because he is somewhat a key to Subhash’s idealized identity. As Bhabha explains: “The fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is as much on mastery and pleasure” (2004: 107). Holly’s husband is the stereotype of an American for Subhash and thus he desires to be in his place. Subhash finds himself sparing time for Holly’s son, Joshua. He spends his nights at Holly’s place on a regular basis, and from time to time the three of them go on picnics at the seaside. In a way, Subhash is imitating a family life in America with a family that is not his own. Although the relationship still remains casual, Subhash undertakes the role of a family man. This way, Subhash challenges his pre-given identity and, at the same time, he mimics, imitates an American man –Holly’s husband. Bhabha dwells upon the concept of mimicry, by underlining: “Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline [...] mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (2004: 122-123). In this case, in the light of Bhabha’s approach, Subhash is reforming himself, regulating his new identity as an American man. His “strategy” is to act as similarly as he can to an American. Before he creates an identity, he trains and adapts himself to his new role in a new society. He becomes “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 2004: 122). He also finds the chance to break away from the feeling of not belonging completely in America. By replacing himself with an American –the idealized Other, a person who is part of this society, who is settled and socially accepted, Subhash gives himself the chance of an inside look at the American society, and an opportunity to understand how their way of living operates. In fact, by temporarily filling in for Holly’s husband, Subhash prepares himself for his future identity as an Americanized Indian.

This game of mimicry Subhash has been playing with Holly and his son is not enough to grant him a sense of belonging. He needs to change something about himself to make him feel like he is adapting himself to his new life. He loses his virginity to Holly. By doing this, he takes a step toward his new identity and accomplishes something new: “He was embarrassed, exhilarated. He felt and did what he had only imagined until now” (Lahiri 2014: 87). As a consequence, he abandons another thing he carried with himself to America from India. He loosens another tie: “He wanted to tell Udayan. Somehow, he wanted to confess to his brother the profound step he’d taken” (Lahiri 2014: 89). He wants

to tell Udayan that he did something irreversible, like moving to the United States, like leaving his old self and life behind and moving on in the world, in a world that is bigger than Udayan's and Calcutta. He wants to show that he is not turning back from this point. The promises he made to himself and his family, such as going back home after his education and leaving his marriage arrangement to the hands of his parents, are hollow now. They are vain like the promise he made to Holly about a leaf they had seen once. He told her he would bring a leaf like that from the family's garden if he goes India: "He told her he would, but it felt unreal, in her company that he would ever be back in Tollygunge, with his family. Even more unreal that Holly would still care to spend time with him when he returned" (Lahiri 2014: 85). What is unreal is he would not be his new self when he goes to India and returns. His Americanizing existence is a threat to his traditional life at home and his home is a threat to his new identity. He may not be an American yet, but he is not the Subhash from Calcutta, either. He is not a shadow in Rhode Island, especially around Holly: "The most ordinary details of his life, which would have made no impression on a girl from Calcutta, were what made him distinctive to her" (Lahiri 2014: 90). The details that make no impression on Udayan and his family and in any part of India make him an individual in the United States. Yet Subhash does not want to be seen as an exotic being from a far away land, instead he wants to be homogenized with America and its culture. This situation corresponds to what Bhabha explains as "the desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry" (Lahiri 2014: 127). In some cases, the colonial subjects bear the anxiety of being exiles and dislocated in the alien culture. The desire to be seen as the original, 'the authentic' –which is the dominant culture –is a survival strategy. Although Subhash does not have the anxiety of being an outcast or a stereotypical outsider (as Lahiri does not portray discrimination against her characters by the American society), he has the anxiety of still being an Indian and different from the rest of the American community. This is an anxiety that Subhash will demolish later in the novel throughout his process of identity formation.

In spite of everything Subhash has now in America, it is not easy to erase every legacy he is given by his past and his roots. It is not very easy to become someone new who is completely free and cleansed from everything about the previous phase of his life. Although Subhash is gradually building his identity, he is still partially connected to his customs, his way of living and the values of his homeland. Frequently he thinks of how his

parents would react on Holly and her conditions, comparing their customs and way of thinking with his newly shaping ideas and life style:

Sometimes he imagined...To live the rest of his life in America, to disregard his parents, to make his own family with her. At the same time he knew that it was impossible. That she was an American was the least of it. Her situation, her child, her age, the fact that she was technically another man's wife, all of it would be unthinkable to his parents, unacceptable. They would judge her for those things...His parents' disapproval threatened to undermine what he was doing, lodged like a silent gatekeeper at the back of his mind. But without his parents there, he was able to keep pushing back their objection. (Lahiri 2014: 91-92)

Therefore in America, he is free from every concern he would have in India. In a way, he is free. As long as he denies the fact that he has a family and a homeland, he can be whoever or whatever he wants to be in America. Mukherjee believes that an immigrant is determined to remake his/her identity (2011: 689). This claim of Mukherjee partially stems from the anxiety of being accepted by the society as mentioned before. As the land of the plenty and of opportunities, America lets Subhash choose his own path and allows him to draw a new frame for his character and his life, thus allowing him to remake his identity. However his family is a threat to destroy this remaking process he has started. More than his family, his origin is a threat to the new person he desires to become. Yet, the illusion of being a family with Holly by mimicking her husband is to be broken by the figure in the center of it, Holly's husband –the authentic subject. It is Holly who reminds Subhash of the facts instead of his own family. She wants a break up so that she could try again with Joshua's father as she believes it is the right thing to do. She also sees the reality that lies beneath the image that Subhash creates in America; that he is not brave enough to make his own decisions yet. She believes Subhash, sooner or later, would go back to India to his family: "She had caught him in his own web, telling him what he already knew" (Lahiri 2014: 97). This impression that Subhash left is exactly what he needed to avoid. As the colonial subject, Subhash is now regarded as non-authentic, a person who belongs to another country and is destined to bond with his own culture. This idea and impression of "the authentic" breaks Subhash's efforts to blend with the dominant culture. He is still not

regarded as a part of it and not brave enough to stand against certain things such as his Indian traditions, as can be understood from his dilemma about Holly and his family. Upon hearing Holly's decision, he takes out the last letter he got from Udayan from his pocket, tears it apart and lets the pieces fly out of his hands (Lahiri 2014: 98). With this, he wants to tear apart his lack of courage; another tie with his home and his family. He is about to let his concerns and contradictions fly off his hands. Holly, in fact, that he is determined and this is the final time he would be in-between things. With this turning point, Subhash steadily constructs his future and identity.

Although he wanted to be a part of the American culture, Subhash had hesitations so far; of not being approved or accepted, of what his Indian community would think, or whether he would become a misfit in the American society. These concerns are gradual elements of developing an identity and a natural part of the immigrant experience. On the one hand, there is an assumed national identity which is being Indian in Subhash's case. That identity is settled and accustomed to and pre-given. It is so intrinsic that leaving it aside would feel like betrayal; it would require difficult decisions. On the other hand there is rejecting of that intrinsic structure, re-creating it. Amin Maalouf explains this difficult journey: "He [the immigrant] is not himself from the outset; nor does he just "grow aware" of what he is; he *becomes* what he is. He doesn't merely grow aware of his identity; he acquires it step by step" (2003: 25)³. In Subhash's case, he thinks he would not fight against certain things, such as not going back to India or choosing his own wife without his family's consent, yet his identity and choices are to be shaped gradually. He starts giving up on what he was given through culture. With experience in another country, interacting and observing it, he grows aware of what he is.

In 1971, he receives a telegram from his family, informing him that his brother, Udayan was killed (Lahiri 2014: 99). He was killed due to his connections with the political organizations and the protests he was involved in. The police shot him dead in his own family house. So, Subhash goes to Calcutta for the ceremony, unwillingly: "Now that he was so close, part of him wanted to return to the taxi, which was backing out slowly. He wanted to tell the driver to take him somewhere else" (Lahiri 2014: 107). Regular rituals take place in the house of the Mitra family. Subhash feels alienated, partly due to his family's approach towards him; his family does not react the way he expected they would.

³ Emphasis original.

They do not seem to be pleased with or interested in his homecoming (Lahiri 2014: 107). Subhash cannot communicate with them: “He struggled to interact with them” (Lahiri 2014: 113). This time, Subhash becomes an alien in his own homeland. His determination to separate himself from his culture is so strong that he feels no belonging. It is not only Subhash, but also his community who feel the change in him as they are distancing themselves from Subhash as well. This distancing is not a way of protesting Subhash for turning his back on India. This distance is similar to how Subhash felt towards the American society when he first arrived: after two years, it seems like the family and Subhash are strangers to one another and trying to figure out each other as they are figuring out a new culture. The colonial subject, after being exposed to his dominant culture, faces his Indian essence from which he is drawn away. In this part of the book, by Subhash’s reuniting with his roots with the excuse of a funeral ceremony, the reader can feel the questions in the characters’ minds although they are not voiced by the writer: Subhash seems confused being around his family, trying to figure out his place in his community. As for his family, they are also puzzled by the new Subhash they see. This estrangement between the colonial subject and his roots is highlighted by Bhabha as follows: “the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence” (2004: 127)⁴. ‘The partial representation’ is a very significant point here. Subhash, as the colonial presence in the United States, has developed “a partial,” incomplete identity within the culture of American society. In America, his identity is incomplete. Yet when he goes back to India, his ‘partial’ representation of the Americanized Indian becomes highly visible. Thus, being the observer of American culture as an outsider is reversed by his being in India and being the observed by the Indian community. As a result, he is “alienated from his essence,” the Indian origins, by his own community as well as his efforts to eradicate his legacy from his identity.

To take a break from his family’s grief and their distanced behavior towards him, Subhash decides to go out, yet he does not feel comfortable walking around his hometown:

He saw foreigners on the streets, Europeans wearing kurtas, beads.
Exploring Calcutta, passing through. Though he looked like any other
Bengali he felt an allegiance with the foreigners now. He shared with

⁴ Emphasis original.

them a knowledge of elsewhere. Another life to go back to. The ability to leave. There were hotels he might have entered in this part of the city, to have a whiskey or a beer, to fall into a conversation with strangers. To forget the way his parents behaved. (Lahiri 2014: 133)

Subhash identifies with outsiders in India, as if he were one of them, only there to come and go like a visitor who belongs somewhere else. In order to move on to structuring his new identity, to be freed from his chains, it was, in fact, necessary for Subhash to come home. His brother's funeral must have been set by the writer to highlight the contrast between the new Subhash and his community. The distance and "alienating from the essence" in Bhabha's words, is pointed out by Lahiri in the background of the family home to underline the maturation and identity development of her protagonist. Only when he is in India does he realize that he does not belong there anymore, and that India is no longer his home. It was necessary for him to prove to himself that what Holly had said before was not true, that eventually he would not come back. He needed to see for himself and discover what he really wanted. Thus, the hesitations he once had in America about his origins vanish. The anxiety of betraying his roots, the difficult decisions he wanted to make, as mentioned before, have now left their place to the comfort of figuring out where he belongs. Maalouf comments on the need of an immigrant to choose a side in order to fill himself with the notion of belonging:

The status of migrant itself is the first victim of a "tribal" notion of identity. If only one affiliation matters, if a choice absolutely to be made, a migrant finds himself split and torn, condemned to betray either his country of origin or his country of adoption. (2003: 38)

The guilty conscience of choosing one side and abandoning the other is now an obstacle for Subhash. This dilemma of an immigrant which Maalouf points out is one of the barriers in identity development. The "partial representation" remains partial as long as the colonial subject cannot choose sides when a choice is to be made. In Subhash's case, he needs a choice to be made as he wants to re-define his identity. Subhash's side should be his new home, America as he has come to a point of awareness that he is a stranger in India.

Subhash, meanwhile, directs his attention to Udayan's wife, Gauri. Because Udayan arranged his marriage without the family's consent, Gauri, who happens to be

pregnant now, is not welcomed, either, by the Mitra family. It is at this point that he, so to speak, “betrays” his country of origin by starting to voice his opinions and challenging his family. He gets more and more irritated by the way his parents treat Gauri. In fact, their behavior is caused by the Indian custom of mourning, as reflected in the novel. For instance, she is not allowed to wear ornamented saris or to eat fish. Yet there are personal reasons involved, as well. When Subhash decides to say something about this matter and when his mother simply defends herself by saying these are their customs, he defies his mother claiming “it’s demeaning”: “He was not used to quarreling with his mother. But a new energy flowed through him and he could not restrain himself” (Lahiri 2014: 134). This is the first time the family meets the new Subhash. His rejection of his culture becomes visible. When Subhash finds out his parents’ plans about taking Gauri’s baby after the birth and letting her go on her way, he decides to marry her and take her to the United States. Gauri does not put much thought into it before accepting his offer. She accepts it both for the sake of her child and her own opportunity of a higher education. Before long, they register their marriage and set off for Rhode Island which opens a new phase in the novel by introducing Gauri and her baby’s maturation and identity development in the United States.

2. Settling Identities

The first impression of Gauri, in a few days, is that America is “a place where no one was afraid to walk about” (Lahiri 2014: 148). Just like Subhash did when he first came to the United States, Gauri is discovering the country in baby steps, appreciating the smallest things, picturing a contrast in her head. Similar to Subhash when he first arrived, everything is fresh and exciting, regardless of their importance. While trying to adapt to her new home, based on the tone of the author, it can be claimed that, Gauri’s identity development would be faster than that of Subhash, that she is more open to embrace this new culture, and has less hesitations than Subhash had as she is less emotional about homeland. Subhash contributes to her adapting by supporting her as much as he can in their arranged marriage: “Subhash acknowledged her independence also. He left her with a few dollars, the telephone number to his department written on a slip of paper” (Lahiri 2014: 149). So, for the first time in her life, Gauri is allowed to be on her own, set free in a country she is foreign to with no one to stop or judge her, as Pius also states: “Now her [Gauri’s] impulsive and calculated decision to be Subhash’s wife, to flee to America with

him, and with that action also to flee from Tollygunge, to forget everything her life had been, she felt even more extreme” (2014: 106). This is not only because of Subhash, but also because of America itself. America also acknowledges her independence, her freedom as an individual and allows her to step out. In India, she was destined to be a mother and a wife; but in America, she is to accomplish more:

And yet, with Udayan gone, anything seemed possible. The ligaments that had held her life together were no longer there. Their absence made it possible to couple herself, however prematurely, however desperately, with Subhash. She’d wanted to leave Tollygunge. To forget everything her life had been. And he had handed her the possibility. (Lahiri 2014: 150)

With Udayan, Gauri was in a political chaos by following her husband’s ideological steps, dedicating her life to her marriage and his ideologies. It is as if Udayan’s political side and their marriage altogether was a symbol of Gauri’s confusion and hesitation. With Udayan’s death, the political struggle disappears from the novel as well as Gauri’s insecure condition and, as a result, as Sugata Samanta notes, she does not feel any responsibility or guilty conscience towards the community she has left (2014: 113). Thus, Gauri is becoming more and more independent. She starts discovering Rhode Island, the campus area and nearby places and going to the supermarket on her own when Subhash is at work (Lahiri 2014: 154-155). However soon, she finds out about the open philosophy classes at the college and starts sneaking in to listen. Eventually she starts taking notes in class, finds herself studying the reading lists announced for the students; yet she remains anonymous, and silent. One day, she cannot help herself and answers a question about Aristotle (Lahiri 2014: 157). This is her first interaction with the American society and the first time she stops being anonymous and starts turning into a visible person. This is the moment when Gauri becomes a part of the American society, interacting with it, as the professor acknowledges her by partially being impressed by her knowledge. As she is a philosophy graduate in India, this is her chance for higher education which she had long dreamed of and by doing this, she starts claiming her place in the American society, thereby building her new identity.

After this encouragement, Gauri starts to change. When she goes to the restroom after a class once, she starts observing young American ladies. When a girl approaches and

talks to Gauri, which is the second time she is acknowledged by the society in which she is new, she starts to figure out certain things about her wishes and wants: “By watching the girl walk away, Gauri felt ungainly. She began to want to look like the other women she noticed on the campus, like a woman Udayan had never seen” (Lahiri 2014: 159). Gauri is the ‘observer’ in the American society and soon she is to begin developing her ‘partial representation,’ in Bhabha’s words, by mimicking the American ‘Other,’ as Subhash had done before. By wanting to look like an American woman that Udayan had never seen, Gauri also challenges her previous home and national identity. She is in need and in the process of developing a new identity in America as well. One day, Subhash comes home to see every item of clothing that Gauri had were destroyed:

On the dressing table was a pair of scissors that he normally kept in the kitchen drawer, along with clumps of her hair. In one corner of the floor, all of her saris, and her petticoats, and blouses, were lying in ribbons and scraps of various shapes and sizes, as if an animal shredded the fabric with its teeth and claws. He opened her drawers and saw they were empty. She had destroyed everything. (Lahiri 2014: 166)

Gauri did not only destroy her clothes, but also her past and the person she had been so far. By wanting to become a new woman she, in fact, wants to be a woman anyone she knows back in her homeland has never seen. She is creating a gap between her current status and her Indian culture in order to become different from it. When Gauri comes home to find Subhash trying to figure out what had happened at home, he notices her hair is cut short and she is carrying shopping bags. When he asks her about her hair, her answer is: “I was tired of it” and her answer about her clothes is the same: “I was tired of those, too” (Lahiri 2014: 167). Gauri’s clothes simply signify her life span; she looked Indian, from head to toe, then her life became a chaos with her marriage, her husband’s death and the Mitras’ constraints over her, and finally she took the control of her life in her hands. She destroyed her items “as if an animal” had destroyed them as a signifier of how tired she grows of being the old Gauri and how she does not feel belong to her homeland culture. Now, she adapted her appearance to those of American women and thus started her process of “mimicry”, Bhabha explains the concept of mimicry: “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not*

quite” (2004: 122)⁵. Gauri, as the ‘subject of a difference’ in this context, feeling unrecognizable, wants to resemble a “recognizable Other” –which is the American women she mimics. She is reforming her style which would take her one step closer to being a part of the American society and a “recognizable Other.”

On a rainy summer night, Gauri gives birth to Udayan’s baby girl. The girl is named Bela and delivered to the hands of her uncle, whom he will acknowledge as her father. The last reminder of Gauri’s past is, thus, removed from her body. Their days go by as a ordinary family; worrying about their baby girl, watching her every motion, every reaction during sleepless nights just as any regular parent would do (Lahiri 2014: 170-176). When Bela is four, her relationship with her father is much stronger than that with her mother. While Gauri is busy with her dissertation, to which she gives priority over anything else in her life, Subhash is parenting Bela not less than a real father would. It is not only because Gauri is so busy that she does not pay much attention to Bela, she also gives her a cold shoulder, being almost displeased with her presence:

Rarely did Subhash see her smiling when she looked into Bela’s face. Rarely did he see Gauri kissing Bela spontaneously. Instead, from the beginning, it was as if she’d reversed their roles, as if Bela were a relative’s child and not her own. (Lahiri 2014: 189)

Now that Gauri moves on to building her own life, and like Subhash did once, to building her identity, Bela disturbs the unity she wants to have. Bela is something, someone she brought along to America. She is the only obstacle between Gauri and a fresh start and an identity. Bela belongs to Calcutta, to Udayan, to her past and is the consequence of her past decisions. As a result, granting a place to Bela in Gauri’s new life leaves Gauri in-between. That is why Gauri takes a step back from parenting; it is Subhash’s job now. He is her late husband’s brother, someone who was included in her life due to her first marriage and not by her choice. Both Bela and Subhash are remnants of the past. She also stops writing back to her brother Manash, who was the only supporter for both of her marriages. She even stops reading the letters from her brother:

There was seldom anything addressed to her. Only an occasional letter from Manash. She resisted reading them, given what they reminded

⁵ Emphasis original.

her of. Manash and Udayan, studying together in her grandparents' flat, and Udayan and Gauri, getting to know each other as a result. (Lahiri 2014: 181)

It is not sheer grief that Gauri suffers from when she is reminded of her late husband; it is the fact that Udayan is, a symbol of the constraints in her past life. She denies remembering her own brother because he is responsible for their getting together, thus Manash belongs to and should stay in the past. She clears the obstacles between her new Americanized self and her past Indian self. First of these obstacles was her appearance which she 'reformed.' The second obstacle was reminders of her homeland like her brother. She cut the connection between her and her roots by cutting the connection between herself and her brother. The third obstacle for Gauri is her daughter Bela which still remains to endanger her developing identity.

When the narration focuses back on Subhash, the reader is reminded that there are some things Subhash struggles with as well. He rejects facing his family after getting married to Gauri. He rejects that Gauri would never accept him as a real husband, that she would not give him more than casual intimacy and the right to father Bela. He also denies his parents of their granddaughter:

In almost five years he had not returned to Calcutta. Though his parents wrote now of wanting to meet Bela, Subhash told them that she was too young to make such a long journey, and that the pressures of his work were too great. (Lahiri 2014: 183)

Subhash does not want his parents to think he failed, that he made a mistake by choosing to shape his own fate and choosing his own wife by disregarding their opinion. Subhash does not want his Indian community to think his new identity and the path he has chosen for himself has failed:

At times, he feared that his one act of rebellion, marrying her [Gauri], had already failed [...] She's Udayan's wife, she'll never love you, his mother had told him, attempting to dissuade him. At the time he'd stood up to her, convinced it could be otherwise, and that he could make Gauri happy. He'd been determined to prove his mother wrong. (Lahiri 2014: 189)

As a matter of fact, Subhash did not put much thought into marrying Gauri and adopting his brother's child. It was a way of showing his parents that he could make his own decisions, and that he was free from the customs and the way of thinking of India, and that he did not believe they were being reasonable by sticking to these beliefs. Although it has been years that Subhash lived in the United States, growing and maturing and obtaining a new identity there, still he is not completely freed of his restraints of India. As mentioned before, in terms of culture and identity, it is not an instant act to forget the given homeland legacy and to replace it with another culture. Given that Subhash's decisions have led him to a point of questioning, his new identity is being shattered as well. The reason of this dilemma is that he built his identity on oppositions: India versus America, his mother's treatment of Gauri versus his attitude to Gauri, his decisions versus the Indian community's decisions and so on. Amin Maalouf discusses:

[A] person's feelings about the country he has left are never simple. If you have gone away, it is because there are things you have rejected – repression, insecurity, poverty, lack of opportunity. But this rejection is often accompanied by a sense of guilt. You are angry with yourself for abandoning loved ones, or the house you grew up in, or countless pleasant memories. And some ties linger on. (Maalouf 2003: 38)

The sense of guilt Maalouf speaks of may have shown itself in Subhash under the mask of rebellion and rejection. He wanted to show his family that his world was bigger than theirs and that he knew better. It was an act of rebellion, yet it is breaking apart now. Subhash's remedy is to have another child from Gauri; this time belonging to them only. However from the point of view of Gauri, Subhash's mother is already proven right:

She did not tell Subhash[...] what she already knew: that though she had become a wife a second time, becoming a mother again was the one thing in her life she was determined to prevent from happening. She slept with him because it had become more of an effort not to. She wanted to terminate the expectation she'd begun to sense from him. Also to extinguish Udayan's ghost. To smother what haunted her. (Lahiri 2014: 191)

Gauri has already moved on and she is not concerned about her daughter or her husband, but Subhash is not aware of this fact yet. Gauri is already starting a life for herself right in front of Subhash's and Bela's eyes. The only thing which keeps them together is a roof. In that house, Gauri's new life is blossoming without anyone noticing:

At first it was just the evenings she had class, but then it was every evening of the week that she spent at the library, away from them. Happy to spend time with Bela, Subhash let her go. And so she felt antagonized by a man who did nothing to antagonize her, and by Bela, who did not even know the meaning of the word. But her worst nemesis resided within her. She was not only ashamed of her feelings but also frightened that the final task Udayan had left her with, the long task of raising Bela, was not bringing any meaning to her life. In the beginning she'd told herself that it was like a thing misplaced: a favorite pen that would turn up a few weeks later...there was a growing numbness that inhabited her, that impaired her. (Lahiri 2014: 194-195)

While already being through with her family of a daughter and a pretended husband, Gauri finally finds the chance to take a bigger step towards her future life; she is suggested a doctoral program by her professor. She will take this chance to start a path for herself.

When Bela is six, Gauri starts reinventing her freedom, because, as Pius notes about her: "her inner turbulence never comes to an end" (Lahiri 2014: 110). Her inner turbulence continues as she has not found her true place in the American society yet, and she will not settle until she finds what she is looking for. Her re-invention of herself is not completed, in fact, it is just starting. Similar to what she did when she first came to America, she starts leaving the house for short periods, leaving Bela home on her own. Her need for being independent, completely free is becoming more and more visible. First she starts by leaving her home and going to the mailbox. Eventually, the trips begin to vary such as going to the supermarket or to the library and the hours become longer:

Time to speculate that, without Bela or Subhash, her life might be a different thing. It turned into a dare, a puzzle to solve, to keep herself sharp. A private race she felt compelled to run again and again,

convinced, if she stopped, that her ability to perform the feat would be lost. (Lahiri 2014: 207-208)

From this point on, Gauri starts mimicking an idealized identity she has created in her mind. This image she has created has several inspirations from American culture and customs of the college girls she observed in the restroom of the university. It is the combination of different personalities and cultural elements and is a Westernized image. In order to be more specific it is the image of a single woman with a job and the ability to support herself. She can live alone if she wants to do so. She wants to be an academic so that she can write and voice her opinions and share them with many people such as students and academics. This woman does not depend on traditional customs such as being prohibited from eating fish after her husband's death or not relying on her husband or brother. The woman she creates is very different from the woman she had been in India. This image can be claimed to be a "third space" for Gauri in which she would shape her identity. During an interview with Eleanor Byrne, Bhabha describes the concept of "the third space" as follows:

The third space is a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience, and the cultural representation of other peoples, times, languages, texts (qtd. in Byrne 2009: 150).

Through Bhabha's description of 'third space,' it can be argued that Gauri, in order to adapt herself to American society, is trying to reach out to another expression of a culture and language –which is American in this context. Her idealized image involves complete freedom in the first place. Her most primal need for her new identity is solitude, so she does not want Bela or Subhash. This is Gauri's turning point to consider how different her life would be without them. The only concern left in her mind is that she would not survive economically without Subhash as she is still a student without an income (Lahiri 2014: 210). The barrier between her and her new identity is the ability to support herself economically. Only then, she will be completely free.

Meanwhile Subhash is about to have another turning point as well. He finally decides to go to Calcutta, to have the long-delayed confrontation with his parents. Yet Subhash is not aware of his father's death. He takes Bela and sets off for his homeland.

Gauri does not go with them, unsurprisingly. Similar to Subhash's visit on his brother's death, he and Bela are not to face a warm welcome this time, either. Subhash's mother is not much herself after her husband's and her son's death (Lahiri 2014: 229-232). Yet she is conscious enough to realize that her granddaughter "is not made to survive" in India (Lahiri 2014: 232). There is a gap between both her son and her, and her granddaughter and her. When Subhash shows the photographs of their family back in the United States to his mother, this gap is highly visible:

There were pictures of the dining table, the fireplace, the view of the sundeck. All the things she knew. The large rocks forming a barrier behind theirs, that Bela sometimes climbed. Pictures of the front of the house...the little crescent-shaped beach in Jamestown where they liked to go on Sunday mornings, her [Bela's] father bringing donuts and coffee. (Lahiri 2014: 238)

The photos are symbolic and a deliberate choice by Lahiri in terms of visualizing the gap between Subhash's past life and current life. They show a gap as wide as the gap between an old generation Indian woman and a young Indian-American girl, Bela. The pictures signify the irreversible separation of Subhash from his roots. As for Bela, she is not even aware of her roots.

Bela celebrates her twelfth birthday at her grandmother's home (Lahiri 2014: 247). Her twelfth birthday is a turning point for Bela as it is the first time she meets her ancestors, gets to know her origins and also because it is the last birthday when she still has a mother. When Subhash and Bela return to Rhode Island, they find out Gauri has left them. She also has left a letter to Subhash telling him he can keep Bela: "In exchange for all you have done for me, I leave Bela to you" (Lahiri 2014: 253). Her daughter is an item of exchange, something to gift someone with for their effort. In fact, leaving Bela with Subhash is not her way of thanking; it is her way of escaping a burden that was left from her past. She informs Subhash that she accepted an offer made by a university in California. Two of her problems are removed off her path: Bela and her lack of income. Now, she is ready to be the person she long-yearned for. Her leaving is a turning point for the whole family: it will shape Bela's future identity and her own family of a daughter from an unknown father, Gauri's new life and her idealized identity, and the deconstruction of the life Subhash has been trying to keep together for years.

After Gauri leaves, both Bela and Subhash start a process of rebuilding themselves due to the new conditions. “Identity isn’t given once and for all: it is built up and changes throughout a person’s life” (Maalouf 2003: 25). As Maalouf underlines, identity is a process that is built up by a person’s choices and experiences and the circumstances that person is in. Bela starts to build a wall between her and Subhash. She is going to high school now. One day they receive a letter from India, informing them that Subhash’s mother had a stroke. Like Gauri, Bela does not want to go with her father to visit her grandmother: “She told him she wanted to stay in Rhode Island, to spend time with the friends from whom she’d soon be separated” (Lahiri 2014: 263). She does not even need to make a more polite excuse; she is distancing herself from her family and she does not hide it, similar to what her mother had done. In fact, what Subhash has been doing for years is not any different:

He’d defied her [his mother] by marrying Gauri; for years he’d avoided her, leading his life in a place she’d never seen...He’d walked away from Calcutta just as Gauri had walked away from Bela. And by now he had neglected it for too long (Lahiri 2014: 263-264)

Soon after Subhash arrives in Calcutta, his mother dies at the hospital. Subhash never has the opportunity to make things up to his mother. His neglect, rebellion and distance from her is now here with him to stay forever. Besides, he is losing Bela, too. The only thing he had and depended on in life is now declaring her own independence. She finished college with a major and a school of her own choice (Fine Arts department in the Midwest) and she already has her own plans:

But graduate school, which he hoped would be the next step, was of no interest to her. She told him she did not want to spend her life inside a university, researching things...It was the closest she came to rejecting how both he and Gauri lived. (Lahiri 2014: 265)

Due to his mother’s death and his regret of keeping himself away and Bela’s absence, Subhash has not much to hold on to. Besides, Bela is choosing a path he does not approve of: “She’d forged a rootless path, one which seemed precarious to him. One which excluded him. But, as with Gauri, he’d let her go” (Lahiri 2014: 269). Bela works at farms, here and there, and does not have a home or income. She stays at the farms for

which she works temporarily in exchange for food and shelter, visiting her father from time to time. During her visits she keeps the communication at a minimum and her days with her father limited (Lahiri 2014: 265-268). Bela's "rootless path" is also highly metaphorical as both her parents once chose to walk on similar paths. They chose to re-create themselves in a country in which no one shares their culture, traditions or way of living and, at the same time, rejecting their origins. They got to know people who share nothing in common with them, removed their roots and re-settled in a foreign land. Now their daughter is doing something similar. The difference between Bela and her parents now lies in having a completed identity. Bela is coming close to finishing her journey. She has a stable life now, does not need approval, and she has no hesitations or regrets. The same thing is not valid for Subhash or Gauri yet, as they still have questions in their minds about their choices and regrets they still dwell upon. Bela has reached that point of maturity way before her parents did by finding her identity and a place in the society. Her father knows and acknowledges this fact: "He learned to accept her for who she was, to embrace the turn she'd taken. At times Bela's second birth felt more miraculous than the first. It was a miracle to him that she had discovered meaning in her life" (Lahiri 2014: 269). It is referred to as a "second birth" by the writer so as to acknowledge Bela's completed maturity. What makes Bela's identity complete is the fact that she has a certain way of living with which she feels comfortable. Most importantly, she does not have the anxiety to become one thing from another; from Indian to American. She feels no need of transformation as her parents do. This is partly because she is a second generation immigrant. She was born into the American culture and did not need an adaptation process. However the other reason, which is more crucial in her development of an identity, is that she is so at peace with her choices and way of living that she fits in very easily. At this point, it can be claimed that, at least in this context, belonging is a matter of acceptance, being in peace. Adaptation is not enough to grant a place in any society or community, it should be accompanied with a sense of being pleased with the chosen path. Tomlinson explains this fact in the simplest way: "Cultures [...] are simply descriptions of *how people act* in communities" (2002: 96)⁶. In this sense, it can be claimed that Bela acts according to her identity from which its success stems. There is only one thing between her and the completion of her journey: the truth about her real father.

⁶ Emphasis original.

Gauri, after all those years, still lives alone in California. She has no intention of starting a family or being involved with someone. On the contrary, she avoids such things. She is still uneasy because of Bela's and Subhash's existence. She is in constant anxiety that she would run into them someday somehow or that her story about abandoning her daughter and husband would spread among the people she knows:

She used to fear that Bela or Subhash would materialize, sitting in a lecture hall, or walking into a meeting...She used to fear that they would find her on the sunny campus, on one of the sidewalks that led from one building to another...She had been given what she demanded, granted exactly the freedom she had sought...She entered a new dimension, a place where a fresh life was given to her. (Lahiri 2014: 275-277)

She is worried that her past would come to haunt her one day as it would shatter the identity she created for herself. Her identity is yet an illusion, because it lacks reality. Bela and Subhash have found their place, their identity; they have compromised with themselves and accepted several facts. They have started new paths by choosing their ways of living and they are modest in their own way. Although it was Gauri who took the sharpest turn and built a life which she always dreamed of having, her new life is a lie, it is only a mask, but it is her new identity now: a single woman who lives her life on the opportunities she herself created, and an academic and an Indian-American. Gauri created a life based on keeping secrets and rejecting her own child and husband. She seeks short periods of appreciation from others, others whom she would not have trouble erasing off of her life:

Her students admired her, were loyal. For three or four months they depended on her, they accompanied her, they grew fond of her, and then they went away. She came to miss the measured contact, once the class ended. (Lahiri 2014: 278)

She gives the attention, she once refused to give to her family, to her students willingly. She does so, because they pose no obligation to her and, besides, they are not connected to her past. They are not something she wants to escape from; on the contrary, the community she created around herself is by her own choice and they are a part of her new identity. This is why she is worried about getting in touch with her professor from Rhode Island,

who encouraged her to pursue a doctoral degree. She is afraid he might have somehow learned about her abandoning her daughter and her husband. If this were the case, “He would have lost his respect for her” (Lahiri 2014: 279).

Her role had changed at so many other points in the past. From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman. With the exception of losing Udayan, she had actively chosen to take these steps. She had married Subhash, she had abandoned Bela. She had generated alternative versions of herself...Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end. (Lahiri 2014: 287)

She kept creating alternative identities for herself and still continues to do so, because she still does not have the identity she wants to have. Her short casual relationship with her advisee Lorna is an example of one of her layers. Gauri carries on a relationship with her until Lorna’s dissertation is finished (Lahiri 2014: 286). Lorna changes her mind about her relationship with Gauri without a notice, terminating their relationship for no reason: “Gauri saw how the relationship shifted: how she reverted from lover to colleague, nothing more” (Lahiri 2014: 286-287). Perhaps for the first time in her life she becomes the abandoned one. Lorna did what Gauri had done to Subhash and Bela by leaving everything half-way through. It is perhaps the reason why she starts to think about Bela after her relationship with Lorna. She believes Bela’s silence, not having been able to hear from her, although it was her choice to keep away, is “the punishment for her crime” (Lahiri 2014: 289). Now being the refused one, Gauri understands how Bela might have felt when she left her and concludes that leaving Bela was a mistake:

She had never written to Bela. Never dared reach out, to reassure her. What reassurance was hers to give her? What she’d done could never be undone. Her silence, her absence, seemed decent in comparison. (Lahiri 2014: 289)

Reaching out to Bela is a mission incomplete in her life, given that everything else she craved she was able to obtain.

It is not only Gauri who has an unfinished business. Towards his late sixties, Subhash is feeling more and more closer to exposing the truth to Bela: “It was the greatest unfinished business of his life” (Lahiri 2014: 301). It is the last turning point to take before

completing his journey into maturity. Like Gauri, he had more than he expected he would find in America, a job, a house, a successful education and a place in the society:

Until he went to America he had not had his own room. He had belonged to his parents and to Udayan and they to him. That was all. Here he had been quietly successful, educating himself, finding engaging work, sending Bela to college. It had been enough, materially speaking. (Lahiri 2014: 301)

However, he is incomplete. His whole identity as a husband and a father is unreal, similar to Gauri's.

After Subhash learns that Bela is pregnant and refuses to reveal the father and let the father know about the baby, he is more worried than ever (Lahiri 2014: 316). The path Bela chose for her baby, denying her of its father, strengthens Subhash's urge to explain the truth about Udayan more: "But it wasn't the prospect of Bela being a single mother that upset him. It was because he was the model she was following; that he was an inspiration to her" (Lahiri 2014: 318). He is a false model, having been lying to her for all of her life, let alone not being her real father. Finally Subhash goes through the last and the most difficult challenge of his life: he tells Bela that he is not her real father (Lahiri 2014: 320). Although Bela reacts and disappears for a short while at first, she returns to Subhash, still calling him 'father.' Now that Subhash is free of his life-long burden and Bela has accepted this fact and forgave Subhash, both of them are more complete.

Now it is Gauri's turn to put things in order, to make peace with who she really is. To be able to do that, she must accept the role she refused once: being a mother. One day Gauri gets a letter from Subhash, telling her he demands a divorce (Lahiri 2014: 342). Although it is not a surprise nor does it upset her, she is a little bit down by the news. She decides to go to Rhode Island to deliver Subhash the papers she signed in person. She goes to Subhash's home. After putting much thought into what she is about to do in her car parked at Subhash's driveway, she decides to ring the bell. Yet it is Bela who answers the door instead of Subhash. On a Sunday morning, the family is together, including Subhash's love interest Elise. They are out to have breakfast together, leaving Bela and her now four-year-old daughter Meghna at home (Lahiri 2014: 369). Now it is Bela's time to hide some facts she finds unpleasant. When Gauri approaches little Meghna and attempts to introduce

herself, Bela intervenes and tells her that she is the aunt, a friend of Meghna's grandmother (Lahiri 2014: 371-372). She goes on to explain to Meghna: "I haven't seen her since your grandmother died" (Lahiri 2014: 372). Gauri is known to be dead to her own granddaughter. She wanted to walk away from Bela and Subhash's life completely, only to return when it is too late. Now, in her late sixties, standing in the living room of the house she once left, she finds out that she is indeed erased from every living memory in this house. When Meghna tells Gauri with a child's innocence that she will have a grandmother when her grandfather marries Elise, Gauri accepts the news as a failure:

She was burning with the failure of it. The effort of the journey, the presumptuous chance she'd taken, the foolish anticipation of coming back. The divorce was not to simplify but to enrich his life. Though she took up no space in it, he was still in a position to eradicate her. (Lahiri 2014: 373)

It can be concluded that the purpose of Gauri's return is to see her victory or perhaps to see that her family missed her and although they are heart-broken, they would accept her back. Seeing that her husband and daughter have started a life all over again, without her, not needing her, she feels even more incomplete and hollow now. They seem to have certain purposes, priorities in life to contribute to their growth and maturation, finalizing their process such as a marriage of affection or raising a child. Yet Gauri could not accomplish either of these. Her marriage was as false as her motherhood. This return is also a breaking point for Bela as she finally encounters her mother:

Bela had dreamed it so many times. This morning, seeing her mother, the force of her anger had crushed her. She'd never felt such violent emotion before. It twisted through the love she felt for her father, her daughter, her guarded fondness for Drew [Her recent partner]. Its destructive current uprooted those things, splintering and flinging them aside, shearing the leaves from the trees. (Lahiri 2014: 376)

Now that the moment she had been waiting for years has come, and that she can finally direct her oppressed anger to her mother, Bela completes her identity formation. She is a loving mother, opposite to her own mother, and she is now able to show Gauri this fact and

the model she has become to her own daughter while confronting her at the same time. She is completed, whereas Gauri is not.

It is for this reason Gauri feels the need to go back to Calcutta after forty years (Lahiri 2014: 377). She visits the Mitra family house, remembering Udayan. It is now clear that there is one more thing to disturb her conscience. There is something unchangeable, unlike facing her daughter or Subhash, something she cannot attempt to fix. Years ago, Udayan was killed by the police due to his taking part in a police officer's murder which also involved Gauri. It was Gauri who supplied the party members with the information about the officer, his off day, his route to take his child to school, whether he would be unarmed or not (Lahiri 2014: 383). She returns to Calcutta to face this secret:

Scarcely two years of her life, begun as a wife, concluded as a widow, an expectant mother. An accomplice in a crime...No one connected her to it. Still no one knew what she'd done. (Lahiri 2014: 383)

Similar to her previous confrontations, this one is a failure as well, not leading anywhere but to a dead end. Holding onto the rails of the balcony in the hotel she is staying at, her solution is to terminate her time in the world: "This was the place. This was the reason why she'd come. The purpose of her return was to take her leave" (Lahiri 2014: 386). Somehow, she cannot come to do it. Her incompleteness would have been completed by her suicide, yet, perhaps again because of the same incompleteness, she changes her mind about taking her own life. Upon returning to California, she receives a letter from Bela, telling her Meghna is curious about her. Although she would someday explain to Meghna who Gauri really is and what she did, she can spend time with her as the aunt for now.

1.3. Conclusion

Concluding with an open ending, perhaps it is only Gauri in the novel who cannot complete the journey of maturation as she could not overcome many things in her life. Her accomplishment is to be allowed to be around her granddaughter and being accepted by her daughter with her deficiencies: "the characters in *The Lowland* –with the qualified exception of Gauri –become fully human: driven not by one identifiable trait (like duty, anger or rebellion) but by a full spectrum of feelings, and capable, not only of rage and vexation but also of forgiveness and hope" (Pius 2014: 113). In general, the novel is not

only a story of coming of age of its different characters but also a story of coming to terms with the foreign land they live in, becoming a part of it and its culture, adapting themselves into an alien culture (Pius 2014: 103). To be able to fit into a society which had the possibility of rejecting them, the Indian characters had to give up some of their customs, traditions and culture throughout the novel. This condition should not be understood as assimilation immediately. As a consequence of living in a new culture, the characters have to adapt to and adopt some aspects of that culture in order to develop a new identity. The characters, as a result, mature both physically and in terms of identity. Pius comments on the general themes and plot of the novel:

The plot of the novel concerns, obligations and passions, parental love and abandonment, choices that we make and the blood and genetics that run in our blood, and the destiny that we cannot shake. The novel explores lives across India and America, in a span of 50 years, taking the narration style of flipping between two different geographical locations and the past and the present. (2014: 110)

As Pius notes, the characters' development is affected by their choices, but especially the notion of "abandonment" plays a very important role. Subhash's rebellion leading to marrying Gauri stems from the guilty conscience of his abandonment of his family in India which reflects itself as a rebellion and challenging of his family's opinions. The returns of Subhash to India indicate unsettled aspects of his life. Also Gauri's abandonment of her child leads to her great conflict, yet unlike Gauri, Subhash manages to come to a point of maturation in his mid-sixties. Bela, on the other hand, chooses a path for herself which is very different from that of her parents, yet she, too, like Subhash, is pleased with the point she arrives at her identity development. There is no indication that Bela feels restless about her way of living and the person she has become, similar to the final phase of Subhash's life. The form of *Bildungsroman* contributes to the identity development of the characters as the novel depicts a long life-span of its characters with the exception of Bela. Still, it can be concluded that Bela has finished her journey into maturation, so has Subhash by being settled in the American society. Gauri's identity is foreshadowed be completed after resolving her issues with her abandoned daughter, as the undertone of the ending implies.

CHAPTER II: *THE NAMESAKE*

What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

The Namesake, the 2003 novel by Jhumpa Lahiri, presents the story of an immigrant Indian family in the United States. The novel revolves around a young Indian couple, Ashima and Ashoke, and their two children, Gogol and Sonya. Throughout the novel, the family's process of adaptation to a new culture is highlighted. The family develops a new sense of cultural identity by adapting to American culture and customs and slowly being drawn away from their Indian origins. Similar to Lahiri's other novel *The Lowland*, the issues of dual identity, hybridity and the immigrant experience are themes central to the novel. Constructed as the *Bildungsroman*, the novel presents a now and then outlook at its characters' development under an alien culture. Some of the themes of the novel are listed by Liviu Augustin Chifane as follows: "hybridity," "marginalization," "cultural insularity," "identity crisis," "cultural displacement" and "cultural trauma" (9). The shifting between Indian and American culture is concluded by the maturation of the characters and their new identities in the American society.

2.1. Cultural Hybridity and the First and Second Generation Immigrants

Shortly after their marriage in India, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli decide to start their life in the United States. Born and raised in India, the couple sets off for the United States for the rest of their lives. The couple's first child, Gogol is born in America. Throughout the story, Lahiri emphasizes the identity development of the family in America through focusing mostly on Gogol who is a second generation immigrant. Gogol's identity development starts with his naming after his birth. According to the Indian customs, as represented in the novel, an elderly person in the family is supposed to name the baby. The name the elder gives is known as a "good name" and until the good name is given, the baby is allowed to have a temporary name which is called a "pet name." Although the

Gangulis wait for months for an envelope from India with the good name in it to arrive, it never arrives and the pet name Gogol remains. Being uneasy with the idea of their son not having a good name, Ashoke comes up with the name Nikhil which means “encompassing all” (Lahiri 2004:56). When Gogol starts kindergarten, having double names becomes a problem as the Ganguli family is highly uncomfortable that their son is not being called Nikhil. As it is implied in the book’s title as well, the central theme of the novel, identity development, begins with the theme of naming. Chifane discusses how the theme of naming serves in the novel:

Hybridity not only emphasizes the rupture, the dislocation, but also creates the image of a third space that bears new transcultural forms. From this point of view, naming becomes a central point in the novel and is seen as a metaphor of the effects that the process of dislocation and relocation have upon the subject. (2015: 9)

First of all, the concept of hybridity, for Bhabha, is a state of in-betweenness, by not belonging completely to a culture or a nation (2004: 159). In another description: “It is the ‘in-between’ space that carries the burden and meaning of culture” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007: 109). It is what Bhabha frequently refers to as “almost the same, but not quite” (2004: 122). It can simply be referred to as neither this nor that. This state of being in between cultures creates the essence of Gogol’s identity further in the novel. Naming is a metaphor to serve this in-between situation since, as it is also claimed by Chifane (9), it dislocates and relocates Gogol in terms of identity at many points in his life. Each time Gogol chooses and re-chooses by which name he wants to be referred (as he changes his mind about this several times in the novel), it usually comes after a socio-cultural crisis of how he wants to “locate” himself in the American society, be it a girlfriend issue or his unsuccessful marriage.

As a young child, Gogol’s first decision upon his own identity is to choose his own name. The Gangulis open up this concern of Gogol’s not using his Indian name to Gogol’s teacher as they are gradually becoming anxious with the fact that their son is putting down his name as Gogol on his drawings and exam papers at school. The teacher leaves the decision to Gogol himself. When he is asked whether he wishes to be referred to as Nikhil or Gogol by his teacher (Lahiri 2004: 59), he chooses his Russian name Gogol, thus, locating himself in the society. He goes against his parents’ wish to have an Indian name.

This is the first moment he denies his Indian identity and starts to build a new one. The first identity split he goes through as a child concludes with his decision of keeping a distance between himself and the Indian identity.

Although the Gangulis are worried about his name (his father is even afraid that the name Nikhil would be abbreviated into Nick), it is his mother Ashima who contributes to Gogol's future American identity: "He doesn't want to wear the new clothes his mother bought him from Sears, hanging on a knob of his dressers, or carry his Charlie Brown lunch box or board the yellow school bus that stops at the end of Pemberton Road" (Lahiri 2004: 56). With this vivid description, with his Charlie Brown lunch box, Gogol resembles more of an American child than an Indian child. Although Gogol seems to be objecting to what his mother is trying to do, it is only a rebellion to his family for the name crisis they had created earlier. His rebellion is against his family and not against the culture they are starting to become a part of. The scene is a basic description of a typical American child's school day and can be interpreted in two ways: firstly; Ashima has already started to be involved in the new culture she lives in and secondly way to interpret is; Ashima feels the anxiety of being accepted by the new culture that surrounds her and creates a set of illusions, such as American style clothes and objects, in order to minimize the differences between her family and the American society. This is her way of 'mimicking' the American culture. As mentioned before in Chapter 1, Bhabha explains mimicry as a desire to resemble the original, a reformation of the self to be "almost the same" with the authentic (2004: 122-123). America is the "authentic" in this context of a postcolonial reading of the novel, as these objects Lahiri chooses are symbolic in reflecting how the family's life starts to change. Products of a culture are not as simple as they seem because they offer a certain type of life style which is at the same time designed according to the culture of their producers. In his book *Cultural Imperialism*, John Tomlinson argues how objects and products create a sense of cultural domination:

The notion of dominated implied is a fairly straightforward one, resting on the idea that alien culture products are imposed on a culture. But we have already met the major problem with this notion. It is the fact that often people don't seem to object [...] they don't perceive them as 'imposition;' hence it is difficult to see where domination at a specifically cultural [...] level is occurring. (2002: 94)

What Ashima does is, as Tomlinson points out, to be “imposed” by an alien culture. A number of simple school items may not seem significant, yet they are the first signs of adopting a new culture and, thus, of a newly shaping identity. John Carlos Rowe also discusses the same topic in his article “Culture, US imperialism, and Globalization,” and underlines that: “Commodities are neither passive nor politically innocent; they are perpetually active in the specific kinds of desires they produce in consumers” (2004: 577). The “specific kind of desire” for the Gangulis’ case is a place in American society. So, it is Ashima who plants the first seeds of Gogol’s future identity. Gogol’s rebellion is not against the American items his mother chooses for him; it is, as many of the children do, against obeying his parents. He only objects to all these as a resistance to the name crisis created by his family. In fact, choosing his own name is not the first step to a new identity for Gogol but at least it is the first conscious one. Years before his choice about his identity, his family and their Indian community had already decided on his identity. When Gogol was six months old, his rice ceremony (*annaprasan*) took place. A group of Indian and American guests were gathered in the Ganguli house for a feast to bless the baby Ganguli. He was given a dollar bill, a pen, a plate of soil dug from the Cambridge campus. According to the item Gogol would touch, his future would be predicted. If, for instance, he were to choose the pen that would mean he would grow up to be a scholar. When Gogol pays attention to none of the items, one of the guests suggests Gogol should be handed the dollar bill: “An American boy must be rich!” he concludes (Lahiri 2004: 40). He was already determined to be an American by his environment and by the community close to his family regardless of his true origins. It gives the reader the feeling of determination, because the family’s friends seem to be expecting Gogol to become an American as understood from Lahiri’s narration of Gogol’s ceremony. The reaction of the guest: “an American boy must be rich!” marks the scene as it is a necessity for Gogol to Americanize. The only objection comes from his father Ashoke by passionately asking him to take the pen (Lahiri 2004: 40). The rest of the community, including the Gangulis’ Indian friends, seems to be fine with the idea of a six-months old Indian baby being simply accepted as a little American boy and locate him in the American culture as a part of it. It seems that the Indian community the Gangulis befriend has abandoned their Indian origins and started becoming Americanized which reflects their process of adopting a foreign culture in order to fit into the society they live in. Chifane describes the community the Gangulis are a part of in the novel:

The Gangulis, Indian Bengalis from Calcutta who go to the United States in the pursuit of a respectful life, face the effects of the spatial, cultural and emotional dislocation and try to reach “beyond” preserving their national and social identity. (2015: 16)

Both the Gangulis and their Bengali friends in America are gradually acquiring a place in the society they are living in. They are trying to “reach beyond” their national identity as preserving their Indian identity is not their concern. They do not try to stay bound to their Indian identity or national culture. They are choosing to live in accordance with the American customs. “Beyond” is Americanness for these Bengali. Beyond means belonging and merging with the rest of the society; it is to blend in. That is the reason why Gogol is handed a dollar bill and immediately declared American; for the community around the Gangulis, Gogol will and must blend in which Gogol will.

When Gogol’s sister Sonia is born, the whole Ganguli family takes another step further away from the Indian culture. Gradually, some things such as their short-lived resistance to maintain their bonds with India change. For instance, naming their daughter is not as big a matter as it was with Gogol. In fact, the Gangulis conclude that the good name and the pet name distinction is useless. What they would do is: “to do away with the pet name altogether, as many of their Bengali friends have already done” (Lahiri 2004: 62). This is one of the turning points for the family. After glorifying this matter for years, after putting this matter in the center of their lives from the beginning of Ashima’s pregnancy through Gogol’s school years all of a sudden they decide, like their other Indian friends in America, that it is an unnecessary custom, which takes one back to the point Chifane referred as “reaching beyond.” This decision is a significant break from the family’s origins and their Indian identity as this tradition is one of the very little things to stand for Indian culture in America for the Gangulis. It is one of the last bonds they have with their homeland, yet they tear it apart and take another step towards Americanizing themselves. The family’s adaptation process, thus, becomes more visible with this decision.

Sonia’s birth contributes to the identity split of the whole family gradually. While naming Gogol, Ashoke was highly worried that the Indian name he chose for his son Nikhil held the risk of being abbreviated into Nick, an American name. Yet with Sonia, this worry, too, disappears: “Though Sonali is the name on her birth certificate, the name she will carry officially through life, at home they begin to call her Sonu, then Sona, and

finally Sonia. Sonia makes her a citizen of the world. It's a Russian link to her brother, it's European, South American" (Lahiri 2004: 62). Another barrier between the American cultures and Indian culture is thereby abandoned by the family. The Ganguli family feels the need to be merged within a more civilized culture (obviously the family believes that European and American cultures are more civilized as they expressed this opinion while naming Sonia), to become more European, more American, again "reaching beyond." At Sonia's rice ceremony, their simple wish to be more American seems to be coming true. Sonia, unlike his brother, chooses the dollar bill among the items she is given and one of the guests of the family comments: "this one is the true American" (Lahiri 2004: 63). The forming of a new identity is not only observed in Sonia, but in the whole family:

And yet to a casual observer, the Gangulis, apart from the name on their mailbox, apart from the issues of *India Abroad* and *Sanguli Bichitra* that are delivered there, appear no different from their neighbors. Their garage, like every other, contains shovels and pruning shears and a sled. They purchase a barbeque for tandoori on the porch in summer. Each step, each acquisition, no matter how small, involves deliberation, consultation with Bengali friends. Was there a difference between a plastic rake and a metal one? Which was preferable, a live Christmas tree or an artificial one? They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house. For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Druga and Saraswati. (Lahiri 2004: 64)

It is not only the Ganguli children who grow up; the whole family grows into a different phase of culture. The word "deliberation" is very significant. What is deliberate is the choices the family makes. Their daily habits, objects they use, their concerns are shifting to those of another culture. Their life is being relocated in America. Each step involves deliberate mimicking of an alien culture. Though Ashima still wears her saris, a traditional Indian female outfit, her husband Ashoke moves onto ready-made American clothing from those tailor-made and starts to use pens instead of fountain pens (Lahiri 2004: 65). These

may seem like insignificant new habits, yet there is more than what is already visible in these changes. Ball pens and ready-made clothes are not all about being practical, but they are also small pieces and inventions of Western civilization, very different from Indian fountain pens. As mentioned before, Tomlinson argues that such products and practices of alien culture create an imposition and a cultural domination (2002: 94). Such items not only offer relatively cheaper and practical use, but also a Western kind of life style, a deliberation. The difference between a traditional, tailor-made Indian piece of clothing and American ready-made one is as sharp as the difference between a now and then vision of the Ganguli family. When the family goes shopping to the supermarket, Lahiri emphasizes the items the family buys: mayonnaise, tuna fish, hot dogs, roast beef and many more. Ashima even consents to prepare an American dish once a week “as a treat” because Ashoke insists (Lahiri 2004: 65). This happens to be very significant for Ashima who would only cook Indian dishes, in a way to stay connected with her roots, when she first came to America with a baby in her belly in 1968 as Thakur observes: “culinary practices are involved by the author, for the characters to maintain ties with their ‘homeland’[...] Subsequently, the kitchen space becomes the re-creation of her home in a foreign land” (2016: 4). Things seem to have changed in such a short period. Lahiri puts an effort to describe the family’s dinners, the meals Ashima prepared for her guests and how Ashima paid attention to serving Indian food earlier in the novel. Now Lahiri portrays Ashima as a woman buying American hot dogs for her family dinners, being worried about the driveway or how to decorate a Christmas tree properly. The family shifts from re-creating their Indian culture in a kitchen to creating a “third space” in which they construct a new sense of culture and identity. Bhabha describes “third space” in *The Location of Culture* as a cultural space in which the symbols of any culture are not fixed, unchangeable and national, on the contrary, third space is where more than one culture meet to be re-read and re-created (2004: 55). From this point of view, the family re-creates a culture for themselves which is not national or pre-given, certainly not fixed, but rather a mixture of their origins spiced with American customs and culture.

Still, in the novel, the family does not give in to American culture altogether. Despite the fact that Ashima and Ashoke, too, along with their children, slowly adopt a culture which was once unfamiliar, they are unsettled with the idea of their children conversing in English among themselves and that “their children sound just like

Americans” (Lahiri 2004: 65). They, then, decide to send Gogol to Bengali language and culture lessons when he is in third grade. The lessons take place every Saturday in the home of one of their Bengali friends. In these classes, Gogol and other Indian children like him learn their mother language, their culture and their history: “The children in the class study without interest, wishing they could be at ballet or softball practice instead” (Lahiri 2004: 66). One thing to be concluded from this statement is that a majority of Indian children in America in the novel are in similar situations. Preference for softball or ballet over their own culture stems from the lack of their family’s ability to raise their children surrounded by their own culture and traditions. Padma Ranganathan discusses, in her book *Namaste America: Indian Immigrants in an American Metropolis*, the need for a community education for Indian immigrants in America as follows:

There was a need to teach Indian children who were growing up in America and learning only American ways something about their own Indian heritage and religion. Indian parents were often alarmed at the prospect that their children would become completely alienated and consider their own parents “weird” if left to the influences of the outside world. (2000: 220)

In fact, it can be claimed that Gogol is already estranged from his parents in terms of culture and life style, although he is still a child. His preferences, his language and the environment he is growing up in are already much different from those of his parents. As Ranganathan discusses for Indian immigrants and their children, Gogol’s parents’ culture is already something somewhat “weird” or alien for him. Another reason why the children do not pay much attention to these classes is that teaching them their history and mother tongue is symbolic under the present conditions. After being surrounded by American culture and life style at home six days a week, listening to Indian history on Saturdays would not, as a consequence, make a difference. It is not enough when the children do not observe their culture in their habitats, so to speak. When they read their history from “handouts written in English” (Lahiri 2004: 66) the situation becomes even more ironic and the effort becomes more insufficient when one tries to learn about his/her own culture and language in a school-like environment instead of learning from their own families. The reason why these families create a community to teach their children their own culture could be stemming from the fear of becoming a minority. Instead of surrounding

themselves with their homeland culture, they prefer to send their children to a weekly course as if they send their children to piano lessons, because, otherwise, merging with the American culture and hybridizing would be out of question. It is a kind of an anxiety to be seen as outcasts in American society. Mukherjee explains this anxiety as follows: “if they [the immigrants] wanted to confine their interest exclusively to events in the homeland, and to communicate only in the mother tongue, they would be exiles or expatriates, not immigrants” (2011: 689). So, in a way, alienating their own culture and practicing it as if they were learning an alien culture makes the Indians of the novel part of the American society, by creating the illusion that Indian culture is only as familiar as it is to any American. The second thing to be concluded from this situation, or more likely a question to be asked, is why the Indian families depend on a friend to teach their children their language and culture instead of teaching their children at home themselves in the course of life. Could the reason be that the families themselves are already drawn apart from their own culture? Is it that they are adapting themselves to an unfamiliar culture faster than their children while forgetting their own? They have already lost the connection with their roots. As a result, their children learn their own history and culture through education as if they are learning a subject at school instead of experiencing it in the family home.

Gogol continues to grow up not minding his name or his origins. By the time he is ten years old, he has visited Calcutta several times. It is on one of these trips that his surname catches his attention. He figures out that Ganguli is a very wide spread surname in India and that he has a very big family when he sees three columns of phone numbers in a phone book under the name Ganguli (Lahiri 2004: 67). His father explains to him that Ganguli surname is a British legacy, “an anglicized way of pronouncing his real surname, Gangopadhyay” (Lahiri 2004: 67). With this brief and cursory information, the reader understands immediately that Westernization is not an unfamiliar concept for the family or for many Indians, as India was a British colony for many years. However his surname is not as popular in America. When the family is back from their trip to India, Gogol, discovers on their mailbox, that their family surname was tampered with by the neighborhood kids (Lahiri 2004: 67). The name Ganguli has been shortened to Gang and the word “green” is added by pencil following Gang. Are the immigrants, are those who are not of pure, white, European descent, a sort of gangrene for America? “The United States is more a free country than a tolerant society” as Esmond Wright suggests (1996:

18). The mailbox incident may be a severe criticism by Lahiri about Americans' behavior towards foreign residents. Although the Ganguli family, at this point in the novel, has embraced America and its culture, and almost feels at home, the underlining tone is that America is not ready to accept them that easily. "For by now he [Gogol] is aware, in stores, of cashiers smirking at his parents' accents, and of salesmen who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf" (Lahiri 2004: 68). If it is a criticism of discrimination, this is the first and the last time Lahiri openly emphasizes it in her novel. In fact, it is very hard to classify these lines of Lahiri as indicators of discrimination towards immigrants in America as she never expresses any events to be interpreted as racism or rejection throughout the novel. On the contrary, apart from this part, the novel gives the reader a sense that America is a welcoming society, ready to accept these immigrants as Americans, providing them with a third space to re-create their identity and granting them a social status along with career and economic opportunities. What Lahiri describes is an exception to the immigrant narrations which include discriminative and racist images that are usually encountered in immigrant writing. Natalie Friedman explains the description of immigrant experience and status in Lahiri novels as follows:

Lahiri's depictions of the elite class of Western-educated Indians and their children's relationship to both India and America dismantle the stereotype of brown-skinned immigrant families that are always outsiders to American culture and recasts them as cosmopolites, members of a shifting network of global travelers whose national loyalties are flexible. (2004: 112)

In this context, it is not very clear what Lahiri tries to underline by the incidence of the tampered mailbox, yet it gives the readers a sense of unacceptance and is reminiscent of Wright's comment about American society.

As Gogol grows up, he becomes indifferent to his parents. Becoming indifferent to one's parents at one's teenage years may seem like a typical behavior, but Gogol's situation stems from not only the gap between generations but also that between cultures. When he is fourteen years old, it is obvious that Gogol and his parents are not sharing a common culture anymore. The gap between Gogol and his parents might be wider than any

other teenage and his/her parents. For his fourteenth birthday, Ashoke decides to give Gogol Russian writer Nikolai Gogol's *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol*, thus reveals the reason of Gogol's naming to the reader. When Ashoke had a train accident in his younger years that caused his limp, he was holding a piece of paper from Nikolai Gogol's short story "The Overcoat." When he tried to move his hand among the wreck, the paper fell down and the rescuers were able to detect his location from the movement of the paper and were able to save him (Lahiri 2004: 18). As a legacy of that incident, and a token of gratitude as he believes it was the book that saved him from death, Ashoke named his baby boy Gogol. Yet, this story was never opened up to his son as it really was. What Gogol believes is that his father's limp was caused by a football match in his teenage years (Lahiri 2004: 74). Nevertheless Gogol does not seem to pay attention as he only indifferently accepts his gift and simply thanks his father (Lahiri 2004: 75). He does not even wonder why his father specifically chose that writer or that book, simply receiving it as a gift and not questioning what is behind the story and goes back to listening to his American records. Gogol, at this point, visibly starts to draw himself away from his family: "Lately he's been lazy, addressing his parents in English though they continue to speak to him in Bengali. Occasionally he wanders through the house with his running sneakers on" (Lahiri 2004: 75). So his resistance is not only towards his family as a teenager but also towards the culture and the identity they represent. What Chifane believes is that the birthday event serves for "stressing the continuous cultural ambivalence" (2004: 11). The term "ambivalence" is used in postcolonial studies to describe the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. It signifies colonized subjects' status between a complete mimicry of the colonizer and an unsuccessful copy of it (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007: 10). As Chifane notes, the cultural ambivalence the family goes through becomes more visible during Gogol's teenage years. This ambivalent status of the family is symbolized through Gogol by Lahiri. Gogol is neither Indian nor completely American. He comes from an Indian background and behaves like an American. His choice of music, his clothes, the English language he speaks both inside and outside the house makes him closer to American culture rather than Indian culture. Like his family who is still partly bound by Indian customs but at the same time adapting their daily lives to the American way of living, Gogol, too, is still in an in-between cultural representation which makes both the Ganguli family and Gogol ambivalent in terms of identity.

During the rest of his teenage years comes Gogol's second identity crisis. The first problem he had with his identity was to choose between his Indian and Russian name in kindergarten. This time, Gogol starts to look for a meaning in his name, thus in his identity. First of all, he hates to answer questions about the meaning of his name:

He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything 'in Indian.'

He hates having to wear a nametag on his sweater at Model United Nations Day at school. He even hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. (Lahiri 2004: 76)

He hates his name because his name, as the most symbolic part of one's existence, does not supply him with an identity, a sense of being someone particular or unique. It is not American, not Indian; it does not belong to either of the two cultures he can acknowledge and associate himself with, but it is Russian, a part of a completely strange, unfamiliar culture. Marques comments: "my hypothesis is that naming in *The Namesake* symbolizes the feeling of the hybrid subject who lives between two worlds, an imagined one and a 'concrete' one which forces the characters to deal with their migrant heritage" (qtd. in Chifane 2015: 10). From the perspective of Marques, Gogol's name, along with his developing American identity, is his imagined world which conflicts with his Indian heritage; the feeling his name gives to Gogol is something unfamiliar, unfinished and unreal in the first place. From the crisis he is having with his name, it can be stated that he is craving a self definition in order to end his in-between feeling. He has the need to develop an identity for himself only, a definition that only he himself can shape, not his family or his origins. He starts looking for alternatives to his name, thus to his existence. One of his main concerns about his name is to shorten it:

At times he wishes he could disguise it, shorten it somehow, the way the other Indian boy in his school, Jayadev, had gotten people to call him Jay. But Gogol, already short and catchy, resists mutation. Other boys his age have begun to court girls already, asking them to go to the movies or the pizza parlor, but he cannot imagine saying, "Hi, it's Gogol" under potentially romantic circumstances. He cannot imagine this at all. (Lahiri 2004: 76)

In this sense, Gogol wants this identity to be an American one. He is not only worried that his name sounds unfamiliar or strange but he is also worried that his name is not convenient to be Americanized. Like his friend in school, he wants everyone to know him by an American abbreviation for a name. He does not feel comfortable enough to approach a girl because he does not know who he is. He is not confident and he cannot find the courage to show his face in society and among those who are the same age as he is. So, his problem is not only his name being Russian or obscure in meaning, but that it is not American: "Leo or Anton, he could have lived with. Alexander, shortened to Alex, he would have greatly preferred. But Gogol sounds ludicrous to his ears, lacking dignity or gravity" (Lahiri 2004: 76). His main concern is to 'relocate' himself, as Chifane mentioned before. By choosing to be called Gogol, he 'located' himself earlier. However, that location is not enough anymore as he grows up and realizes his name Gogol still does not make him a representative of American culture. Thus, he needs relocation. While his obsession about his name increases, Gogol finally faces his father about his name. His father tells him that it will make sense to him one day (still keeping the real story behind his naming a secret), yet Gogol finds out that the author himself is not named Gogol but his first name is Nikolai, a fact that he had never paid attention to before. This fact, somehow, makes him even more furious although now he knows that "no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake" (Lahiri 2004: 78). At this point, it becomes more overt that being unique, having a unique name to symbolize his identity, to symbolize who he is, is not enough for Gogol. What he wants is to have an American identity. Perhaps, being unique is what makes him feel uneasy at this point. His being unique by the name, gives him a sense of loneliness as he feels detached from the society he lives in. Being neither Russian, nor American, nor Indian, his ambivalent situation continues to dislocate him.

When the narration focuses back on the Ganguli family, their visits to India continue throughout the years. During one of these visits, the family decides to see different parts of India. Afterwards, they return to Calcutta and Gogol and Sonia get ill. "It is the air, the wind, their relatives casually remark; they were not made to survive in a poor country, they say" (Lahiri 2004: 86). Although this is not the first time they have visited India, the relatives consider the Ganguli children, as if they are somewhat exotic beings, not accustomed to an environment that they originally come from and that they belong to a

more prosperous country such as the United States. Their sense of Americanness is becoming so obvious, so dominant to their identity, so absorbed that even their own relatives are convinced at every visit that the children are not of their roots, not Indian, but they are strangers from an unfamiliar country. This experience the family goes through is very similar to what Subhash experiences when he goes back to India for his brother's funeral in *The Lowland*. He is, too, seen as a foreigner, a part of an alien culture in his family home and by his community. As claimed before, this is what Bhabha explains as: "the observer becomes the observed and "partial" representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence" (2004: 127)⁷. Similar to Subhash, the Ganguli family's 'partial' representation of American culture (it is partial as it is only a mimicry of American culture), makes them the "observed" as Bhabha would claim, in their own homeland. They stand as outsiders who slightly moved away from their essence. At the end of every visit, each time they go back home to America, Ashima and Ashoke feel a slight longing for their homeland and feel "disconnected from their lives" in the United States (Lahiri 2004: 87). Somehow, their yearning does not last for long and they adapt back to their new culture, new life and new home easily. From this point on, it is not very convenient to refer to America as a 'new home' since for the Gangulis, it is their home now:

But by the end of the week, after his mother's friends come to admire her new gold and saris, after the eight suitcases have been aired out on the sun deck and put away, after the chanachur is poured into Tupperware and the smuggled mangoes eaten for breakfast with cereal and tea, it's as if they've never been gone. (Lahiri 2004: 87)

Towards the end of his teenage years, while still being in denial about his name and his identity, Gogol takes a surprising step. At a party, Gogol meets a girl. Finally having the chance to talk to her, he is having second thoughts about how to introduce himself.

He could introduce himself as Colin or Jason or Marc, as anybody at all, and their conversation could continue, and she would never know or care. There were a million names to choose from. But then he realizes there's no need to lie. Not technically. He remembers the other name that had

⁷ Emphasis original.

once been chosen for him, the one that should have been. (Lahiri 2004: 96)

All of a sudden, Gogol introduces himself as Nikhil. Up to this point, Gogol has always had an introvert attitude towards girls, having difficulty talking to them or dating and he always believed he had had this problem because of his absurd name. After this breaking point, Gogol is able to kiss this girl to whom he, in a way, opens up his true identity, by relocating himself. When his friends are surprised that he could actually do this, Gogol tells himself silently that it was not him who kissed the girl: “Gogol had had nothing to do with it” (Lahiri 2004: 96). Heinze discusses Gogol’s decision to introduce himself as Nikhil and his confusions of identity as follows:

Here, issues of personal and cultural identity are linked: Gogol becomes a double, he has a doppelganger, and with it two different histories, identities, affiliations, affections [...] By now it should be obvious that the protagonist’s “real” personal identity, like his cultural identity, remains ultimately indefinable because there is no such thing as a “real,” “original” identity. The notion of an original name and identity is just that. That he has not one name but several, forming a complex interplay of history, stories and personal and cultural identities, makes sense. (2007: 196-197)

He may have been an American person with an Indian origin, but at least both of the identities, American and Indian, have a sense of familiarity which forms a safe zone in the center of his confusion. Being Gogol, on the other hand, is something he is completely irrelevant to. As a consequence, he takes refuge in being Nikhil to ease his uncertainty about who he is. As his American identity is not yet completed, he chooses a complete one to provide himself with the sense of unity he needed at that moment.

In the summer of 1986, Gogol makes another radical decision: changing his name to Nikhil legally. After all, “it was a right belonging to every American citizen” (Lahiri 2004: 99). At first, his family opposes his decision, yet after a small discussion about Gogol’s being uncomfortable with his name, his father concludes that it is acceptable as “in America everything is possible” (Lahiri 2004: 100). Although his parents do not suspect Gogol of turning into an American teenager (Lahiri 2004: 93), now as he grows up,

as his character is being shaped and built, as he moves forward in his journey of maturation, they begin to accept some facts about their son. As a result, they do not object to some of his choices or intervene. They, too, are aware of the fact that Gogol is not an Indian child by his socio-cultural conditions. Gogol is not like his father Ashoke, but instead he is an American born and raised child. Naturally, Gogol's understanding of life and his choices are different from those of his parents. As Maalouf suggests:

Imagine an infant removed immediately from its place of birth and set down in a different environment. Then compare the various "identities" the child might acquire in its new context, the battles it would now have to fight and those it would be spared. Needless to say, the child would have no recollection of his original religion, or of his country or language. (2003: 24)

Maalouf's depiction of a new-born immigrant lays out the most appropriate frame for Gogol's experience. It is only natural for Gogol to declare his independence, making his own decisions about legally changing his name, because as his father also says, Gogol lives in a country which supplies him with such rights. If he were in India, maybe it would be out of the question, or maybe it would be a shame in his community to change a given family name. However, he is an American citizen now; his community and his country, allow him to do it. Here in this part of the novel, Gogol's inevitable Americanization is recognized by his family. By not objecting to his decision, his father Ashoke acknowledges that Gogol is an American individual in the making.

After opening up this decision to his family, Gogol applies to court. His purpose in changing his name is about acceptance from the society he lives in. So, this decision Gogol makes about using his original name should not be immediately taken as he accepts his Indian roots. Gogol only frees himself from an obstacle, as he believes it is, by removing the obscurity that his name brings to him, thus, to his identity. He has not made peace with his true self yet as "there is only one complication: he doesn't feel Nikhil" (Lahiri 2004: 105). His journey has not yet been completed, as Heinze remarks: "Gogol consciously chooses a name and identity from his 'ethnic' background, but does not have absolute control over it" (2007: 197). He chooses his Indian name, yet he does not know what it means. He has not returned to his roots; he has removed an obscurity.

When Gogol starts college, his major is not decided. His parents are anxious as choosing a profession is to determine his future and status in America:

Like the rest of their Bengali friends, his parents expect him to be, if not an engineer, then a doctor, a lawyer, an economist at the very least.

These were the fields that brought them to America, his father repeatedly reminds him, the professions that have earned them security and respect.

(Lahiri 2004: 105)

It is only fair for someone who feels he does not belong to gain respect and acceptance through having a certain, definable social status. The most solid way of gaining such a stance would be having a title through a respectable job and education. Edward Said underlines this situation in his book *Orientalism*:

Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distance. The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a fact which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do [...] To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. (2003: 32)

As Said remarks “knowledge” –in this case, the knowledge of a respectable profession, an academic training – means being involved, taking part in the “foreign.” Lahiri highlights the concern of an immigrant, a very familiar theme in an immigrant’s story of acceptance through Gogol’s choice of career. Mukherjee explains this need of approval through a certain social status in the simplest way: “The flip side is that hard work and education will erase the deficit within a generation [of immigrants]” (2011: 687). If there is anywhere on earth where hard work is respected and rewarded, it must be the United States of America. However Gogol obviously does not share his parents’ concern: “But now that he is Nikhil it’s easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas” (Lahiri 2004: 105). It is easier to set his own future and plans about himself, more freely than before as now he disconnected one of the ties between himself and his family by changing his name. In addition to this, Gogol does not seem to believe he needs a certain profession to be respected or approved. He believes it is gained through becoming a part of the society, blending in with the American culture which is what he is trying to do. It can be

understood from this conflict between the Gangulis and Gogol that his parents still see themselves as immigrants and in danger of becoming outcasts any moment unless they gain respect through social status. Nonetheless, Gogol seems to give importance to the notion of belonging by adaptation. The Gangulis do not believe belonging is an option. What they believe is to be of use in the society (by becoming a successful doctor or an engineer) in order to be welcomed. Yet Gogol does not agree with this.

Perhaps the most significant breaking point for Gogol is meeting Ruth at college. As an American girl, Ruth stands for many things Gogol does not have in his family and himself. Ruth is one of the characters in the novel to affect and redirect Gogol's identity development. Gogol's contradictions start with Ruth's possible rejection by his family:

As much as he longs to see her, he cannot picture her at the kitchen table on Pemberton Road, in her jeans and her bulky sweater, politely eating his mother's food. He cannot imagine being with her in the house where he is still Gogol. (Lahiri 2004: 115)

In some ways, the Gangulis are still traditional and bound by their values, but Gogol is not. As much as Ashoke and Ashima live in relative accordance with the American society, the idea of their son's marriage with an American girl is still an unacceptable situation for them: "They've even gone so far as to point out examples in Bengali men they know who've married Americans; marriages that have ended up in divorce" (Lahiri 2004: 117). Although they embrace American culture, their American friends, their American opportunities, they still cannot accept and embrace an American into their family and community. The idea of considering an American as one of their own does not make sense as buying a Charlie Brown lunch box for their children. Yet these warnings and judgements his parents lay out do not make much sense to Gogol: "He pities his parents when they speak to him this way, for having no experience of being young and in love" (Lahiri 2004: 117). Their judgements only drive Gogol further away from them, making him feel further closer to the American way of living as their judgement underlines the difference between Gogol and themselves. As a result, it is now Gogol who judges his parents, his community and his culture, because now that Gogol feels like he belongs to another society, he observes his family and their opinions as if they are of an alien culture.

Coming over for a panel about Indian novels in English, Gogol is asked by her mother to greet his cousin, Amit, from India. He is completely indifferent both to the subject and to his cousin. Then, one of the sociologists on the panel claims that the *ABCDs* are unable to answer where they are from. This term puzzles Gogol:

Gogol has never heard the term *ABCD*. He eventually gathers that it stands for ‘American-born confused deshi.’ In other words, him. He learns that the C could also stand for ‘conflicted.’ He knows that *deshi*, a generic word for ‘countryman’ means ‘Indian’ ... But Gogol never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India. (Lahiri 2004: 118)

Not only does he not consider himself Indian or desh, he considers himself an American, only observing his homeland from a distance, through world maps and touristic visits. India simply is India, an exotic far away land for Gogol, it is not home. His people are not his, India’s past is not his past and its culture has nothing in common with his way of living. Gogol makes an effort to exclude himself from his community:

He has no ABCD friends at college. He avoids them, for they remind him too much of the way his parents choose to live, befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of a past they happen to share. “Gogol, why aren’t you a member of the Indian association here?” Amit asks later when they go for a drink at the Anchor. “I just don’t have time,” Gogol says, not telling his well-meaning cousin that he can think of no greater hypocrisy than joining an organization that willingly celebrates occasions his parents forced him throughout his childhood and adolescence, to attend. (Lahiri 2004: 119)

To this end, it can be concluded that Gogol visibly builds a barrier between himself and his Indian roots which will become more visible later in the novel.

2.2. Confronting the “Other” and Other Confrontations

Gogol moves to New York after he graduates from Columbia University as an architect. As he moves on in life, his ideas and point of view are shaped in accordance. His

decision of distancing himself from his family and roots continues; his opinions are only sharper and unalterable now:

He didn't want to attend his father's alma mater, and live in an apartment in Central Square as his parents once had, revisit the streets about which his parents nostalgically. He didn't want to go home on the weekends, to go with them to pujos and Bengali parties, to remain unquestionably in their world. He prefers New York, a place which his parents do not know well, whose beauty they are blind to, which they fear. (Lahiri 2004: 126)

Gogol makes his own choice both about his profession and about where to live. Moving to New York is one of the major events to affect his life as it is the clearest and sharpest decision he has made, the most 'not open to discussion' decision after changing his name. He has, in his own way, openly declared that he is not like his parents. It is New York which brings Maxine Ratliff and Gogol together, most importantly. Maxine is another American girl with whom Gogol starts an emotional relationship with who will change Gogol's stance in American society and his identity deeply. Very similar to his previous experience, Maxine symbolizes perhaps everything Gogol yearns for. Tamara Bhalla underlines the role that Maxine plays in Gogol's identity formation:

As the main interracial romance in the novel, Gogol and Maxine's relationship raises questions about the interplay of class privilege, assimilative desires for whiteness, and national belonging for South Asian Americans [...] Gogol in his quest for a more advantageous class position in America, she becomes an object against which Gogol defines himself. (2012: 113)

Maxine comes from a good family. Maxine and her family are the living symbols of the elite class in the American society, perhaps much more than Gogol's previous love interest Ruth ever was. They are very different from his own family in every way and that is what drives Gogol to Maxine more than Maxine's attractiveness does. Maxine and her family, with all the privileges they have, enjoy the promised land of the United States and its opportunities, which is something an immigrant wishes and immigrates for. The contrast between the two families is significant:

The Ratliffs are vociferous at the table, opinionated about things his own parents are indifferent to: movies, exhibits at museums, good restaurants, the design of everyday things. They speak of New York, of stores and neighborhoods and buildings they either despise or love, with an intimacy and ease that make Gogol feel as if he barely knows the city. (Lahiri 2004: 133)

Friedman also comments on the relationship and the contrast between the Ratliffs and the Gangulis:

Gogol desires Maxine's mode of living, her utensils, and her food, and his curiosity verges on the voyeuristic, while the narrator's descriptions verge on the orgiastic. Besides sexual pleasure with Maxine, he is seeking a fantasy of upper-middle-class American life. In this fantastic realm, Gogol "learns" to embrace Maxine's customs; the repetition of the word *learns* points to his desire to adopt Maxine's rituals, to make them his own. (2008: 121)⁸

With the generous nature of the Ratliffs, their beautiful house and manners, their Western style of daily conversations about art and, more importantly, with their acceptance of him, Gogol grows closer to his girlfriend's family. It needs to be pointed out that Maxine poses Gogol's most important turning point. She and her family are a very significant element in Gogol's maturation and identity development. The Ratliffs, in sharp contrast with the Gangulis as their "Other," as Bhabha would suggest underline the most crucial identity split that Gogol has as he takes a very sharp turn to American culture with Ratliffs. Bhabha's words "Oriental stereotype –is confronted with its difference, its "Other" (2004: 66) would be an appropriate definition to describe Gogol's situation. As the "Oriental stereotype," so to speak, Gogol confronts his "Other," his desired image in the society, the source of his mimicry.

Gogol practically lives in the Ratliff house now. He has a key, he stays for the nights, the family has dinners joyfully together and then they give him and their daughter the privacy they need. Gogol is in his desired place in the society through Maxine. He, metaphorically, re-locates himself once again:

⁸ Emphasis original.

Quickly, simultaneously, he falls in love with Maxine, the house, and Gerald and Lydia's manner of living, for to know her and love her is to know and love all of these things. He loves the mess that surrounds Maxine, her hundreds of things always covering her floor and her bedside table, her habit, when they are alone on the fifth floor, of not shutting the door when she goes to bathroom... He learns to love the food she and her parents eat, the polenta and risotto, the bouillabaisse and osso buco, the meat baked in parchment paper... He learns that one does not grate Parmesan cheese over pasta dishes containing seafood. He learns not to put wooden spoons in the dishwasher... He learns to anticipate everything, the sound of a cork emerging from a fresh bottle of wine. (Lahiri 2004: 137)

In short, Gogol learns how to be an American. This Americanness is more real than the Americanness he learnt during the Ganguli family's Thanksgiving celebrations, more than the Charlie Brown lunch box he had or his clothes from Sears. This time, he does not only mimic the culture, but he is immersed in it. He respects and appreciates Maxine's family not only for the reasons listed above, but also for their acceptance of him. Maxine's parents accept him into their family, without questioning, without a direct and visible effort to change him or trying to shape him, as his family tries to do. Gogol changes and re-shapes himself willingly towards their way of living. In addition to his respect for the Ratliff family, he respects Maxine as she has "the gift of accepting her life" (Lahiri 2004: 138). She never wishes to be someone, something else as Gogol has for years. She respects and embraces her parents in a way Gogol never could which makes Gogol admire her more and more. Maxine never has the feeling of obligation, pressure, and "there is none of the exasperation he feels with his own parents" (Lahiri 2004: 138). Gogol feels at home and surrounded by family around the Ratliffs. Everything they do, Gogol observes and admires. A constant comparison between the Ratliffs and the Gangulis gradually reveals Gogol's long desired dreams. Maxine's parents slowly turn into Gogol's role models, something his own family was never able to do:

But their lives bear no resemblance to that of Gerald and Lydia: expensive pieces of jewelry presented on Lydia's birthday, flowers brought home for no reason at all, the two of them kissing openly, going

for walks through the city, or to dinner, just as Gogol and Maxine do.
(Lahiri 2004: 138)

Bhalla also comments on the relationship between Gogol and the Ratliffs:

Lahiri draws an ambivalent, somewhat critical portrait of Maxine by cataloguing and lingering over her materialistic lifestyle. Maxine is an affluent white American, a New Yorker by birth, and privileged in every sense. *She functions as a representative of Western high culture and international sophistication.*⁹ Detailed lists of what Maxine instructs Gogol to eat, drink, and buy abound, implicitly commenting on their class difference. Maxine becomes a cultural usher, teaching Gogol how to affect the highbrow tastes that would enable him to realize the cultural capital of his Ivy-League education and gain proximity to the advantages of whiteness. (2012: 113)

Bhalla's words are significant as they summarize what Maxine poses for Gogol. In short, Maxine stands for being Westernized, privileged and American. The concepts of culture, life style and class are very different and more important for Gogol than what his father suggests. When Ashoke gives importance to certain professions for high status in society, Gogol desires these concepts which Maxine and her family introduced to him to grant his place in society.

While becoming a family with the Ratliffs, Gogol ignores his own parents. He avoids going home at the weekends and his mother even calls him at the Ratliff house instead of at his own apartment (Lahiri 2004: 143). One day, Gogol is invited to spend the summer in the family cottage in New Hampshire where he will also meet Maxine's grandparents. On the way to New Hampshire, Gogol dutifully and unwillingly visits his long-avoided parents with Maxine. "He feels no excitement" (Lahiri 2004: 146) and he is not anxious at all as he was with Ruth when he thought of introducing her to his family, because he is, in his own mind, free from his family and their judgements and demands now. After he moved to New York and especially after he met Maxine and observed her family, he already decided what he wants to be and his family no longer concerns him. He wants to be where he is with the Ratliffs and he wants to live like them. He does not need

⁹ Emphasis mine.

his parents' approval in his new life. The visit takes place calmly, nothing extraordinary happens, because Gogol cuts it very short and sets for New Hampshire, as "it is a relief to be back in her world" (Lahiri 2004: 150). He enjoys his days at the cottage with Maxine's extended family, trying to imagine how his family would fit into such an environment: "They would have felt lonely in this setting, remarking that they were only Indians" (Lahiri 2004: 155).

Gogol spends his twenty-seventh birthday with Maxine's family at the cottage. He is being introduced to the family's distinguished guests, proudly, as an architect, by Maxine's father (Lahiri 2004: 157). A question is brought up by one of the guests asking the age at which Gogol came to America. Gogol's answer is remarkable: "I am from Boston" (Lahiri 2004: 157). The conversation slowly comes to an awkward point. The guest's comment about one of her friends going to India and coming back enviously thin due to sicknesses caused by a variety of bacteria annoys Gogol. She is presumptuous when she turns to Gogol and comments that he should not have such a problem. She assumes that being from a poor country originally, he must be used to poor conditions. Gogol's defense is declaring that he and his family get shots should they ever go to India (Lahiri 2004: 157). His defense is to emphasize that he, too, is a stranger to India by remarking that he goes to India occasionally and gets vaccinated before going. Gogol justifies his identity by suggesting that India is his alien culture, and not America, and tries to prove himself worthy of Maxine, her family and their community. Frantz Fanon discusses the need of a non-white individual to belong to the "white community" (in Gogol's case, American society) through the frame of relationships in his book *Black Skins White Masks*. Fanon believes that coupling of a white woman and a man of a non-white community signifies this man's need to be seen as part of the white community, and he notes:

I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*. Now [...] who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man.
(1986: 63)¹⁰

He elaborates his discussion by analyzing the 1947 novel, *Un Homme Pareil Aux Autres*, by French journalist and author Rene Maran, which portrays the emotional relationship

¹⁰ Emphasis original.

between a white woman and a black man as part of its plot. Fanon dwells upon the black protagonist's seeking of advice from his white French friend about the white French woman he wants to propose to. The French friend sends a letter to the protagonist to encourage him:

In fact you are like us –you are “us” [French]. Your thoughts are ours. You behave as we behave, as we would behave. You think of yourself – others think of you –as Negro? [...] Since European men only love European women, you can hardly marry anyone but a woman of the country where you have always lived, a woman of our good old France, your real and only country. (qtd. in Fanon 1986: 68)

Fanon notes: “The white man agrees to give his sister to the black –but on one condition: You have nothing in common with real Negroes. You are not black, you are “extremely brown” (1986: 69). In the framework of *The Namesake*, when Maxine's mother comes to Gogol's rescue about her guests questioning him in the novel by saying: “Pamela, Nick is American” (Lahiri 2004: 157), Gogol's acceptance by the Ratliffs seems to be occurring on the condition of his being an American. The white American family, the Ratliffs, gives their consent to Gogol to be with their daughter in exchange for Gogol's having nothing in common with the Indian community. For them, he is Nick, not Gogol and he is American, not Indian. A similar process takes place in Lahiri's other novel, *The Lowland*, where the protagonist Subhash seeks acceptance from American society by mimicking his white American girlfriend Holly's husband and trying to underline that he feels more American than Indian. Now, Gogol does not only become a part of a family and has a status he has always dreamt of, but he is now also considered an American by Americans; he now has the American name he has always longed for, Nick. As Friedman explains,

Gogol is not the brown-skinned exotic, but rather bland and naïve suburbanite who is suddenly thrust into the enticing land of the wealthy urbanite. He does not consider his attraction to a Caucasian woman [Maxine] problematic. Rather, class trumps race or ethnicity in this section of the book; instead of identifying as an ethnic minority who sexually desires the representative of the Western dominant culture,

Gogol simply identifies as an American of slightly lesser means who is thoroughly enjoying his “vacation” with Maxine. (2008: 120)

As Friedman points out, his relationship with Maxine is a “vacation,” a brief and temporary settlement in his journey where he discovers and reveals parts of his in-progress identity. His relationship settles one of the most crucial problems about his identity: his name. Finally, his name, too, can be abbreviated into that of an American. Again, he is relocated in the society. With this comment that declares him an American named Nick, Gogol gets closer to the social position he yearns for. He is socially accepted by a culture he has been trying to be a part of and given a name as a symbol. With this step, he places another piece in his puzzle of self-maturation: he grants himself a small piece of the big American pie. Bhabha believes “the social instinct is the progressive destiny of human nature” (2004: 61). In this context, symbolically, the social instinct Bhabha mentions would be the acceptance of the society and mixing with it. This social instinct places Gogol within a group of people of whose approval he has aimed at in order to build his identity.

The novel also focuses on the other members of the Ganguli family by shifting the focus among characters. It is not only Gogol’s the *Bildungsroman* but that of all the characters. Along with the main character, the maturing process of other characters can be observed as well. An example for this is Gogol’s mother Ashima. When Lahiri shifts her focus to Ashima, it is observed that it has always been her who felt partially disconnected with the United States, missing her homeland and family back in India. It has always been her who still has not torn up the last remaining bonds with her past through the simplest way: by still wearing her saris and encouraging her family for India trips every couple of years. Nevertheless these futile efforts do not simply keep her connected with her roots; she, too, goes through an identity change, an Americanization process. When the novel cuts the sequence of Gogol’s maturing and focuses on Ashima, she is seen delivering Christmas cards (Lahiri 2004: 159), a habit she developed throughout the years she has lived in America. She never gives up on having Christmas and Thanksgiving celebrations, cooking and serving for her housefull of guests on these occasions as if she has always done so, dutifully, as if these were part of her own culture. At first sight, her longing for her homeland and culture seems to be in contrast with her adopted American habits. Yet, in fact, it can be observed that it is not being assimilated into a foreign culture that she is afraid of; that is not the reason why she is trying to maintain certain Indian traditions. The

reason why she keeps herself around her Indian community and her saris near is that she is afraid of being alone, or else she is not fighting against losing her own culture. When she first came to America she was a young woman, who had married a man she barely knew through her family's arrangement and before long moved to an unfamiliar country with this unfamiliar man. It was hard, lonely and alien for her: "For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all" (Lahiri 2004: 6). Before she could adapt herself to her new environment, she was already pregnant with Gogol which made everything harder. Gogol's birth did not ease her sense of being alone; on the contrary, the fear and anxiety of her son's possible future under the current circumstances made her situation more complicated:

Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, the baby's birth, like most everything 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. (Lahiri 2004: 25)

First steps of her adaptation come with going out of the house after Gogol's birth. Ashima takes baby Gogol and starts to discover the outside world: "Before Gogol's birth, her days had followed no visible pattern. She would spend hours in the apartment, napping, sulking, rereading her same five Bengali novels on the bed" (Lahiri 2004: 35). In a way, after Gogol arrived, Ashima found someone to share her loneliness with. Gogol kept her company and she was able to find herself a pattern of taking Gogol out with her for her chores, meeting her husband at the campus at lunch time or just going out to wander around. She became braver in the United States with Gogol because her son was just as unlucky in this country as she was, according to her. The pregnancy and her first days in the United States are depicted as a symbol of her immigrant status by Bhalla as follows:

By equating pregnancy with the alienation of immigration, the narrator describes a gendered spectacle of what it means to be a foreigner [...] This metaphorical rendering of difference as a state of pregnant longing and expectation suggests that the transition from immigration to assimilation at once partakes of public recognition and is also an insular, private, and internal process that carries with it the promise of resolution.

In fact, it is literally motherhood that enables her adjustment to American self-sufficiency and independence. (2012: 120)

Indeed, she started to discover her environment with Gogol's arrival by trying to step out of her comfort zone –her home –after a period of loneliness and feeling alienated. However Gogol was not enough and soon he was to start school which meant she would be by her own again: “For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy- a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts” (Lahiri 2004: 49). Ashima needed more people around her, presumably sharing her status in America. She, therefore, started to build a community around herself and her family, mostly of Indians but also involving Americans and that is when she started arranging her famous Christmas and Thanksgiving parties or occasional gatherings with the family's friends. And now, at this point in her life, she is sitting at a table, writing Christmas cards to friends and still trying to ease her suppressed loneliness by trying to convince herself many people exist in her life:

Having three separate address books makes her current task a bit complicated. But Ashima does not believe in crossing out names, or consolidating them into a single book. She prides herself on each entry in each volume, for together they form a record of all the Bengalis she and Ashoke have known over the years, all the people she has had the fortune to share rice with. (Lahiri 2004: 159)

Ashima's saris, her Indian friends, her address books, her five Bengali novels she rereads, her *Desh* magazines she cannot throw away and her cravings for her home are all indicators of her being alone. She needs to feel a crowd around her, as Thakur also notes:

Ashima Ganguli, the female protagonist of the novel tries to maintain her ties with her homeland, Calcutta, by upholding her cultural values, traditions and her national identity, while at the same time, trying to juxtapose it with the complete assimilation into ‘America's multicultural ethos’. (2016: 4)

The only thing to disagree with both Bhalla and Thakur is their choice of the word “assimilation.” It is not a process as simple as to be called assimilation. As the rest of her family, she, too, develops a new identity, because now she is a part of the American society and culture. The habits she carries on are not devoted to her loyalty or to her origins and culture, they are for her being in the center of a population she would recognize

and associate with. In short, her efforts are made so that she no longer would be a misfit. She is not fighting against becoming an American or being assimilated, as she also needs the feeling of belonging like her son Gogol; she is fighting against solitude:

At forty-eight she has come to experience the solitude that her husband and son and daughter 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. She hates returning in the evenings to a dark, empty house, going to sleep on one side of the bed and waking up on another. (Lahiri 2004: 161)

When she digs up her memories, her big Indian family had been at her side up until she got married. She is used to living in a community as part of Indian culture. That is why she keeps her Indian friends close and does not cross their names off the address books. This is why she still keeps all the letters from India and goes through them once a year (Lahiri 2004: 160). This is the second thing she could not come to Americanize after her clothes: being on her own, perhaps the only tradition of her new homeland that she cannot adapt herself to.

Ashima keeps waiting for her children to come over now that they are adults. Their affection and company is still something she demands. It is one thing that the children have their own life and up to a point, avoid their family. Yet perhaps the most saddening thing for Ashima is that her children do not care to spend Thanksgiving with her and their father: "So she and Ashoke had spent Thanksgiving together, not bothering for the first time in years, to buy a turkey" (Lahiri 2004: 166). The family feels so American now that they become upset when they have to spend Thanksgiving alone, a tradition they had not had in the first place. It is the first Thanksgiving that they do not need to buy a turkey because they do not have the full family at the dinner table. Buying turkeys for Thanksgiving for years, the need to celebrate a day which they did not have in their own culture and not only a celebration, but a complete celebration. With turkeys and the whole family together, it is the American way of celebration which indicates the transformation Ashima and the rest of the family go through. The only reason to these practices is they feel American by now. After all these years, they have internalized and adapted to the culture of their new home and now they feel threatened by the lack of their new habits.

With Ashoke's death, the narration focuses back on Gogol. He receives the news at Maxine's place. It is his duty to run the paperwork and formalities about his father's death. After going to the hospital to identify his father's body, he goes to his temporary flat where his father stayed while he worked at the university. He decides to spend the night there, alone, thinking. He is calm and cool about his father's passing away. His father "was born twice in India, and then a third time in America" (Lahiri 2004: 21) before his death. The same statement is also emphasized in Lahiri's other novel *The Lowland* as "second birth" to underline a similar identity development of the character Bela. Valkeakari comments that "Lahiri's reference to Ashoke's two births in his country of origin complements and complicates the familiar trope of the immigrant's rebirth in the 'promised land' of America" (2015: 202). Indeed, his father led a relatively successful life in America. He had a respectful job, a family, a suburban house, an income, and a social status. Although Gogol has been trying to undermine what his family achieved in the United States, his father located himself in society as Gogol is trying to do. He thinks about the last time he saw his father, three months before, when he visited his parents with Maxine. At that very moment, Maxine calls his father's apartment and asks Gogol to find somewhere else to stay. Gogol agrees: "He is accustomed to obeying her, to taking her advice" (Lahiri 2004: 177). As he calls the hotel to book himself a room, he suddenly hangs up. He does not want to leave his father's place. This is another breaking point for Gogol. With Maxine and her parents, he believed he was free; he was in a situation that he had always longed for. Maxine and her family revealed the strong contrast between his life and his dream life. It was only through his relationship with Maxine that the reader found out about Gogol's real wishes, aims and motivations even if Gogol himself was completely unaware of them or never voiced them openly. Only at this moment when he decides to stay in the flat, he discovers that he is not free at all. "Obeying" is a contradiction to his identity. All the time he spent with Maxine was only adapting himself to her and her family and being a part of the elite American way of living. Maxine and her family was some kind of an experience for Gogol, gained and learnt. As Bhalla underlines:

Finally, class is a structuring theme of the novel and descriptions of consumption, brand-name materialism, Gogol's Ivy-league educational privilege, and his desire to leverage his cultural capital to attain a higher social class fill its pages. (2012: 110)

His desire to leverage was possible with the Rattlifs. Now that he has acquired certain aspects to apply to his life, he can move on. Although the family presented the life he wanted, being around them began to be only a break from obeying his own family only to start obeying another one after this point. Their splendid house, taste of wine or art, intellectualism did not fulfill Gogol's need to be a self-reliant person. His development stopped as he has been walking around the same pattern that Rattlifs laid out for him. He needs to move further on in his maturation process. His "relocating" starts to feel like "dislocating" again. At this point, Gogol decides to end his relationship with Maxine and move on.

Years after his father's death, Gogol agrees, for the sake of not hurting his mother's feelings, to meet an Indian girl, the daughter of one of her Bengali friends. He meets Moushumi and cannot help but thinking she is very different from what he had expected. She is a Ph.D. candidate in French Literature at New York University. She is well educated and mannered. She also lived in Paris for a while. She is not only an Americanized deshi, but she is also Europeanized. Gogol is immediately affected by her. He tries to remember her from his childhood and happens to remember a Christmas party at their home: "He and Sonia had not wanted to go; Christmas was supposed to be spent with just family. But their parents had replied that in America, Bengali friends were the closest thing they had to family" (Lahiri 2004: 201). A typical Christmas at Moushumi's house is nothing different from that in an American house; frozen doughnuts, gift exchanges, Moushumi's mother pressuring her to play "Jingle Bells" on the piano and bragging she knows how to play it very well upon the guests' request (Lahiri 2004: 200- 201). In that perspective, Moushumi's upbringing and her family are not very different from those of Gogol: a family forcing themselves to become a part of the dominant culture and seeking approval. They start seeing each other on a regular basis. The moment she was "forced to play" "Jingle Bells" is the topic of one of their meetings. Although Gogol cannot exactly remember her from his childhood, this scene seems to be carved into his mind. When Moushumi remembers that night, she remarks: "My mother was always forcing me to do things like that... I never wanted to learn in the first place. My mother had this fantasy. One of many. I think my mother's taking lessons now" (Lahiri 2004: 203). Her mother's behavior is nothing more than a simple wish to grant her daughter a place in the society they have been trying to adapt to which is something Bhabha defines as "the desire to

emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry” (2004: 126). Mimicking the “authentic” –the Americans –would make the mimicker –the Indian –closer to the authentic –the dominant culture – while tightening the cultural gap between the two sides, presumably. Moushumi’s family seems to be using mimicking as a means of protection and prosper as “mimicry is at once resemblance” (Bhabha 2004: 122-23). However, Moushumi is not like other Indian children of Ashima’s community or Gogol in several ways. Her protest against her family is much more visible. She was known to be studying chemistry, but in secret, she double majored in French Literature, with no intention of following in her father’s footsteps (Lahiri 2004: 214). She, interestingly, rejected both American and Indian cultures and moved to Paris where she met her future fiancé, a banker from New York. She moved back and applied to New York University through her fiancé’s encouragement (Lahiri 2004: 125). Moushumi is a free soul like many other women Gogol had been with, but she is the first free soul at the same time being an Indian Gogol has met. Bhalla describes the facts that brought them together: “They are united by their common culture, and second-generation dilemma [...]” (2012: 116). Indeed, they are both looking for an act of “locating” in the society. The part of Gogol’s desire for Moushumi comes from this aspect of her. As Field argues:

Moushumi's decision to control her own cultural identity may well prove to be the normative behavior for the later generations of immigrant families in the United States. As their direct connection to certain roots diminishes and other cultural options are presented, these Americans will create their own personal bricolage of various cultural materials in order to form their identities. (2004: 176)

Like Gogol, Moushumi, too, creates different layers to her identity, trying to find herself a place in the American society, thus, she can anticipate and become a companion to Gogol on his way to maturity.

Gogol finally proposes to Moushumi. They have a perfectly normal and ordinary marriage: cooking together, watching TV, working on their projects and going out for food shopping (Lahiri 2004: 225- 230). They even go to Paris together when Moushumi is to present a paper. The balance between them is kept until Gogol meets his wife’s two very close friends: Astrid and Donald, a married couple expecting their first child. Gogol is

actually familiar with the couple as they were at his wedding. Gogol assumes that Donald and Astrid are Moushumi's role models and the family she would like to become (Lahiri 2004: 235). Whatever Donald and Astrid mean to Moushumi is the equivalent of what Maxine and her parents had meant for Gogol. That is probably why Gogol figures out easily and immediately how Moushumi feels for them:

They [Donald and Astrid] reach out to people, hosting dinner parties, bequeathing little bits of themselves to their friends. They are passionate spokespeople for their brand of life, giving Nikhil [Gogol] and Moushumi a steady, unquestionable stream of advice about quotidian things. They swear by a certain bakery, a certain butcher on Mott, a certain style coffeemaker, a certain Florentine designer of sheets for their bed. Their decrees drive Gogol crazy. But Moushumi is loyal. She regularly goes out of her way, and thus out of their budget, to buy bread at that bakery, meat at that butcher. (Lahiri 2004: 236)

In that sense, Donald and Astrid are a part of Moushumi's maturing process, her idols. They embody the concept of being Westernized and elite for Moushumi, similar to what Maxine had once meant for Gogol. "He knows the approval of these people means something to her" (Lahiri 2004: 238). At a dinner party at Donald and Astrid's home, the guests carry on a conversation about names and naming. As Astrid is expecting, their popular subject is to choose the perfect name which, they believe, will play an important role in the baby's character. The books with possible names are passed around the table. The guests start to look up their names' meanings in the books. Only Gogol's and Moushumi's names are not listed: "Both Gogol and Moushumi are absent from these books, and for the first time all evening he feels a hint of that odd bond that had first drawn them together" (Lahiri 2004: 240). Yet when Moushumi is asked about her name's meaning she explains it means "a damp southwesterly breeze" (Lahiri 2004: 240) which surprises Gogol. He never knew the meaning of her name nor has he ever intended to ask. It is also significant that though she has the same Indian roots and she has a foreign name and she knows the meaning of it, unlike Gogol. Gogol's name still remains a mystery. Again, in the company of Donald and Astrid, and his wife, Gogol feels dislocated. Heinze comments on Gogol's unique naming and its effects in the narration as follows:

Lahiri does not describe a new or entirely unfamiliar phenomena. Rather, in using a unique name as the thematic focus of her book and making it strange, she highlights processes which once naturalized are always likely to be ignored. (2007: 197)

At this point, it is clear that Moushumi is different from Gogol in a way: at least she knows what her name means, yet Gogol's name still remains obscure and meaningless. Gogol, though he is married to someone who shares many common aspects with him, is still partially an outcast and cannot be a part of her community. He is still not fully understood by other people, especially by his wife, thus he is not completely recognized by the society of which his wife is a part resulting in his feeling of being unidentified. After two, relatively unsuccessful relationships, it is fair to pose Heinze's question:

Finally Gogol's affections are in permanent transit, just like his original name. Would he need the concept of a stable personal and cultural identity for a stable relationship, i.e. marriage with a happy ending? (2007: 197)

The answer seems to be 'yes,' yet the word "stable" should not be understood as fixed, national or pre-given. Stable, in Gogol's case, is an identity to define himself, making him a part of the society, resists the danger of being dislocated frequently. He needs a stable identity in order to feel "located." Although they are both Indian, their adopted cultures clash with each other and draw them apart. They are both dominated by a different culture which overshadows their own culture and as a result, they are estranged towards each other. They cannot meet in a "third space." Their origins and experiences may be the same, but their expectations, the way their understanding and perception of their adopted cultures and personalities are different. Perhaps Maalouf explains this clash in the simplest way. He says:

Every individual is a meeting ground for many allegiances, and sometimes these loyalties conflict with one another and confront the person who harbors them with difficult choices. (2003: 4)

Gogol's difficult choice was leaving Maxine before when he went through this "conflict" Maalouf refers to. Now it will be his divorce from Moushmi. Gogol's independence conflicts with Moushmi's loyalty to Donald and Astrid.

While Gogol feels tender on the issue of naming, and while the name debate is still ongoing, Moushumi reveals that Gogol changed his name legally in the past: "His expression is lost on her; she smiles back at him, unaware of what she has done" (Lahiri 2004: 243). Gogol is upset, disappointed as he thought, although he never openly told her, she would understand the delicate nature of his decision. He assumed, at the very least that, she would keep it to herself: "But now it's become a joke for her... This is what upsets him most" (Lahiri 2004: 244). Yet there are more to their differences, their past with people for instance; Gogol is a person of regular relationships and during his relationships he was always monogamous. Whereas Moushumi always liked courting, enjoyed "clandestine relationships" (Lahiri 2004: 250), she was polygamous in her Paris years and Gogol had been aware of all these before they were married. Although Gogol never judges, or complains about these facts, he never gets used to them, either. Even her best friends Donald and Astrid played a role as her sexual partners when she was engaged to Graham, the man she had met in Paris. Gogol never was and is like his wife in such matters and he is uncomfortable when they are in Moushumi's "community": "Gogol can't shake the feeling that half the people in the room have slept with one another" (Lahiri 2004: 236). These are Moushumi's "many allegiances," as Maalouf would define them, that conflict with Gogol's personality. The marriage, although it is not visible yet, is cracking. On top of everything, Moushumi does not interpret their marriage as Gogol does. Gogol married Moushumi simply because he thought he had found the person he had been searching for. However, for Moushumi, their marriage has become somewhat a trap:

And yet the familiarity that had once drawn her to him has begun to keep her at bay. Though she knows it's not his fault, she can't help but associate him, at times, with a sense of resignation, with the very life she had resisted, had struggled so mightily to leave behind. He was not who she saw herself ending up with, he had never been that person. Perhaps for those very reasons, in those early months, being with him, falling in love with him, doing precisely what had been expected of her for her

entire life, had felt forbidden, wildly, transgressive, a breach of her own instinctive will. (Lahiri 2004: 250)

Thakur notes about Lahiri's female characters and their turbulence and conflict:

The unhappiness of her [Lahiri's] female characters can be seen as a direct result of postcolonial binaries, of the division between 'us' and 'them,' the 'native' and the 'alien.' Moreover, these binaries are not just limited to the first generation Gangulis, it is also visible in the second generations life. (2016: 7)

It is at this point, when Moushumi realizes what her marriage means to her and Gogol also feels the same awakening, he realizes something is missing in his life and his marriage. Moushumi's awakening to her marriage almost opens a new page in Gogol's life as his last turning point in the novel. Before long, Moushumi starts having an affair with a man named Dimitri on a regular basis. Is that affair something she needed due to lack of something in her marriage or is it only a way of her rebellion against her "resignation", one cannot simply decide. Yet it seems to be a way of proving herself, similar to moving to Paris or deciding on her own university major: "She wonders if she is the only woman in her family ever to have betrayed her husband, to have been unfaithful" (Lahiri 2004: 266). The undertone in this line is that Moushumi accepts this as a challenge to her origins, her Indian customs and community. Gogol's marriage, unfortunately, turns out to be a simple act of rebellion for Moushumi and his divorce is the final breaking point in his life:

But unfortunately they [Gogol and Moushumi and new the American-Indian generation] have not considered it their duty to stay married, as the Bengalis of Ashoke and Ashima's generation do. They are not willing to accept, to adjust, to settle for something less than their ideal of happiness. That pressure has given way, in the case of the subsequent generation, to American common sense. (Lahiri 2004: 276)

From this perspective, the change that Gogol went through until this phase of his life is highly visible. Gogol's and other second generation of immigrants' understanding of marriage, family, point of views about life altered and are described to be highly different than those of first generation immigrants in the novel. That change is defined by Lahiri as

“American common sense” to emphasize the cultural and identity turn the characters take into Americanizing.

2.3.Conclusion

At the end of the novel, the reader sees Gogol questioning his childhood, his adulthood, his past and his present. He sees now how his family survived in America with a lot of things missing “with a stamina he fears he does not possess himself” (Lahiri 2004: 281). He can only now understand his family and their concerns and predictions about himself: “In so many ways, his family’s life feels like a string of accidents, unforeseen, unintended, one incident begetting another” (Lahiri 2004: 286). Gogol has matured, yet he has not completed his journey. He has only come to a point of accepting. He accepts the things he does not have the power to change, like his origins, his family which does not resemble the Ratliffs or Donald and Astrid, his fate and even his name: “his being named Gogol, defining and distressing him for so many years. He had tried to correct that randomness, that error. And yet it had not been possible to reinvent himself fully, to break from that mismatched name” (Lahiri 2004: 287). He is now mature enough to go to his childhood room in the house he grew up in, take Nikolai Gogol’s short story book which his father gave him for his fourteenth birthday and start reading it, start figuring out his meaning (Lahiri 200: 291). With this open ending of the novel, it is obvious that Gogol’s choices and his adopted identity have not led him to a point of unity or a completed identity right away. Developing an identity is a life-long journey that Gogol has undertaken. The point he comes to question his being is not a conclusion of his development but a half-way into it. “Certainly from the standpoint of many around the world, hybridity, mobility, and difference do not immediately appear as liberatory in themselves” (Hardt and Negri 2010: 2643). As Hardt and Negri emphasize, Gogol is in a process that would not reach its climax immediately, but only after self-realization and maturing.

Although Gogol accepted that there are certain things he could not change such as his family’s point of view or his origins, he believes he can change his own identity and way of living. During this process, he encountered many different events and people to shape his identity. The peak of the change in his identity is his relationship with Maxine as her family and her way of living and thinking represented the identity that Gogol wishes to

have. His recognition as an American by an American family happens at the point when he was referred to as “Nick” which resolves Gogol’s long-time problem of naming. After the termination of his relationship, he takes another step forward at when he decides to marry someone of his own origin, Moushumi. Moushumi appears as a character, in the novel, that is more Westernized than Gogol. Her life style and her American community highlight the aspects of Gogol’s yet incomplete American identity. The undertone of the described relationship between Gogol and Moushumi gives the reader the feeling that Gogol cannot keep up with Moushumi’s settled and strong Western identity. As a result, Gogol ends his marriage. Although Gogol chooses an American identity at the earlier stages of his life, the open ending of the novel also bares the implication that Gogol may give up on his process of Americanization. Gogol’s return to his family house and investigating of the story book given by his father are symbolic to underline a new turn Gogol may take later in his life, and that turn may be a return to his Indian roots which might have been symbolized by his return to his family home. However, the progress of developing an identity, as mentioned before, is a life-long action. In that sense, Gogol may also choose a path to complete his American identity as he is only at his thirties in the end of the novel.

CONCLUSION

In both of Lahiri's novels, *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*, a progress of identity development can be observed. Lahiri describes first and second generation immigrants and the cultural change they go through. Designed as *Bildungsroman*, both novels show the development and growing up process of the characters from their early years to adulthood. Lahiri challenges the idea of a given, national identity by highlighting the different turns her characters take in their process of cultural change. In both of the novels, the characters are depicted as self-developed and changed individuals who choose to disconnect themselves from their national roots.

Lahiri's later novel, *The Lowland*, introduces more characters and more complicated identity progresses than *The Namesake*. The main character Subhash is an Indian student who decides to go to the United States for higher education where he would construct a new identity. Similar to Gogol, Subhash's identity development is contributed by many American people he meets. Along with Subhash, the reader also observes the cultural changes of Gauri, Subhash's dead brother's wife. The difference between Gogol and Subhash is that Gogol is an American born Indian and, as a result, it is easier for him to adopt the identity of his 'new home'. Subhash, although he spends his first twenty years in India, being bound by his customs, adapts himself to an alien culture as easily as Gogol has done. His first turning point is when the reader is hinted about his ideas of not going back to India. Similar to Gogol with Maxine, he also experiences the American culture closely with his girlfriend Holly. After his brother's death, Subhash marries his late brother's wife Gauri and Gauri's identity development starts taking place in the story when she comes to America. Their marriage goes through much turmoil and ends with Gauri leaving Subhash with her late husband's child. The reader observes Gauri as a much more Americanized character than Subhash in the novel, yet it is Gauri whose identity progress is incomplete. Subhash completes his identity development as an American-Indian who fathered his niece for years, yet, at the end, the reader sees Gauri as a woman who is deprived of her own daughter and granddaughter. Her identity is not completed due to internal role conflicts she goes through.

Lahiri's first novel, *The Namesake*, portrays a young Indian couple, Ashoke and Ashima, who immigrates to the United States. The couple goes through a process of adaptation and eventually they find themselves embracing the American customs and culture more than their original Indian culture. As the first generation of immigrants, Ashoke and Ashima slowly adapt, changing their culinary habits, building a community of friends, and celebrating American and Christian holidays. The couple creates a new identity for themselves by becoming American-Indians. The novel challenges the idea of a pre-given and national identity through Ashoke and Ashima, but more strongly through their first-born child Gogol. The Ganguli family also contributes to Gogol's identity development. His mother Ashima raises Gogol as a typical American child by providing him with American goods such as clothes and daily items. The whole family gradually adapts to American culture. The family is not being assimilated; on the contrary, they create their own culture and identity by incorporating American customs into their lives. The characters' transformation process can also be described through the words of Amitava Kumar as follows:

There is a deeper meaning, however, to this notion of adapting to a new culture. For Lahiri, exile from one's birth or traditional culture results ontologically in a state of inbetweenness, or limbo, that is not necessarily a negative condition, but can be one of potential freedom.
(qtd. in Brown 2011: 333)

The notion of "freedom" mentioned comes from the ability and the opportunity to create a new identity in the adapted alien culture the family lives in. As Homi Bhabha argues, what is called culture is a mixture of more than one culture and thus, the family constructs a cultural identity instead of a fixed, pre-given national identity. Different people Gogol encounters throughout his life contribute to his identity development. The most significant of these characters in the novel is Gogol's girlfriend Maxine. Maxine's and her family's lifestyle are glamorized by Gogol and he slowly turns in to the culture of the Rattliff family. He reaches the climax of his American identity when the family starts referring to him as Nick (as a short form of Nikhil) which is Gogol's life-long dream. The novel closes with an open ending where Gogol sits in his childhood room in his family house and looks at Nikolai Gogol's book his father gave him as a birthday present during his teenage years

and contemplates on his family and his life. The tone of the ending of the novel gives the idea that Gogol's identity development has not finished yet and he will most probably have more breaking points about his identity. Although Gogol adopted American culture and identity in the first thirty years of his life, his progress is ongoing and the reader cannot observe the final form of his identity.

As both of the novels are constructed as *Bildungsroman*, a form in which the reader can follow the characters' life spans, tracking and dwelling upon an identity development is more clear and visible. Since the *Bildungsroman* is a form which reflects its characters' maturation, a final point in their life and acknowledges its characters' final characterization, it provides a large frame for a gradual identity forming as well. Since the reader can follow Lahiri's characters' life-long experiences, it can be claimed that her use of the *Bildungsroman* along with her narration of immigrant and alien culture experience enriches the notion of identity development. In an interview, Lahiri explains her style of narrating through her own notion of belonging:

I write from the perspective of someone, not technically born here [America], but who might as well have been born and brought up in this country, with a different sort of division than my parents and that previous generation. (qtd.in Leyda, 2011:73)

Similar to her characters, Lahiri mentions a process of identity and cultural adaptation she herself experiences, which contributes to the identity transformation in her works. Her three major characters in the two novels have come to a point of adopting a new culture and living in the American society according to their new identity. The characters, throughout the years in the novels, go through turning points, turmoil; they age and grow up. In addition to this natural progress, the characters live in a foreign country being exposed to an alien culture. As they grow up, they also get the chance to develop a new cultural and national identity of their choice instead of a fixed, national and pre-given identity. As a result, the characters become hybrids by bearing both Indian and American cultures, yet they feel closer to the American culture. With the contribution of the *Bildungsroman* form to the cultural changes the characters experience in the novel, John Tomlinson's comment about cultures is an appropriate description of the experience

Lahiri's characters go through: "Cultures [...] are simply descriptions of *how people act* in communities" (2002: 96)¹¹. In this sense, in their life-span, the characters of both of the novels develop a certain way of acting in the American society by involving American customs in their lives, thereby create a self-developed identity.

Throughout the novels almost all the characters go through an identity change, yet the three main characters' transformation is highly visible: Gauri, Subhash and Gogol. They have common and different characteristics at the same time. The biggest difference between these characters is that Gogol is a second generation immigrant whereas Subhash and Gauri are first generation immigrants. Although Gogol is born and raised in America whereas Subhash and Gauri are new arrivals, all of them share an identical process of identity development. All of the characters adapt to American culture through the events and the characters that shape their development. One of the most frequent concepts to contribute to the characters' development in the novels is relationships. Gogol's relationship with Maxine resembles that of Subhash and Holly's. Both of the relationships give way to mimicry and a close investigation of American culture. Gogol and Subhash, in the early stages of their lives, choose to be with American women. The women they choose represent the culture they want to adapt to. Holly's issues with her husband and her husband's absence let Subhash to fill the place of her husband. By doing so, Subhash practically mimics an American man by becoming a father and a husband figure in Holly's house. Thus, he takes his first steps towards Americanizing by closely investigating and mimicking the American culture through Holly's husband's role. On the other hand, Gogol's relationship with Maxine is highly symbolic as Maxine serves as the embodiment of the point Gogol wants to reach in his life. Maxine and her family's elite way of living, their open-mindedness and their taste in arts and life draw Gogol closer to the Ratliff family and, at the same time, drive him away from his own. The contrast between the Ganguli and the Ratliff family is depicted by Lahiri in detail in the novel throughout the couple's relationship. As a result, the gap between American and Indian cultures and Gogol's stance about choosing a side is highlighted through the contrast between the two families. Both relationships end due to cultural difference, yet both characters learn and obtain cultural aspects from their partners and re-shape their way of living according to their experience of the relationships.

¹¹ Emphasis original.

Marriage is an agent used by Lahiri to contribute to the characters' development in both novels. The concept of marriage both contributes to self-development process and, at the same time, highlights certain deficiencies of the characters. The deficiencies serve to point out that their maturation process is not finished yet. Subhash and Gogol, after their relationships with American women, choose to marry Indian women for different reasons. Subhash marries his late brother's wife, Gauri, to show his parents his rejection and his disapproval of their way of thinking. By this marriage, Lahiri emphasizes the gap between Subhash and his family in India after he spends many years in America. Thus, the shifting between cultures and Subhash's still-developing new identity is underlined. The marriage results in their separation as, Gauri, too, wants to develop an identity for her own. She decides to cut her ties with Subhash and also her daughter Bela, who is the child of her late husband, and starts a new life. Gogol's marriage, on the other hand, is not an act of rebellion, yet it also results in separation. He marries an American-Indian girl named Moushumi, but her inner turbulence and restlessness gradually bring the marriage to an end. Moushumi is a person who is more Westernized, and this fact creates the couple's disagreements. Her American community is more marginal than that of Gogol's. This marginality involves polygamous relationships and top brand, expensive tastes in many things. Moushumi and her community's way of life are, in a way, ahead of Gogol and his identity. In addition, Moushumi is, in some ways, like Subhash when it comes to rejecting her family's opinions. Her marriage and the affair she has during her marriage with Gogol is a way of her showing her Indian community that she is different. In that sense, Gogol becomes an agent through which Moushumi shows her difference to her Indian community and the marriage is terminated. For this reason, it can be claimed that the relationships and the marriages in the two novels serve as indicators of the identity development as all four characters shape their identity through American culture. At the same time, the contrast between the Americanized-Indian characters is underlined with these unsuccessful marriages which show that the identity development and adaptation to another culture may occur at different levels. These levels involve the aims and wishes of an individual and the expectation in an alien culture. For instance, Gauri wants to be a woman, independent and self-sufficient, and her choices and her progress are shaped in accordance with this aim, whereas Moushumi only wants to rebel against her parents. Both of the characters are able to fulfill these goals, yet they fulfill them through their adapted identity and in the American society.

The contrast between first generation immigrants, as well as a comparison between first and second generation, is also one of the themes of the novels. Ashima and Ashoke in *The Namesake* and Gauri and Subhash in *The Lowland* are considered to be first generation immigrants as they are not born in the United States, but have immigrated to there. However, the Americanization process of Gauri and Subhash is stronger than that of Ashoke and Ashima. Subhash and Gauri become more Americanized at the end of the novel by choosing to completely settle down in American society and adopt its culture. Subhash marries an American woman, he is an academic in America and he has no intention of following a different path. He is fulfilled by the status he has obtained and, thus, it can be claimed that he has completed his identity transformation. Whereas, Gauri still struggles to find her identity due to her relationship with her daughter Bela and her granddaughter. Although Gauri, too, finds her place in the American society and reaches a certain status by also being an academic, her turbulence and confusions stem from the choices she has made about her child and both her marriages and their consequences. Her identity has not yet arrived at a conclusion as she still questions the choices she has made, especially about Bela and Subhash. The journey of Gauri concludes with an open ending, implying that she will try to resolve her issues with her daughter and her second marriage. In that sense, Gauri's development is an ongoing process when the novel ends. Unlike Gauri, her daughter Bela comes to a point of having a completed identity transformation as she is depicted as a free individual, taking the responsibilities of her choices and pleased with the status she has in life. Bela chooses to raise a child without a father, by her own choice, supporting herself with temporary jobs, unlike her parents, and making peace with the fact that Subhash is not her real father, but her uncle. On the other hand, Ashoke and Ashima are not depicted as they are ready to fully settle down in America. Although their lives and daily practices shaped by American culture and they are drawn away from their Indian roots, they are not completely Americanized as Subhash and Gauri are. Ashoke, who is also an academic, dies and, thus, the reader does not have the chance to observe his further identity development and transformation. His wife Ashima decides to go back to India to spend six months of the year which shows that Ashima does not intend to carry on a further Americanizing process. Although she, too, changes in America, she is still partly connected to India and, as a result, her Americanized identity is not completed.

As such, it can be claimed that identity is a fluid and changing notion and not pre-given. As Homi Bhabha claims, identity development is a gradual process which cannot be pre-shaped or ready-given to an individual; it is a “transformation,” he explains:

Finally, the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, 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. (2004: 64)

Whether one is born into a certain culture or has adapted to it after a point in his/her life, identity is an alterable concept. The novels illustrate this notion of an adapted identity clearly and visibly due to their construction as *Bildungsroman*. The characters draw themselves away from their Indian origins and tone in with the American way of living. Comparing these three characters, one can conclude that it is only Subhash who came to a state of maturation as the readers see him at peace at the end of *The Lowland*. Gauri and Gogol, on the other hand, still have questions and struggles to find out who they are. The open endings suggest that they still have not finished their maturation process. Although they, too, adapted themselves to the American society and culture and adopted a certain identity which is more American than Indian, they still do not draw an image as whole and completed as Subhash does. Gogol’s story ends in his thirties, thus he still has a long way to go, whereas Gauri is in her sixties when the novel concludes. It is foreshadowed that Gauri will try to compromise with her daughter and her granddaughter before she ends her journey. As for Gogol, the open ending suggests that he will consider the choices he made about his family such as neglecting and drifting away from them. The ending of both novels imply that the characters will go through a deep questioning before they arrive at a full maturation.

Among other American-Indian writers, it can be claimed that Jhumpa Lahiri displays a rather moderate approach to the notion of hybrid identities and cultures. Lahiri depicts not only the immigrant experience, but also the socio-cultural structure of American society, the transformation of immigrant identity, the possibility of cultural variety and hybridity, the alterable nature of belonging to a culture and/or a nation and creation of alternative identities to national identity and belonging. Owing to the richness of her characters and her detailed analyses of alien cultural experience and the concept of belonging and identity, her works have been the subject of many studies. Her works have

been studied a variety of different topics from the frame of female immigrant characters to immigrant cosmopolitanism. As an author who still writes today, Lahiri will remain in the center of many scholarly studies in the future as well.

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