

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

MINISTERE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

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FACULTY OF LETTERS & LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



جامعة مولود معمري-تيزي-وزو

كلية الآداب واللغات

قسم الإنجليزية

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master in English**

Field: Letters and Foreign Languages

Speciality: General and Comparative Literature.

Title

***Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake (2003) and Chimamanda
Ngozi Adichie's Americanah (2013): Living in-between two
Worlds***

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2021-2022

The Master domiciliation laboratory:

Acknowledgements

Thank God for granting us enough strength and determination to complete this research. We would like to express our thankfulness to our supervisor Mrs. Maida Naima for being so helpful and supportive to us during the fulfilment of this modest work.

We are grateful for the members of the board examiners for accepting to assess and examine our work.

Dedication

*I dedicate this work to my dear family: my parents, brother and sister, to my beloved uncle **Hadj-said Aziz** who has never ceased to support me, to the soul of my grandmother may God have mercy on her.*

Dalila

I dedicate this work to:

My beloved parents: Bouamara Mohamed Larbi and Kaci Tassadit

My brothers: Mourad and his children Dacine and Elyes

Ghani and his children Zindine and Maya

Belkacen and his son Malik

Tarik

Arezki

My sister who helped and encouraged me to finish my studies and her children Emma and Eddine

Rachida

Abstract

This research is a post-colonial comparative study between Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The main purposes of this study is to demonstrate how dispersion from the place of birth to new lands, results in identity transformation through the process of assimilation, and to reveal the hardships of the immigrant experience, exposing the concerns of the Diasporic communities in the two novels. To achieve this purpose, we have made use on some post-colonial concepts that are Homi Bhabha's hybridity and mimicry and Stuart Hall's theoretical work Cultural Identity and Diaspora. At the beginning of our analysis, we have explored the two authors' biographies in relation to their realistic immigrant experiences, and its influence on their writings. Moreover, we have drawn the similarity between the Asian immigrant experience in *The Namesake* and the African immigrant one in *Americanah*, comparing between the two novels' immigrant characters. Then, through the inclusion of our selected postcolonial theoretical concepts, we have come to notice its relevance in the study of the immigrant writings, referring to the immigrants' attempt to integrate through Bhabha's concept of mimicry and Hall's identity transformation on immigrant characters. In this way, at the end of our analysis of these two novels, we conclude that despite of belonging into two different immigrant generations, communities and cultures, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have a similar immigrant experience, and share the same convictions towards the sufferings of their indigenous immigrant communities.

Keywords : Jhumpa Lahiri, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Postcolonial, Dispersion, Identity Transformation, Assimilation.

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I. Introduction

Literature has always been considered as the mirror of the concerns, sufferings and ideas of the society of its origin. Our study, in this research, is concerned with the literature of the Diaspora. This literature has come to receive an increased academic recognition, as ‘it has emerged as a distinct literary genre’.¹ Its writers seek to deliver the voice of the dispersed people and tell the readers about their struggles.

This study is a comparative study of the twenty-first century literature broadly constructed by the figures of diasporic literature: the Indian-American author, Jhumpa Lahiri and the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who voice the silence of their indigenous immigrant communities.

The two countries India and Nigeria are both former colonies of Great Britain. After decolonization, many people from these previous colonies chose to immigrate to countries like the United States of America and England in search of new opportunities. On the one hand, in 1965, the immigration Act; ‘also known as “the Hart-Celler Act”’, was passed in the United States of America, this act provided immigrants with more facilities by abolishing the old system of immigration that was ‘based on national origin’, and replacing it with a new policy based on ‘attracting skilled labor’.² This led to the growth of the Indian population in America.³ In fact, *The Namesake* events are set in 1968, three years after the Act was passed, which explains the presence of Indian immigrant characters: the Ganguli family and their Bengalis friends in America.⁴ On the other hand, after Nigerian’s independence in 1960, the country faced a series of military coups, leading into instability, university strikes and poor working conditions. Therefore, many Nigerians chose to leave Africa for Europe or America in the hope of better employment or greater educational opportunities, the kind of

immigration that is depicted in Adichie's novel *Americanah*.⁵ The protagonists Ifemelu and Obinze represent people who believe that the developed countries have much more to offer. However, their immigrant experiences are full of rejection and racism due to the changing laws and the 'new security measures' in the United States and Britain, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.⁶

In this context, our two selected literary works are worthy for their realistic depiction of the Diasporas' concerns such as: identity crisis, cultural clashes and racial discrimination of these minorities in the host countries. In fact, there is a typical blend of reality and fiction in both these works. In that way, the two writers tell us about their immigrant experiences from a Hindu and a black African perspective.

Therefore, we think that our selection of these two novels is relevant to deal with diasporic writing, assuming that although there is almost a decade between the two works, preliminary readings indicate that there are similarities between the two texts. Our main purpose in this research paper is to investigate the issues of home, identity and the conflicting loyalties when living in-between two cultures in the context of immigration, as we seek to analyse the characters' reaction to face racial discrimination and to cope with. To achieve our purposes, appropriate theoretical texts are applied in our intended study as secondary sources.

Review of the literature

The female authors of the Diaspora, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have been the main subject of many critics. Their literary works, *The Namesake* and *Americanah* respectively have been studied from several and different perspectives. On the one hand, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) has been the subject of interest for many scholars. Mandra Sen in her reviewed work about *The Namesake* entitled *Names and Nicknames* (2004), focuses on the role of nomenclature in the novel's story. She claims that

Jhumpa Lahiri stresses on the importance of names in creating one's identity in her novel, through the introduction of the story of her second-immigrant generation character; the male protagonist Gogol Ganguli. The reviewer mentions that Lahiri presents a middle class and educated immigrants from Bengali community to her western readers, the quality that distinguishes them from other immigrant communities in America.

Therefore, she suggests that this fact (being middle class and educated immigrants) might be the reason that protects them from 'racial discrimination'. However, she considers its absence throughout the novel's story 'surprising'. Manderer refers to the fact that similarly to her protagonist 'Gogol', Lahiri 'uses her' pet name 'Jhumpa' as a good name.⁷ Additionally, she wonders how Lahiri's male character would be, and to whom among *The Namesake's* female characters he would resemble, if he were a woman, suggesting that the author intended to choose a male character to avoid creating a character with a closed experience to hers as a second immigrant generation.⁸

Ed Peaco in another review (2004) claims that Jhumpa Lahiri makes use of the immigrant experience in order to analyse the malaise of the immigrants and to criticize the 'American culture through a fresh set of eyes.' The reviewer affirms that the protagonist Gogol refers to the embarrassing assimilation of the second generation immigrant through the manner in which his parents name him. In addition, he mentions that *The Namesake* follows 'Gogol's great self-sorting', and despite the fact that this character is 'on the gasp of moving forward' at the end of the novel, his "ruminations" does not inaugurate actions. The reviewer finds this as 'a little disappointing'.⁹

Kushaba Salunke in his research paper, *Struggle for Identity and Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's the Namesake* (2016), is focuses on the themes of 'identity' and 'belongness' within the Indian immigrant characters in Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*. The researcher affirms that

the term of “Diaspora” has been perfectly dealt with by Jhumpa Lahiri, depicting ‘the lives’ of two different Indian immigrant generations in the United States through her plot and characters. Salunke points out that the fact that Lahiri ‘is the child of Indian immigrants’, has made of her ‘both a migrant and Diaspora writer’. He claims that the author tells about ‘the Indian Diaspora’ and shows the paradox of ‘identity’ and ‘cultural difference’ in the context of ‘Diaspora’ in her literary work.¹⁰

Likewise, *Americanah* has also been studied from different perspectives. Using feminist perspectives, Halima Shehu and Mohammad Alkali focus on the improvement of African women’s writings through two different generations of writers. They complete a comparative study of Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*. Basically, this study examines themes in relation to marriage, disloyalty and ‘women’s individuality’ as they are presented in the two selected novels. The analysis takes into consideration ‘the generational gap’ between these two female writers, the fact that influences their feminist views and qualifies it as being somehow different. Nevertheless, this research has been able to distract similarities between the presented themes of these two novels.¹¹

Maria Victoria et al conducted another research about racism and identity in Adichie’s novel *Americanah*. The purposes of their research are to show how the immigrant experience of the protagonist ‘Ifemelu’ affects her socially and personally, and to demonstrate how the formation of her identity was influenced by ‘stereotypes and social structure’. This study is based on the approach of Critical Discourse Analysis and its theories, as it is based on the concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘racism’ and their inclusion in the novel. Thus, the research concludes that racism remains an existing issue. Through the examination of the protagonist’s experience, it is also concluded that ‘Black female immigrants’ suffer from both ‘racial stereotypes’ and ‘sexism’, as it is concluded that discrimination has a strong effect on

individuals. In addition, the researchers claim that *Americanah* does not only form ‘a strong Black female character’, but it also brings about ‘deep discussions on social problems.’¹²

Soheila Arabian and Vida Rahiminezhad contributed another study that is mainly focused on the concept of ‘Diaspora’. Therefore, they select Adichie’s novel *Americanah* that deals perfectly with the concept according to them. Their study provides a detailed explanation of the term ‘Diaspora’, focusing on its related issues that are displacement, belonging, otherness and the notion of return into the homeland, making reference into *Americanah* in which such issues are widely exposed.¹³

The two literary works, Lahiri’s *The Namesake* and Adichie’s *Americanah* have been studied simultaneously in a research entitled, *The Namesake, Americanah & Petropolis: The representation of hybridity in twenty-first century literature*. This research focuses on the concept of ‘hybridity’ and how it ‘is represented’ in the literature of the twenty-first century, through the examination of its three selected novels’ characters and events in separate and combined way.¹⁴

Issue and Working Hypothesis

From the above review, it is clear that Lahiri’s *The Namesake* and Adichie’s *Americanah* have been studied from different perspectives. The previous literary critics have primarily dealt with the representation of Diasporas and their concerns in these two novels. However, to our best knowledge no comparative study, including several aspects of migration has been compiled on the two novels.

Therefore, our basic focus in this dissertation is to deal with the various immigrants’ dilemmas referred to in these novels. We intend to study both the Indian and the Black immigrant experiences in *The Namesake* (2003) and in *Americanah* (2013). Mainly, we will focus on the authors’ biographical inspirations as components of first and second immigrant-

generation, in completing their literary works, as we will try to distract the affinities between the thematic concerns of the two works. In order to complete our task, we intend to rely on Stuart Hall's work on identity and Homi Bhabha's concepts of Hybridity and Mimicry.

Methodological outline

Our research paper follows the IMRAD method. It is divided into five sections. The first section is a general introduction, in which we have presented the subject and the purpose of this research paper, then in the second part of the introduction we have made a Review of the literature about the two selected novels: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), as we have mentioned in the issue and working hypothesis that no comparative study examining several immigrants' aspects have been made between the two novels. The second section is Methods and Materials that contains a presentation of the postcolonial theory, Stuart Hall's work about cultural identity and Homi Bhabha's concepts: Hybridity and Mimicry, in his work, *Location of Culture* (1994). Then, the results and discussion section that is dedicated to the findings and analysis, and the part of discussion is divided into two chapters: the first one is about the authors' biographies and their inspirations, as it deals with a comparative study between their characters, the second one studies the affinities between the novels in terms of themes in relation to our theoretical framework. Finally, we provide our work with a general conclusion that summarizes the main issues of this research.

Endnotes

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<https://www.exoticindiaart.com>.

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³ “Immigration Experience in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*”, *Exhilaration and Exasperation: A Study of Immigrant Experiences in Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake*, (2016), Accessed on June 2022. <https://ashvamegh.net>.

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⁵ “Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Americanah Background”, Accessed on July 2022. <https://www.sparknotes.com>.

⁶Ibid.

⁷ Sen, Mandera, *Review of Names and Nicknames by Jhumpa Lahiri*, *The Women’s Review of Books* 21, no. 6 (2004), 9, Accessed on July 2022. <https://www.jstor.org>.

⁸Ibid. 10.

⁹ Peaco, Ed, *The Antioch Review* 62, no. 3 (2004), 581, Accessed on July 2022. <https://www.jstor.org>.

¹⁰ Salunke, Kushaba, *Struggle For Identity And Diaspora In Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake*, (Vol. 2, Issue 4, April 2016), 39-41, Accessed on July 2022. <http://www.epitomejournals.com>.

¹¹ Shehu, Halima and Mohammad Alkali, *A Place of their Own: A Comparative Study of Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, (Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 26th-30th November 2017), Accessed on July 2022. <http://repository.futminna.edu.ng>.

¹² Victoria, Maria et al, *Racism And Identity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, (September/December 2019), Accessed on July 2022. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es>.

¹³ Arabian, Soheila and Vida Rahiminezhad, *Journey and Return: Visiting Unbelonging and Otherness in Adichie's Americanah*, (Vol. 3, Issue. 3, Supp.1, 2015), Accessed on July 2022. <https://www.researchgate.net>.

¹⁴*The Namesake, Americanah & Petropolis: The representation of hybridity in twenty-first century literature*, Accessed on July 2022. <https://theses.ubn.ru.nl>.

II. Methods and Materials

A-Methods

In order to achieve our purpose in this research, we will rely on Post colonial theory; precisely on Stuart Hall's approach of Identity and Homi Bhabha's concept of Hybridity and Mimicry.

The two selected novels, *The Namesake* and *Americanah* discuss subjects in relation to cultural identity, dual identity and assimilation in the case of Diasporas. These subjects have been already discussed and well explained by the theorists in books such as: Bhabha's *The Location of culture* and Stuart Hall's *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. Therefore, it is important to investigate the presentations in these two works to understand how one's identity and cultural heritage affect his integration in the new society to which he immigrates. The use of post colonial theory in our research is more appropriate to analyse the immigrants' concerns since the growth of the immigrants' waves emerged after the decolonization of third world countries. To understand the post colonial concepts we have first to explain the post-colonial theory.

1-Postcolonial theory

Post-colonial theory is an approach¹ that emerged in the academics after colonization.² It is mainly about colonialism; it is interested in its effects 'on both the colonized and the colonizer.'³ It is assumed that this theory gains a place in the curriculum by the publication of the Palestinian-American theorist Edward Said's famous book *Orientalism* (1978)⁴, considered to be a foundational work that leads to the development of the post-colonial literary theory.

Moreover, the publication of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* (2002), plays also an important role in the emergence of the field. It represents the theory and its concepts. In this theoretical work, the theorists claim that the term post-colonial semantically seems to be concerned only with the period after decolonization⁵. However, this term is used to refer to all the colonized cultures 'from the moment of decolonization to the present day'. Since 'there is continuity' of historical events that have been started from by the European domination.⁶

On the identification of 'post colonial literary theory', the theorists claim that this notion appears due to the incapacity of 'European theory' to treat properly the different original cultures of 'post-colonial writing'. They emphasise on the fact that 'European theories themselves' come from a specific 'cultural traditions' that are covered by a falsified ideas 'of 'the universal''. Therefore, they state that 'indigenous theories' such as postcolonial theory seek to stress this difference.

Additionally, the theorists affirm that the privileged representation of the European traditions results in 'the political and cultural mono-centrism of the colonial enterprise'⁷. And that these perceptions of Europe support the European 'imperial expansion' of the world during the nineteenth century,⁸ leading into 'cultural subservience' of the European culture. As a result, these 'indigenous theories' emerge to react to this situation and formed 'specific national and regional consciousness.'⁹

2-Stuart Hall: *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*

On the first hand, in order to analyse the issue of identity in our two selected literary works, we will rely on the Jamaican theorist Stuart Hall's approach to identity. In his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall declares that identity is not 'transparent' or "unproblematic" as it is thought. The theorist argues that:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.¹⁰

Hall distinguishes two different manners to think about 'cultural identity'. The first one considers cultural identity as being one, it is the common culture, and it seeks to gather all people under 'one true self' and hide inside of it 'the many other', the theorist describe this type of cultural identity as being 'more superficial or artificial imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.' Through this definition, he concludes that 'our cultural identity' refers to 'the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as "one people", with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.'¹¹

The second 'view of cultural identity' is related to the first, but differs at the same time. Even though this second view acknowledges the existence of similarities within one cultural identity, it also emphasizes on 'deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened – 'what we have become''. According to Hall this second view prevent us to speak only about 'one experience' and 'one identity' for a long period of time with certainty, without recognizing its different sides. Hall explains further this identity as follows:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.¹²

In spite of claiming that ‘cultural identities’ are rooted from a specific place with a specific history, Stuart Hall affirms that similarly to every historical thing, they pass through ‘constant transformation’; they are not ‘fixed’ in a given era of the past. However, ‘they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.’ In addition, he stresses on the fact that identities are the matters of how ‘we are positioned’ and how we ‘position ourselves’ in ‘the narratives of the past.’

Therefore, the theorist affirms that ‘the traumatic’ nature ‘of the colonial experience’, is only understood appropriately through the understanding of this second rank of cultural identity. According to Hall, from this point we can understand that the representations of ‘black people’ and ‘black experiences’ by ‘the dominant regimes’ resulted from the ‘critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation’. He claims that it is ‘not only in Said’s ‘Orientalist’ sense’’ of analysing the western knowledge created ‘by those regimes’ that we are described ‘as different and other’. However, those regimes ‘had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as ‘other’.’ He considers ‘every regime of representation’ as ‘a regime of power formed’¹³.

3-Homi Bhabha’s Hybridity and Mimicry

On the second hand, we will rely on the Indian theorist Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial concepts: Hybridity and Mimicry. These concepts are inevitable with the study of the Diasporas characters that are presented in our two selected novels.

a- Hybridity

In Oxford dictionary; *Oxford Learners Pocket Dictionary* (2015), the noun hybrid refers to an ‘animal or plant produced from two different species’¹⁴. In colonial and postcolonial literatures, Hybridity makes reference mainly to the combination of the eastern

and the western culture, and commonly hybrid refers to the colonized people from the third world countries; Asia and Africa, who make a balance between the eastern and western cultural qualifications.¹⁵ the term was first included within the postcolonial discourse in the essays of the theorist Homi Bhabha.

In Bill Ashcroft et al *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2007), it is acclaimed that Hybridity is among the most used and discussed ‘terms in post-colonial theory’. According to the theorists, we generally mean by this term ‘the creation of new transcultural forms’ due to the direct contact with the colonizer through colonization. It has variant types such as: ‘linguistic, cultural, political, racial, etc.’

The theorists affirm that Homi Bhabha argues that all cultures are formed in a space that is called ‘Third space of enunciation’ (1994:37).¹⁶ Therefore, ‘cultural identity always emerges’ in this space that is considered to be a ‘contradictory and ambivalent space’. They claim that this process confirms for Bhabha the inability to hold the ‘hierarchical ‘purity’ of cultures’.¹⁷ In addition, they assume that the idea of hybridity is important, because it is mainly in the ‘third space’ or in what is also called ‘‘in-between’ space’ that ‘the burden and meaning of culture’ is found.¹⁸

b- Mimicry

According to Oxford Dictionary; *Oxford: Learner’s Pocket Dictionary* (2015), to mimic is ‘to copy the way somebody speaks, etc in an amusing way’ or ‘look or behave like something else’, and its noun ‘Mimicry’ stands for the ‘action or skill of mimicking somebody’.¹⁹ In reference to post-colonial studies, this concept of ‘mimicry’ was first used by the theorist Homi Bhabha to refer to the situation in which the colonized people imitate the culture of the colonizer. However, according to him this imitation process is always

interrupted by the fact that the colonized person would never be able to be one of the colonizers.

Besides, Bill Ashcroft et al have also stressed the importance of this 'term in post-colonial theory', since it represents 'the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized'.²⁰ They affirm that this process is considered to be a threat for the colonial power; indeed its result does not only consist of imitating the colonizer. However, it creates what is called a "blurred copy" of the colonizer'. For the reason that according to these theorists: 'mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics',²¹ referring to Bhabha's statement that: 'it is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double'.²² This fact weakens the dominance of the colonial power and its ability to control 'the behaviour of the colonized.'

In this way, the theorists assume that even though mimicry has been an intended purpose of 'the imperial policy', its realisation signs for its 'weakness'.²³ They explain the need of colonialism for this process of imitation, in order to create what Macaulay had already explained in his declaration to be 'a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals, and in intellect'.²⁴ Thus, according to the theorists' analysis of Macaulay's words, it means that the mimicry process is intended 'to be hybridized and therefore ambivalent' by 'the imperial discourse', in order to be efficient.

Moreover, the theorists refer to Bhabha's view of mimicry to be a 'crucial' term for being ambivalent.²⁵ He considers that it results in the reproduction of the 'colonized subject', which is "almost the same, but not quite"²⁶ Additionally, they have mentioned that the adaptation of the colonizers properties 'contains both mockery and a certain 'menace'',²⁷

confirming Bhabha's statement that: "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace".²⁸ In that way, they conclude that: 'Mimicry reveals the limitation in the authority of colonial discourse, almost as though colonial authority inevitably embodies the seeds of its own destruction'. They mention that the "mimic man", which Bhabha had claimed, is the effect of what he had described²⁹ as: "a flawed colonial mimesis in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English".³⁰

B-Materials

1-Summary of the novels

a- Summary of *The Namesake* (2003)

The Namesake was published in 2003 by the Indian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri. In 2006 it was adapted into a much known film carrying the same title.³¹ The novel's whole story is about the Ganguli family; an Indian immigrant family in the United States of America, which consists of two different immigrant generations. The Ganguli couple Ashoke and Ashima got wed through an arranged marriage in their homeland Calcutta, and then moved to the USA, where they got their two American-born children: Gogol and Sonia.

The story is divided into twelve chapters. The two first chapters present the new arrivals into America: Ashoke and Ashima, telling about their memories and nostalgia for their old lives in India through flashbacks. From chapter three, the narration emphasizes more on Gogol Ganguli; their first-born child and the novel's protagonist, tracking his life from childhood into adulthood. As an American-born child, the protagonist has troubles with his name because of his indigenous cultural heritage of nomenclature which dictates the need of each child to have a pair names: a pet name and a good name, the last one has to be meaningful and given by an old member of the family. However, when Gogol is born, the letter sent by his mother's grandmother carrying his 'good name' does not arrive. Therefore,

his parents decide to go for a pet name. Ashoke gives his child the last name of his favourite Russian author, Nikolai Gogol, whose book is considered as personal savior for him during the terrible train accident he had in India. Within the American foreign culture, Gogol's 'pet name' is transferred to be his 'good name', the fact that disturbs the protagonist's whole life through the narratives.

Jhumpa Lahiri sets the majority of her narratives in America, in cities such as: Cambridge, Boston and New York. However, she moves it into India in chapter four to emphasize the different effect of the native country on two distinctive immigrant generations. *The Namesake* is told in the third narrative point of view. Nevertheless, the narrator gives insight into the deep thoughts of the character.³² It 'is a novel of identities'³³; it deals with how people form their own identity through time and experiences with reference to characters such as: Gogol, Moushumi and Ashima.

b- Summary of *Americanah* (2013)

Americanah is the novel of the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It was first published in 2013. It tells the story of young Nigerian students: the female and male protagonists Ifemelu and Obinze, who have been lovers since school days. However, when Ifemelu moves to the United States of America through a study visa, the couple break up and Obinze flees to Britain as an illegal immigrant. Each one adventures in a new place with different immigrant experiences. Ifemelu discovers new things about race in America and turns to be a blogger who writes about racial issues there. Obinze comes back to his country after he has been deported. However, once in Nigeria again, he succeeds to become a wealthy businessman and he makes his own small family. By the end of the novel's story, the couple meet again in their homeland after Ifemelu's return to Nigeria, and renew their romantic relationship.

The story is divided into seven main parts. It is told in the third person and follows Ifemelu in the majority of the narratives that is built objectively, except for the protagonists' thoughts and feelings, in addition to Ifemelu's blog posts that are 'based on her own observations of and opinions on race in America.'³⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie stresses on identity in her novel and its relationship with race and nationality; she follows the growing up of her protagonists: Ifemelu and Obinze, their clash with identity abroad, and finally the finding of their place of belonging in their homeland Nigeria.

Endnotes

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III. Results and Discussion

A-Results

This research paper has examined the Hindu and the Black immigrants' experience, through the analysis of the two literary works, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). This analysis has relied on some of post-colonial concepts introduced by some well known theorists.

Based on our investigations of the two works and of the author's biographies, we have noticed the authors' influence by their own immigrant experiences in the creation of their Diasporic writings; Lahiri as second and Adichie as first immigrant generation. In addition, we have noticed their focus on the immigrants' concerns from their original communities; the Indian Bengali and the Nigerian Igbo communities, due to their belonging and their direct contact with those communities. The second finding consists of the existing resemblance between the Bengalis and the Igbo immigrant experiences, despite their belonging into two different areas and two distinct cultures

Moreover, we have noticed the difference in the process of integration into the host society between the two different generations of immigrants. On the first hand, for the first generation immigrant, assimilation in some cases is an obligatory option in order to achieve personal and professional accomplishments. On the second hand, assimilation for the second generation immigrant is a spontaneous process. Therefore, their perception of their country of origins differs from each others. However, the two immigrant generations have not succeeded to shield themselves from racial and cultural discrimination in western societies, where the "other" stands for the majority, resulting in internal and identity conflicts.

Thus, we have also observed that the immigrants' attempts to integrate lead them into identity transformation and duality, affecting their old identities and their sense of belonging whether to the new or to the original community as hybrid characters, particularly in the case of the first generation immigrants.

Our analyses of the authors' biographies and their literary works have permitted us to conclude that both of Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Adichie's *Americanah* are semi-autobiographical novels. Indeed, they are the fictional outcome of their realistic immigrant experiences. The authors demonstrate the nature of the Hindu and the Black immigrant experience in western countries.

B-Discussion

This section is an analysis of the two selected literary works: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). First, in chapter one, we will examine the authors' biographical inspirations in the realization of their literary works, and then we will deal with a comparative study based on the similarities between the two novels' characters and their immigrant experiences. In chapter two we will stress our study on some of the analogous themes developed in the two novels focus on the already presented theoretical concepts that are: cultural identity, hybridity and mimicry.

Chapter one

Biographical Elements and Inspirations in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013)

1-The authors' Biographical Inspirations

Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are ‘two of the most prominent and acclaimed’ female ‘writers of their generation’¹ in the twenty-first century. As immigrant authors, they created the best in the literature of immigration. Each one was influenced by specific circumstances of her environment in accomplishing her work. Despite the fact that the authors belong into two different immigrant generations; Lahiri had grown in America, and Adichie has moved there in order to study, their immigrant experience remains nearly the same. It is coloured with the struggle for identity, the search for the true home of belonging and the cultural conflict resulting from being split by two cultures.

1-1- Jhumpa Lahiri’s Biography and its Connections with *The Namesake* (2003)

Jhumpa Lahiri by her second name “Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri” is an Indian American author. She was born on July 11, 1967 in London to Indian immigrants and educated parents from Bengali heritage, Calcutta, in the eastern part of India. Her family moved from London into the United States of America when she was still young. Although they lived abroad, Lahiri’s parents ‘remained’ close to their Bengali-Indian culture and decided to transmit it to their children. Jhumpa Lahiri started her career as a writer after she had finished her school. The author graduated with a B.A. in English literature from Barnard College in 1989, as she completed her ‘three master’s degrees in: (English, Creative Writing and Comparative Literature and arts)’, and obtained her doctorate in Renaissance Studies during the 1990s from Boston University. Among her known literary works her debut collection of short stories *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), for which the author won the Pulitzer Prize in 2000, *The Namesake* (2003) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008).²

These debut works are worthy for their loyal depiction of the Indian immigrants in America, particularly the Bengalis immigrants³ from her original community. Lahiri writes about their different experiences and struggles as foreigners. Through Lahiri’s declarations in

her interviews and the analysis conducted on her previous literary works and articles, it is concluded that Jhumpa ‘Lahiri’s fiction is autobiographical’, since the author appeals in her writings for her own experiences as the daughter of Bengalis immigrants parents, as well as those of her parents, her friends and her familiar circle from Bengalis communities.⁴

The Namesake is our main subject of analysis in this dissertation. It is Lahiri’s first novel and masterpiece in which she explores the cultural conflicts involved between two different cultures: the American and the Bengali, and between two different immigrant generations: the first and the second. Concerning this novel, the author declares: “A lot of the novel rose out of my experiences growing up...and while *The Namesake* is not explicitly autobiographical, it sticks pretty closely to the general way I was raised.”⁵In that way, *The Namesake* is one of Lahiri’s novels that might be considered as an inspiration from her real life.⁶

Therefore, this novel has biographical dimensions. First, in terms of settings, Calcutta is the city where the author comes from in India, and New England, in the United States, is where the author has been grown up. Second, in terms of the characters’ behaviours that might be assumed to be the fictional outcome of the author’s concrete experiences, observations and contact either with the family members or friends from Bengali community. Hence, our analysis is based on some of these characters in comparison with Jhumpa Lahiri’s person and surroundings.

Accordingly, we start with the characters close to Lahiri for being the descendants of Bengalis immigrant parents in America. In this way, they are the components of the second generation immigrant. In the first place, we have the Gangulis’ children, the male protagonist Gogol and his sister Sonia. These characters share with Lahiri the same place of growth, all of them have been raised in New England;⁷ the northern-eastern region of the United States.

Additionally, in a written essay by Jhumpa Lahiri about her conflicting immigrant experience entitled *My Two Lives* (2006), the writer speaks about her family's long and regular visits into their home country, she declares: "In addition to my distinguishing name and looks, I did not attend Sunday school, did not know how to ice-skate, and disappeared to India for months at a time."⁸ The case of Gogol and Sonia in *The Namesake*, these characters are described to be disturbed for taking them away from their acquainted American life, in *The Namesake* Lahiri writes: "There had been the same frequent trips to Calcutta, being plucked out of their American lives for months at a time."⁹

On a particular way, our protagonist Gogol in *The Namesake* has an interesting common personal experience with the author. In the novel's story, Gogol has troubles with his name, specifically as an immigrant child; he does not have a 'good name' like any ordinary Bengali child. Therefore, he is forced to use his 'pet name' on official papers and places. This situation disturbs him and leads him to feel himself prisoner, discomfited and out of sorts, Lahiri writes: "For by now, he comes to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain."¹⁰ on her side, Jhumpa Lahiri had nearly a similar experience with her name, at school, she was encouraged by her teachers to only keep 'her family nickname Jhumpa', for being easier to pronounce¹¹ instead of 'her birth name Niljana'¹². In a previous interview with the author, she confesses: "I always felt so embarrassed by my name. You feel like you're causing someone pain just by being who you are. It was easier for teachers to use my pet name instead of my proper name."¹³

Consequently, both of the author and her protagonist experience denial for their inherited culture. On the first hand, Jhumpa Lahiri confesses in an interview on National Public Radio her hardships of being different in America and her wish to distantiate herself from her Indian roots, saying: "I wanted to pull away from the things that marked my parents as being different."¹⁴ Similarly, on the other hand, from chapter five in *The Namesake*, when

Gogol attends Yale College in New Haven, he changes his name into 'Nikhil', and decides to have a fresh start with the new person he becomes, Nikhil keeps distance from his parents and from all the things that remind him of his parents' restraint world in Boston.

Moushumi is another character in *The Namesake* who belongs to the second generation immigrant, she is Gogol's wife. As a female character, her immigrant struggle might be closer to the author's one. This character struggles to accept her family's traditional way of living and the status of being a 'Bengali woman'. Her parents do not agree with her American behaviours and wish her to behave according to this status. The case of Lahiri who speaks about her parents' inability to consider her as an American rather than an Indian, she says: "According to my parents, I was not American, nor would I ever be no matter how hard I tried."¹⁵

As a result, the two immigrant girls create a third identity for themselves as their own shelter. By the end of the novel, Moushumi chooses French as her third tongue and culture that is far away from her conflicted ones; Bengali and English,¹⁶ as it is mentioned in *The Namesake*: "Immersing herself in a third language, a third culture, had been her refuge".¹⁷ Moushumi's running into the French language and culture is assumed to be similar to Lahiri's relief in Italian language in which she has written her recent literary works. In her research paper, Carole Martin writes: "Similar to Lahiri's flight to Italian, Moushumi flees to French, which emerges as the dynamic third point of the triangle."¹⁸

Additionally, the Bengalis parents in the novel seem similar to Lahiri's parents in being so committed and loyal to their Bengali origins and traditions, as they are interested in introducing this culture to their American- born children. These characters have never thought of America as their home, despite the years spent there, about Ashima, Lahiri writes: "...after twenty years in America, she still cannot bring herself to refer to Pemberton Road as

home.”¹⁹The author affirms the same thing about her parents, saying: “For my parents, home was not our house in Rhode Island but Calcutta, where they were raised.”²⁰

Lahiri explains how it was hard for her parents to integrate in the American society. She declares that in the market the salesman used to talk to her because of her parent’s accent, the author recalls: “Anytime we were in some sort of situation in a store – buying a machine or something like that – if I happened to be there, the salesman would talk to me, assuming that my parents didn’t understand English.”²¹ The scene is referred to in the novel through the experience of protagonist’s parents, the narrator writes: “For by now he is aware, in stores, of cashiers smirking at his parents’ accent, and of salesman who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf.”²²

1-2-Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Biography and its Connections with *Americanah* (2013)

Our second author is the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. ‘She was born on September 15, 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria’. She is the daughter of Igbo educated parents. Adichie was raised in Nsukka;²³ in a University town, where her parents worked. She studied medicine and pharmacy in the University of Nigeria. However, at the age of nineteen, she moved to the United States of America in order to study there. In 2003, she got her first master’s degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University, and during the academic year of 2005-2006, she got a fellowship at Princeton University. In 2008, she completed another master’s degree in African studies, in that same year, she obtained the MacArthur Fellowship,²⁴ which consists of a prize offered specifically for United States’ citizens and residents, who have extraordinary capacities in any field of study.²⁵ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the youngest Anglophone authors, who have gained the attraction of new readers from the new

generation to read the African literature. The author was inspired by African authors and literature such as her compatriots, Chinua Achebe and Buchi Emecheta.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a feminist author, she has drawn on her feminist perspective in works such as: *The Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *The Things Around your Neck* (2009) and *Americanah* (2013).²⁶ This feminist perspective has been declared overtly in her recent works such as: her book-length essay “*We Should All Be Feminists*” (2014) and *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017). Additionally, Adichie is also an immigrant author; she had experienced the feeling of being abroad, which she expresses in works such as *Americanah* (2013) that is the subject of interest in our dissertation. Similarly to Jhumpa Lahiri, she has transmitted through her narratives the messages and the cry of her diasporic community.

Americanah is Adichie’s third novel for which the author won the *National Book Critics Circle Award* in 2013. This novel depicts to its readers the social and the historical upheaval of Nigeria. In 1966, the country falls under military control and sectors such as the higher education sector was affected with unlimited strikes and miserable working conditions, these conditions encouraged Nigerians to flee their country and apply for visa to the United States of America or to the United Kingdom.²⁷ The case of the novel’s protagonists: Obinze, Ifemelu and their colleagues from University. In addition, the novel speaks overtly about racism, Adichie confesses her willingness to not treat this issue in a figurative way, as it is usually done in previous works, and intends discussing it with a more dared manner through the inclusion of Ifemelu’s blogs within the novel’s texts.²⁸

According to the researches made about the novel, it is assumed that similarly to Jhumpa Lahiri, Adichie had also been inspired by facts of her own life in creating her fictional works,²⁹ the author affirms: “I’m not interested in perfection, and my writing is very much

rooted in a certain world, and what I try to do in my fiction is to tell (what I've observed).”

About *Americanah*, she adds: “Americanah was just mine, really, and also because I didn't think it would do well, I just let myself do what I wanted to do...I wrote the heck I wanted to write to make myself happy”.³⁰

Therefore, the following analysis is about Adichie's biographical dimensions in this novel in terms of setting and characters, as it has already been done within *The Namesake*.

The author's choice of the setting is due to her knowledge and acquaintance with the places. First, Nigeria is her country of origins, she particularly sets a part of her novel in Nsukka; a town of Enugu state, where the author had been raised. Second, the United States of America is the country which she had reached since she was nineteen years old, and where the author had gained many experiences and knowledge as an immigrant. Adichie declares: “I don't believe in writing what I don't know..., so I feel, having lived in U.S. off and on for a number of years, that I can tell a story partly about America.”³¹

Accordingly, we analyse Adichie's creation of her fictional characters. First, the female protagonist Ifemelu seems close to Adichie, she leaves her Country to study in America as she starts a career as a blogs' writer there. In fact, both of them are Nigerian-born authors who quit their country for America as young students in search of better opportunities. Similarly to Adichie, the protagonist succeeds to get a fellowship at Princeton University; she gets her fellowship for research humanities as it is mentioned in chapter forty. Additionally, in the eyes of Nigerian society, both of them are ‘Americanahs’; ‘the nickname for born-and-

bred Nigerians whose thoughts and behaviours have been influenced by years spent in the States',³² the fact that is well highlighted in the novel through Ifemelu's mannerism after her return to Nigeria. However, in an interview, when Adichie was asked about the existence of a strong autobiographical connection between her and her female protagonist, the author replies:

Ifemelu spends thirteen years in the U.S. before moving back to Nigeria. I spent only four years in the U.S. before I went back, and I have since lived in both countries. That is a significant difference, as much of Ifemelu's character is shaped by being disconnected from home for so long.³³

Nevertheless, according to our research, it is also suggested that Adichie uses the voice of her female protagonist to express her feelings as an immigrant student in America. Adichie shares with her protagonist the same racist experience of discovering their blackness only when they arrive into America, the author affirms: "I wasn't black until I came to America. I became black in America"³⁴. The same experience lived by Ifemelu, who declares in chapter thirty-one: "I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as a black and I only became black when I came to America.",³⁵ and at the end of the novel, in chapter fifty-five, when she confesses: "I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black".³⁶

On the other hand, the male protagonist Obinze is supposed to be closer to Adichie's person, both of them are the children of University professors, and they have been both raised in Nsukka. In an interview, the author confesses: "Somebody who is close to me said, 'Ifemelu is the person you wish you were and Obinze is the person you actually are.' I've been thinking about it and there is a lot of me in Obinze." Similarly to Adichie, this character is also an American dreamer; he is fascinated by the American culture and literature, as he

plans for future studies and life in America. The author describes Obinze as “an idealized character” in *Americanah*, and ‘the perfect man’ for whom she gives a lot of good qualities. Adichie declares: “...Obinze is very much me. I think I gave him a lot of my longings, the things that I wished for and am not. I put a sort of dreamer in him, and I think there’s a huge dreamer in me as well. Obinze is my idealized male self.”³⁷

2- *The Namesake* and *Americanah*: characters’ Affinities

Both the Indian-American Jhumpa Lahiri and the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie present in their literary works, *The Namesake* and *Americanah* respectively middle class and educated immigrants who search for accomplishment and fulfilment in their lives in western countries. Lahiri has always presented immigrants of such category in her narratives³⁸ and Adichie breaks with the tradition of African literature, which often deals with poor, thieves and starving refugees from African countries.³⁹ The authors deal with immigrants from different historical periods. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri introduces immigrants of the 1960s⁴⁰ and Adichie presents in *Americanah* immigrants from the late of 1990s until the beginning of the 2000s.⁴¹ However, their immigrants’ concerns and needs resemble to each other. Therefore, through our deep analysis of the characters in the two novels, we have noticed the existence of noticeable affinities between them.

2-1- Male characters

A-Ashoke and Obinze

First, Ashoke Ganguli is the father of the Ganguli family in *The Namesake*, and Obinze is the male protagonist in *Americanah*.

On the first hand, these characters resemble to each other on the personal level. They are quiet, intelligent and honest, as they are educated men and fond of books. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri describes Ashoke's passion for reading, she writes: "Ashoke's mother was always convinced...That he would be reading a book the moment he died."⁴² Similarly, in *Americanah*, Obinze is also portrayed as a passionate reader. In chapter four, the character talks to his girlfriend Ifemelu about the first time he met her, saying: "I saw you holding a James Hadley Chase, near the lab. And I said, Ah, correct, there is hope. She reads."⁴³ In addition, the two characters are the children of middle-class and highly educated families. As it is mentioned in the novels, Ashoke's paternal grandfather is: "a former professor of European literature at Calcutta University"⁴⁴ and Obinze's mother is also a university professor in Nigeria, this fact has influenced the two characters and has tempted them to explore the world of books.

Moreover, through the narrative, these characters perform their duties nearly in the same way. Once they are married, they behave with sense of responsibility toward their families; they are hard workers and bread-winners. Despite the fact that the two characters are

reserved persons, they are caring and understanding dads. Ashoke tolerates and never judges his son's acts. In a scene from chapter five, when Gogol decides to change his name, Ashoke is shown calm and replies: "Do as you wish."⁴⁵ Obinze, on the other hand decides to confront the reality of his unhappy marriage in order to protect his daughter from living a fake life, he tells Ifemelu: "I want to raise Buchi, I want to see her every day. But I've been pretending all these months and one day she'll be old enough to know I'm pretending."⁴⁶

Additionally, both of the characters have an immigrant experience as the components of the first immigrant generation. Ashoke and Obinze believe in the Western Dream; they have both left their homelands in search for change and improvement. However, the two characters' basic motives are due to the distressing personal and particular events happening in their lives. Ashoke's terrible train accident in India pushes him to think over about his life and about the possibility of restarting a new life abroad. Therefore, the character follows the advice of men who tell him: "pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world as you can."⁴⁷ Obinze is so affected by his breakup with his beloved Ifemelu. Contrary to Obinze whose situation in England turns from a middle-class person into a poor and an illegal immigrant who has been later deported into his homeland, Ashoke's immigrant experience is a successful one, his life improves in America; he prospers both as a student and as a professor.

b- Gogol and Dike

Second, Gogol and Dike are other main characters in Lahiri's and Adichie's novels respectively. Gogol is the protagonist in *The Namesake*, he is the first American-born child of the Gangulis parents, and Dike is the son of Aunty Uju in *Americanah*; Ifemelu's aunt and mentor. Both of these characters belong to the second immigrant generation, they have been raised in America and accustomed to its culture. Therefore, their cultural identities differ from that of their parents who are immigrants from the first generation and have been raised elsewhere. Gogol and Dike are the outcome of hybrid cultures, their cultural identities are formed in what Bhabha calls the 'Third space of enunciation' or the 'in-between space'.⁴⁸

However, in a written article about *The Namesake*, Natalie Friedman assumed that Gogol is not a hybrid character, since according to her 'he immediately declares America to be his home'.⁴⁹ The character shows an ease in being completely assimilated into the American culture, as he finds difficulties in accepting his cultural heritage. In fact, this contrasts with 'the idea of a hybrid' that is 'the immigrant would not fit in with either culture, neither in Indian culture nor the American one in this case'.⁵⁰

In both the narratives, Gogol and Dike's growths have been tracked to the readers from childhood until they become young men. In the beginning of the novels, the two characters have an ordinary childhood. Gogol is 'obedient', talented, 'and sensitive child'⁵¹ and Dike is joyous, funny and delightful kid. However, once they are grown enough to

understand the coexistence of two different identities in their lives, the characters come to live an internal conflict. Gogol tends to isolate himself as it is referred to in the novel: ‘Gogol does not date anyone in high school. He suffers quiet crushes, which he admits to no one, on this girl or that girl with whom he is already friends. He does not attend dances or parties.’⁵² Likewise, Dike becomes silent and more distant. Adichie narrates: “Dike watched, saying little, speaking politely and properly...”⁵³. The character has even written an essay in which he expresses his ambivalent position about his true self.

Nevertheless, their conflicts arise from different circumstances. Gogol is pressed by his parents who always remind him of his Bengalis origins, the fact that leads him to take into consideration the Bengalis traditions and defeat his own wish to live on the American way. Lahiri writes: “During his first semester, obediently but unwillingly, he goes home every other weekend, after his last Friday class.”⁵⁴ On the opposite side, Dike is removed from his Nigerian roots; his mother comes between him and his cultural heritage. In a scene from chapter nine, she tells Ifemelu: “please don’t speak Igbo to him...Two languages will confuse him.”⁵⁵ Her insistence to Americanize him and others’ projection into him as an African, lead him to confusion.⁵⁶

Moreover, the characters bear particular symbolic and physical signals. Gogol’s strange name and Dike’s skin colour act as reminders of their difference in comparison to their American fellows. Since he begins kindergarten, Gogol becomes aware of the ambiguity of his name, his fellows tease him for it and his teachers are unable to pronounce it correctly.

Lahiri writes: “teachers at school always pause, looking apologetic when they arrive at his name on the roster, forcing Gogol to call out, before even being summoned, “That’s me,””⁵⁷

Dike also experiences humiliation at school for being a black child. On several times, his mother receives complaints without evidences about his behaviours. The character is conscious of being a victim of racial discrimination that he declares: “you should blame the black kid first.”⁵⁸

Consequently, these characters react differently to their conflicts. Gogol chooses estrangement and denial of his cultural heritage, the character changes his name and tries to posit himself closer to his American identity. Dike tries to commit suicide and put an end to his life by Tylenol over dose as it is mentioned in chapter forty-one from the novel.

However, at the end of the narratives, both characters have succeeded to reconcile with their original backgrounds. On the first hand, after his father’s death, Gogol finds out the volume of the Russian author Nikolai Gogol which he gave him on his birthday. The book is his father’s favourite collection and Gogol’s namesake. The discovery of that book makes ‘Nikhil’ conciliates with his old self as ‘Gogol’, and feels sadness for its(the name Gogol) disappearance in the near future, Lahiri confirms: “Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all.”⁵⁹ On the other hand, Dike’s visit to Nigeria in chapter fifteen is healing;⁶⁰ through this direct contact with his

country of origins, Dike comes to know more about this community's daily life as he comes to confirm his Nigerian identity.

2-2-The Female Characters

Ashima and Ifemelu

Ashima is the wife of Ashoke and the mother the Gangulis children in *The Namesake*. Ifemelu is the female protagonist and Obinze's beloved in *Americanah*. Like Ashoke and Obinze, these characters belong to the first immigrant generation. They make a journey and discover a new world in America. Both of them are educated women who come from ordinary families. The two female characters travel for different reasons into America. Ashima joins her husband and Ifemelu applies for school. However, their trip remains basically an idea that other people have planned for them. Ashima gets wed through an arranged marriage with a man who lives abroad, and Ifemelu follows her boyfriend American Dream and the advice of her surroundings to leave her country and study abroad.

Moreover, as members of the first immigrant generation, Ashima and Ifemelu have nearly the same immigrant experience. The two characters have suffered from loneliness, homesickness and nostalgia during their first times in America. In addition, both of them have been disappointed by the reality of the American Dream. Ashima turns out to be disappointed on her first sight of her husband's apartment in Cambridge, Lahiri tells us: "It is not at all what she has expected. Not at all like the houses in *Gone with the Wind* or *The Seven-Year*

Itch, movies...”⁶¹. The same thing happens with Ifemelu at her first night in America in Auntie Uju’s modest home of Brooklyn, Adichie describes: “...she had, after all, slept on mats when she visited her grandmother in the village—but this was America at last, glorious America at last, and she had not expected to bed on the floor.”⁶²

As a result, both of these characters undergo disappointment and even despair during their first times abroad. After giving birth to her first child Gogol, Ashima feels depressed to spend all the time alone at home, as it is indicated in the novel: “to her surprise, finding herself once again in the gloomy three-room apartment”⁶³. Additionally, this character feels terrified by the idea of raising her son in a foreign country, she tells her husband: “I’m saying I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It is not right. I want to go back.”⁶⁴ Similarly, Ifemelu endures hard times for being jobless. Her despair pushes her to accept working as relaxing assistant for a white man, this experience destroys her internally and leads her into a severe depression, Adichie illustrates: “the world was big, big place and she was so tiny, so insignificant, rattling around emptily.”⁶⁵

Yet, the two female characters have succeeded to overcome their hardships. Their immigrant experience changes them on the personal level; Ashima and Ifemelu become strong and independent women. Ashima transforms from a householder who relies only on her husband into an independent woman. In chapter seven, the character succeeds to manage her life alone in the absence of her husband and children; she finds a job as a librarian. Ifemelu starts working in a public relations office from chapter nineteenth, and then launching

her successful career in writing Blogs on web site, in which she expresses overly her opinions about racist issues in America.

Through our characters' analysis, and based on the idea that the hybrid 'would not fit in with either culture', ⁶⁶ it is acclaimed that both of Ashima and Ifemelu have been turned into hybrid characters due to their immigrant experience. Throughout the narratives, we notice that these characters struggle to find their true home of belonging, they do not fit in any culture anymore; neither in their original culture nor in the American one.

On the first hand, when Ashima first arrives to America, she shows ambiguity and exoticism toward its culture as she shows nostalgia for her home country, as it is narrated: "On the runway in Boston, her seat belt buckled, Ashima looks at her watch and calculates the Indian time on her fingers."⁶⁷ However, during her long trip into her hometown Calcutta, Ashima seems different from the other Bengali women of her community; once in India, she ceases to be the perfect housewife that she has been in America.⁶⁸ Lahiri writes that Ashima "...shops in New Market and goes to movies and sees her old school friends. For eight months she does not set foot in a kitchen."⁶⁹ Thus, this character shifts in her consideration of her true home of belonging. By the end of the novel, she decides to split herself between India and America,⁷⁰ as the reader is informed in the novel: "Ashima has decided to spend six months of her life in India, six months in the States."⁷¹ The female character is depicted sorrowful for leaving America,

For thirty-three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties. She will miss living with her daughter... She will miss the opportunity to drive, as she sometimes does on her way home from the library, to the University, past the engineering building where her husband once worked. She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband.⁷²

On the other hand, Ifemelu shows also confusion in choosing her place of belonging. Being in America, Ifemelu looks with a critical eye at the American society. The character keeps manifesting her 'Africanness' as she feels longing for her hometown, the narrator tells us: "The crisp air, fragrant and dry, reminded her of Nsukka during the harmattan season, and brought with it a sudden stab of homesickness, so sharp and so abrupt that it filled her eyes with tears."⁷³ Nevertheless, once settled in Nigeria again, Ifemelu seems having an Americanized vision, her friend tells her: "You are looking at things with American eyes. But, the problem is that you are not even a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent, we would tolerate your complaining!"⁷⁴ Despite being in Nigeria, the character is still feeling different and discomforted that she joins the 'Nigerpolitan' club, where Nigerians returnees meet each other.

Ifemelu's problem is considered to be different from the problem of the other hybrid people, in the sense that this character has no difficulty in choosing one place as home, but in remaining stuck with it. This contrasts with the already given definition of Hybridity. According to our research, Ifemelu's problem come also in the others' projection of her and their rejection for her choice; the American black community that tends more to Africanize

her, and her Nigerian friends who continually call her 'Americanah' on her return to Nigeria.⁷⁵

Through these two female characters, Lahiri and Adichie represent in a particular way the feminine immigrants experience and their multiple struggles: a struggle to be integrated, a struggle for honour and also a struggle to preserve their cultural identity as women bearers of culture. Ashima has never ceased to wear her traditional clothes, and Ifemelu keeps wearing her natural, braided and African hair.

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Chapter Two: Themes in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Americanah* (2013).

In this chapter, we will investigate the levels of similarity between Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Adichie's *Americanah* in terms of themes. We will analyse some of the common themes developed through the diasporic narratives. We intend to implement our analysis with the already discussed theoretical concepts and devices, namely mimicry and cultural identity.

1-Assimilation

Both of Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie depict to their readers immigrant characters who attempt to mingle with 'the receiving society' so as to diminish their 'intimidating feeling of being an outsider'.¹ This leads them to the process of assimilation that Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess first define as: 'A process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitude of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated in a common cultural life'²

Later, by the beginning of the twenty-first century we came to have a more convinced explanation of the term. Alba and Nee in their book *Remaking the American Mainstream* (2003), agree that 'America's immigrants' 'may not intentionally seek to assimilate'; indeed their attempts to integrate can lead to changes in attitudes but not to 'eventual assimilation'.³

In this way, 'assimilation is not a single event but a constant, complex process. It occurs in stages, with some individuals and groups reaching more advanced stages in the process than others.'⁴

Jhumpa Lahiri in, *The Namesake*, distinguishes the difference in the process of assimilation into the American culture between her Indian immigrant characters; those of the first generation and those of the second one.

Starting with characters from the first immigrant generation, we select the main characters that are the Gangulis parents. Ashima's and Ashoke's assimilating process passes through different stages which confirm Alba and Nee's definition of the term. During their first times in America, India still marks its presence in their daily lives. The couple struggle to preserve its culture through food, dress, and the celebration of Indian rituals such as their celebration of Gogol's annaprasan to which they invite all of their Bengalis friends; it is 'a rice ceremony that marks an infant's first intake of food other than milk.'⁵ Lahiri writes: "There is no baptism for Bengali babies, no ritualistic naming in the eyes of god. Instead, the first formal ceremony of their lives centers on the consumption of solid food."⁶ This ceremony demonstrates the Bengalis parents' attempt to 'create a semblance of India in America'.⁷

Furthermore, they have tried to pursue the Bengali traditions of nomenclature. They give the decision of naming their first-born child to an old family member that is Ashima's grandmother, as they have tried to follow the Bengali tradition in attributing a pair of names

for their child in America. In addition, the Indian couple ‘create a close circle of friends that consists exclusively of other Bengali immigrants’,⁸ so as to feel at home and feel secured from being integrated into the American society. Lahiri writes: “every weekend, it seems there is a new home to go to, a new couple or young family to meet. They all come from Calcutta and for this reason alone they are friends.”⁹

Their attachment to their ancestral culture is reflected in the raising of their children. Ashima and Ashoke initiate their children to the Bengali culture and sow respect for it in them. In chapter three, the narrator points out: “When Gogol is in the third grade, they send him to Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday, held in the home of one of their friends...In Bengali class, Gogol is taught to read and write his ancestral alphabet”.¹⁰

However, once the Gangulis children Gogol and Sonia grow up, the couple ‘have to accept more and more American traditions’¹¹ for their sake. These immigrants from the first generation become integrated into the American society; they start to celebrate American parties such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, and Ashima learns to prepare American food such as the roast turkeys that Americans cook on Thanksgiving, Hamburgers and sandwiches, the narrator illustrates: “For the sake of Gogol and Sonia, they celebrate with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati.”¹²

In Addition to their children’s sake, being on a foreign territory where the culture of the “other” stands for the majority the Ganguli couple are forced to give up some of their

Bengali traditions. They accept their child's pet name 'Gogol' to become his 'good name' under the pressure of cultural conflict, as they agree for one name to their second born baby Sonia, rather than to repeat the same mistake of maintaining a tradition which can never match with the American society, Lahiri affirms,

They've learned their lesson after Gogol. They've learned that schools in America will ignore parents' instructions and register a child under his pet name. The only way to avoid such confusion, they have concluded is to do away with the pet name altogether, as many of their Bengali friends have already done. For their daughter, good name and pet name are one and the same¹³

Particularly, Ashima experiences an interesting 'assimilating' process through which she makes a great improvement as a traditional woman. The female character has been able to defeat her fear of assimilation; her transformation is well demonstrated through the narrative. By the time Ashima becomes accustomed with the celebration of American holidays, she organizes for the occasions under no obligations. In chapter seven, when she has been left at home alone after her husband's departure to Cleveland for a job, Ashima succeeds to behave as an American woman; she lives on her own, gets a part-time job at a library and opens her circle of friends to American women. This is best illustrated in the novel: "she is friendly with the other women who work at the library...they are the first American friends she has made in her life...on occasion she has her library friends over the house for lunch, goes shopping with them on weekends to outlet stores in Maine."¹⁴

Moreover, Ashima's assimilation is also demonstrated through the changes of her attitude. She respects and accepts Gogol's romantic relationship with an American girl, as she

changes her opinion about divorce, respecting Gogol and Moushumi's decision to break up, and giving up 'the Bengali belief that marriage should not be ended under any circumstances'.¹⁵ She also welcomes the marriage of her daughter Sonia with a non-Bengali man, basically for the sake of her children's happiness. Through the introduction of this first immigrant generation characters, the author refers to their double struggle; the struggle to preserve their ancestral culture and the struggle to assimilate into the new one.

Unlike the parents' slow and progressive assimilation, the children go through an immediate assimilation process. As the components of the second generation immigrant, Gogol and Sonia see with another eye their homeland, they 'build an image of the culture of their ancestors on the information passed down by their parents',¹⁶ and they 'become fully incorporated into the American culture', not really care for knowing 'so little about their parents' homeland'.¹⁷ The point is well referred to in the novel. In chapter three, the narrator mentions that Gogol and his colleagues from Bengali origins do not really enjoy their Bengali lectures planned by their parents, describing: "the children in the class study without interest, wishing they could be at ballet or softball practice instead"¹⁸, as he indicates that when their parents gather at the home of one of the Bengali families, it is only the adults who speak Bengali, instead their children will isolate themselves in a room watching American movies.

On a specific way, since childhood, the protagonist Gogol proves his admiration for the American culture rather than for his Bengali cultural heritage. The character feels bored during their long visits into Calcutta. He complains about some Hindu rituals that his parents'

practice. He even objects to the name ABCD that stands for the American Born Confused Desh, mainly because the term means marginality for him. The fact that is well exemplified in the novel: “Gogol is bored by the panelists who keep referring to something called “marginality””.¹⁹ The character adapts an American accent and attitudes; he shows the defiant behaviour of an American son, when he changes his name, as ‘he ignores his parents’ objections concerning his profession’.²⁰ Lahiri writes: “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...but now that he’s Nikhil it’s easier to ignore his parents”.²¹

Therefore, Gogol, as the member of the second immigrant generation, represents the dominant foreign culture. The character seems completely assimilated into the American culture. He separates himself from his parents and lives alone on American ways; he has been in relationships with many women, as ‘he spends his time having fun at parties’²² like any ordinary American teenager. Gogol confirms his obsession with ‘western values such as Independence and personal freedom’²³. He feels himself free from all the barriers of his ancestral culture, when he changes his name, Lahiri writes: “He wonders if this is how it feels for an obese person to become thin, for a prisoner to walk free.”²⁴ Thus, Gogol belongs to the class of people that Lord Maculay describes in *Minute to Parliament* 1835 as: “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”²⁵

In a similar way, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's immigrant characters in *Americanah* are also exposed to the process of assimilation. Indeed for Adichie's characters, assimilation is not only an obligatory and an efficient process for them in order to be accepted, but also to take hold of the presented opportunities. Assimilation in *Americanah* is well demonstrated through the characters' changing of behaviours, language and physical appearances in order to fit into the new society. It is demonstrated through the narratives, and through both of Ifemelu and Obinze's critical observations of some characters.

First, we begin with Aunty Uju; Ifemelu's aunt. She immigrates to America with her new-born child Dike, years before Ifemelu. When they were in Nigeria, Aunty Uju and Ifemelu maintain a close relationship, but once they are in America, Ifemelu senses a sort of change in her behaviour from the instant, when she comes to pick her up from the airport. Adichie narrates: "there is something different about her. Ifemelu had noticed it right away at the airport, her roughly braided hair, her ears bereft of earrings, her quick casual hug, as it has been weeks rather than years since they had last seen each other."²⁶ Through the narrator's description of this character in America and under Ifemelu's observations, it is concluded that Aunty Uju is adapting the American way of being and the American mannerism. She has become the busy woman in a capitalist country, whose only concern is to gain much money and pay her fees.

Additionally, Ifemelu notices her changed accent. In chapter nine, when they are in a grocery with Ifemelu, Aunty Uju addresses to her son with an American accent in front of Americans: "Dike, put it back," Aunty Uju said, with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans."²⁷ This suggests her attempt to hide her African origins due to the low esteem of Africa. Through this character, Adichie emphasizes on how African immigrants fall in the process of assimilation in order to fit with the American ideals and superiority.

The second character is Emenike, Obinze's old friend from University, who immigrates to Britain. Emenike is another character in the novel who symbolizes the mimic behaviours of the western culture. His first step to integrate into the American society is to marry a white woman who offers him a luxurious house in Islington, as he surrounds himself with 'his wife's sophisticated circle of white friends'.²⁵ Emenike shows 'an exaggerated appreciation for the white culture',²⁸ as he agrees with the western stereotypes about Africa to achieve his personal interests.

Emenike's attempt to assimilate is referred to through the eyes of Obinze during his stay in England. When Emenike introduces his English wife to Obinze in chapter twenty nine, Obinze notices Emenike's changing behaviour in front of her so as to meet her expectations as an English woman. Adichie writes: "He had changed. His voice had taken on an unfamiliar modulation, his delivery slower, and the temperature of his entire being much lower."²⁹ In another scene from the same chapter, Obinze is invited into Emenike's house. Sitting and talking together, Obinze is astonished to hear him talking about 'good furniture', which is typically a European concept, especially when the furniture concerned is an old one: "he could talk about "good furniture," as though the idea of "good furniture" was not alien in their Nigerian world, where new things were supposed to look new."³⁰

Emenike's mimicry of western behaviours leads him to mockery. This fits in very well with Bhabha's and the other theorists' reference to mimicry as a 'mockery', as it is explained by Bill Ashcroft et al that mimicry 'can appear to parody whatever it mimics'.³¹ This perception of mimicry is invoked in the novel when Emenike wants to invite his friend Obinze to his home, but feels hesitating for not informing his wife, as it is illustrated through the depiction of Emenike's estate in the following paragraph,

"...I would have asked you to come and stay with us but it's not a decision I can take alone. Georgina won't understand. You know these oyinbo don't

behave like us.” His lips moved, forming something that looked like a smirk. He was making fun of his wife, but Obinze knew, from the muted awe in his tone, that it was mockery colored by respect, mockery of what he believed, despite himself, to be inherently superior.³²

In spite of being a critical observer in the novel, Ifemelu falls in the process of a forced assimilating attempt as an African woman in order to get more professional and social opportunities in America. In chapter nineteen, when Ifemelu applies for a job and is called for an interview, her friend advises her to change her hairstyle saying: “My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job.”³³ In addition, Ifemelu changes her Nigerian accent due to her embarrassment toward Americans’ response to her in slow and careful English, which makes her feel like the narrator describes it: “... a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling.”³⁴ Through this character, Adichie informs the reader that assimilation for some African immigrants means the right path to their success.

Yet, over time, Ifemelu becomes conscious that her American accent is something she pretends, it is fake and adopted, as Adichie explains: “from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of t, the creamy roll of r, the sentences starting with “so”, and the sliding response of “oh really,””³⁵, as she realizes that: “If she were in panic, or terrified, or jerked awake during a fire, she would not remember how to produce those American sounds.”³⁶

The character decides to take back her African accent, and starts again wearing her hair naturally, under the influence of a Kenyan colleague and friend, who tells her: “Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You’re caged in. Your hair rules you.”³⁷

Finally, through our deep analysis of the two novels, we may conclude that the characters discussed above, have never achieved the intended conformity despite their

assimilating attempts. In *The Namesake*, the protagonist Gogol has not been able to distract himself completely from his Bengali origins. Despite the character's immersion in American culture, he is still considered as 'the other', as it is referred to in the novel from chapter six. When Gogol meets the parents of his American girlfriend, on the occasion of celebrating his twenty-seventh birthday, a middle-aged woman tells him that he is lucky, because he could visit India without being affected by the climate. Even though she knows that he has been raised in Boston, she tells him: "I'd think the climate wouldn't affect you, given your heritage."³⁸

Similarly, in *Americanah*, it is clearly demonstrated through racist illustrations that for white Americans, black people are all the same, whether black Americans or black non-Americans, educated or not educated. In a scene from chapter eleven, Aunt Uju confirms this reality, telling Ifemelu: "All of us look alike to white people"³⁹. Aunt Uju, despite all her efforts to improve herself in America; she has succeeded to become a qualified doctor in America, 'Americans still react with doubt and suspicious at the thought of her being a doctor'⁴⁰. Adichie illustrates: "Sometimes she told the same stories twice...How she walked into an examining room and a patient asked "Is the doctor coming?" and when she said she was the doctor, the patient's face changed to fired clay."⁴¹

This racist assumptions support Bhabha's declaration about "colonial mimicry", which consists of creating 'a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same' as the colonizer, 'but not quite'.⁴² Meaning the colonized people would never be considered equal to the colonizers. It also corresponds to his claim that the "mimic man" is resulted from 'a flawed colonial mimesis in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English'.⁴³

2-Cultural conflict and identity

In his research work, Javeed Ahmad Raina concludes that culture and identity are often related to each other. However, they do not have exactly the same meaning. The researcher explains that: ‘Culture represents the ‘macro-pattern’ –the big picture. It includes the customs, attitudes, beliefs, traditions and rituals of a society. Identity represents the smaller, ‘more micro’ meaning we have as individuals.’⁴⁴

These two concepts are vividly discussed in both Lahiri and Adichie’s work, since we are dealing with diasporic writing, which is mainly concerned with characters dispersing their homelands for new ones. Thereby, these characters encounter cultural differences on their new chosen soil resulted in identity crisis. Thus, both of the selected literary works stress on the role of culture and upbringing in creating one’s cultural identity.

2-1-cultural conflict

Within *The Namesake*, the narrator sheds light on the cultural clashes and differences between the two presented cultures: the American and the Indian-Bengali culture, mainly through the comparison of the Gangulis family with their American surroundings. Ashoke and Ashima are more exposed to be confronted by these clashes since they have been raised in India. Indeed, they feel more attached to their ancestral culture than this new adopted one.

Ashima’s first cultural clash as a traditional Indian woman appears in the novel from the first pages, when the female character is in the hospital to give birth to her first child. Lahiri narrates: “she is asked to remove her Murshidabad silk sari in favor of a flowered cotton gown that, to her mild embarrassment, only reaches her knees.”⁴⁵ Her malaise toward the new confronted culture continues throughout her silent observations in the hospital as it is illustrated in the narratives: “And then a man’s voice: “I love you, sweetheart.” Words

Ashima has neither heard nor expects to hear from her own husband; this is not how they are.”⁴⁶ In this expression, the narrator admits the existence of “we” and “they” in the novel.

Moreover, this strange environment of the hospital leads Ashima to think about the traditions of her Bengali society. The character remembers that back at home, women go to their parents’ home to give birth. As a result, she feels sorrowful for her child who will be born in the hospital. Lahiri writes: “Ashima thinks that it’s strange that her child will be born in a place most people enter either to suffer or to die.”⁴⁷ In addition, as a new comer to the United States of America, this character arrives with an already constructed opinion and stereotypes about the American society, as the narrator illustrates:

She wishes the curtains were open, so that she could talk to the American women. Perhaps one of them has given birth before, can tell her what to expect. But she has gathered that Americans, in spite of their public declarations of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other on the Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy.⁴⁸

When the Ganguli couple get their first and new born child in America, they come into friction with another cultural clash concerning nomenclature. For Bengalis, a new born child can go with a pet name, without being recorded during his first years, and it will only be used and known by members of his family. Thus, the Bengali parents can take their time until he joins school, to choose the good name for him. The narrator illustrates: “Names can wait. In India parents take their time.”⁴⁹ However, once in America, the Gangulis parents experience another naming system, Lahiri writes: “...they learn that in America, a baby cannot be released from the hospital without a birth certificate.”⁵⁰

Therefore, the couple are forced to register their child under his pet name. Ashima and Ashoke are terrified by the fact of seeing their child’s pet name, supposed to be private, written on official papers or used by foreigners. Lahiri writes: “When Ashima and Ashoke see

their son's pet name typed on the label of a prescription for antibiotics, when they see it at the top of his immunization record, it doesn't look right. Pet names aren't meant to be made public in this way."⁵¹ The difference in nomenclature traditions between these two cultures, suggests a great cultural gap. This is far and wide referred to in the novel when Mr. Wilcox, who works as a compiler of hospital birth certificates, tries to help them, suggesting to name the baby after one of their ancestors, Lahiri writes:

But this isn't possible. Ashima and Ashoke think to themselves. This tradition doesn't exist for Bengalis, naming a son after a father or grandfather, a daughter after mother or grandmother. This sign of respect in America and Europe, this symbol of heritage and lineage, would be ridiculed in India within Bengali families, individual names are sacred, inviolated. They are not meant to be inherited or shared."⁵²

Gogol has also made a constant comparison between their Hindu culture and the American one since his childhood. When the character makes a school trip to cemetery, he and his colleagues are asked to search for their ancestors' names among the graves. This visit pushes Gogol to remember their peculiar Hindu rituals for dead people in comparison to his American colleagues as it is illustrated: "Gogol is old enough to know that there is no Ganguli here. He is old enough to know that he, himself, will be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life."⁵³

The protagonist continues his comparisons and assessments through the narrative when he becomes an adult man. Engaged in a romantic relationship with an American woman named Maxine, Gogol's immersion with Maxine's family leads him to compare between his family's life style and theirs. First, he notices their eating menus and eating styles. On the eating table, the small amount of food draws Gogol's attention into Bengali's way of serving the gusts, Lahiri clarifies: "His own mother would never have served so few dishes to a guest."⁵⁴ Additionally, the character examines their western mannerism; their celebrating

mood, openness in their sexual relations and their spirit for holidays, in comparison to his parents' life, as it is depicted in the novel:

But their lives bear no resemblance to that of Gerald and Lydia: expensive pieces of Jewellery presented on all 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. Seeing the two of them curled up on the sofa in the evenings, Gerald's head resting on Lydia's shoulder, Gogol is reminded that in all his life he was never witnessed a single moment of physical affection between his parents.⁵⁵

In the same way, in *Americanah*, Adichie refers to these cultural conflicts and differences between the two presented cultures in her work: the western culture: the American and the British, and the African culture, particularly the Nigerian- Igbo culture. She depicts these divergences through deep examination and critique of these societies, in 'scenes that are sometimes humorous and sometimes tragic.'⁵⁶ First, Adichie criticizes 'the culture of corruption and materialism'⁵⁷ in Nigeria, as she criticizes their idealization of western culture and whiteness. Then, when the narrative turns to America and England as sittings, Adichie analyses and criticizes their cultures and societies through the eyes of her immigrant characters; she even presents in her work a set of well -spread stereotypes about the Americans and the British people, as she compares it to her indigenous Nigerian culture.

The author starts her 'many light-hearted observations'⁵⁸ about the American society, and their particular way of 'being' and 'behaving', through Ifemelu's stream of consciousness. Since her first times in America, this character examines her American surroundings; people outside, friends and her roommates' manners, behaviours and the way they treat her.

Thus, the first scenes of Ifemelu in America illustrate her examination of Americans, and their difference in comparison to her Nigerian compatriots. First, the author deals with the

American wearing style. In a scene from chapter twelve, Adichie stresses on the American indifference in choosing their clothing through Ifemelu's remarks, she narrates: "Ifemelu saw a woman on the sidewalk going to lunch from work, wearing sneakers, proof of their American preference for comfort over elegance,"⁵⁹ In another scene, when Ifemelu is invited by her roommates to go out for a party, the character is astonished to see them, and the other students in the party dressed in their daily and simple clothes. In fact, "they were all a jumble of frayed fabric and slack collars, the students at the party, all their clothes looked determinedly worn."⁶⁰ From these scenes Adichie refers to the American particular visualization of the outside presentation, and their indifference concerning their self-presentation that the narrator considers as sign of American superiority as is illustrated in the novel from Ifemelu's inserted blog posts,

*When it comes to dressing well, American culture is so self-fulfilled that it has not only disregarded this courtesy of self-presentation, but has turned that disregard into a virtue. "We are too superior/busy/cool/not-uptight to bother about how we look to other people, and we can wear pajamas to school and underwear to the mall."*⁶¹

Additionally, the narrator comes to scope the American particular way of making proposals and invitations. When Ifemelu's roommates suggest going and eating out with them, she notices that their way of forming proposals is completely different from the Nigerian one. Their assurance and impulsive way surprises her that she misinterprets their proposal thinking it an invitation. The reason is that, in Nigerian context, their proposal is supposed to be an invitation, Ifemelu tells Obinze about the story,

She had told him how Allison had said, "Hey, we're getting a bite to eat. Come with us!" and she thought it was an invitation and that, as with invitations back home, Allison or one of the others would buy her meal. But when the waitress brought the bill, Allison carefully began to untangle how many drinks each person had ordered and who had the calamari appetizer, to make sure nobody paid for anybody else."⁶²

Moreover, Adichie clarifies to the readers other rational differences between Americans and Nigerians, among them the recognition of obesity in people, and meaning of losing weight for these two different communities. In chapter fifty-one, when Ifemelu meets Obinze again in Nigeria for the first time, after spending many years in America, she insists on the fact that she has become fat, but Obinze reassures her saying: “Oh, no, Ifem, you’re not fat. You’re being very American about that. What Americans consider fat can just be normal.”⁶³ In another scene, Ifemelu meets her old friend Ginika, living in America for a long period, she confesses,

Do you know I started losing weight almost as soon as I came? I was even close to anorexia. The kids at my high school called me Pork. You know at home when somebody tells you that you lose weight, it means something bad. But here somebody tells you that you lost weight and you say thank you. It’s just different here, Ginika said, a little wistfully, as though she, too, were new to America.⁶⁴

On the other hand, Adichie discusses the shifting and the different cultural codes, virtues and morals between these two societies. In a scene from chapter eleven, Ifemelu, Auntie Uju and her new beloved Nigerian immigrant, Bartholomew are watching television. When it shows a young girl in a short dress, Bartholomew comments: “A girl in Nigeria will never wear that kind of dress,”⁶⁵ adding: “Look at that. This country has no moral compass.”⁶⁶

Thus, on a feminist perspective, Adichie discusses the changing situation of the freed Nigerian immigrant women who have moved to western countries, compared to those who still live under the Nigerian social restraints and preservations. As a result of the changing laws and social norms, Adichie refers to the fact that these Nigerian immigrant women tend to reach more liberties and rights on western soil. This is exemplified in the novel, when Ifemelu tells her father that she is moving to live with her new black American boy-friend Blaine. Adichie writes: “Ignoring him, even telling him that she was moving in with a man to whom

she was not married, was something she could do only because she lived in America. Rules had shifted, fallen into the cracks of distance and foreignness.”⁶⁷

The author has also included in her novel a post of Igbo Massachusetts Accountant which supports the assumption of the negative impact of western laws and ideas on the Nigerian immigrant women and families. She writes,

Nigerian women came to America and became wild, Igbo Massachusetts Accountant wrote in one post; it was an unpleasant truth but one that had to be said. What else accounted for the high divorce rates among Nigerians in America and the low rates among Nigerians in Nigeria? Delta Mermaid replied that women simply had laws protecting them in America and the divorce rates would be just as high if those laws were in Nigeria. Igbo Massachusetts Accountant’s rejoinder: “You have been brainwashed by the West. You should be ashamed to call yourself a Nigerian.”⁶⁸

Furthermore, *Americanah* stresses the different ways in which Nigerians educate and treat their children in comparison to Americans. Adichie depicts the Nigerian immigrant parents’ concerns with their western-born children. She portrays parents complaining about their offspring’s spoiled and childish behaviour due to the western educational system and they believe, in fact, that children in Nigeria are much easier to be controlled. The point is widely extended in the novel through the exposition of the experiences of some immigrant parents characters with their children such as: Aunty Uju, Jane and Ojiugo.

On the one hand, Aunty Uju complains to Ifemelu about her son’s behaviour. The character accuses the American system for their children’s exaggerated reactions. She tells her about her neighbour Jane and her own daughter who threatens to call police if she beats her. Aunty Uju declares: “I don’t blame the girl; she has come to America and learned about calling the police.”⁶⁹

In the following chapter, Jane herself confesses to Ifemelu: “The hardest thing is raising my kids. Look at Elizabeth; I have to be very careful with her. If you are not careful in this

country, you're children become what you don't know. It's different back home because you can control them. Here, no.”⁷⁰

On the other hand, when the narrative turns into England in chapter twenty-four, Obinze's short stay with his cousin Nicholas and his small family helps him to realise the tolerance that diasporic people have for their children. Compared to the parents' treatment of their children in Nigeria, Obinze finds it exaggerated. Confessing this to his cousin's wife Ojiugo, she answers him: “It is because in Nigeria, people teach their children fear instead of respect. We don't want them to fear us but that does not mean we take rubbish from them. We punish them.”⁷¹ However, on a discussion between Obinze and Ifemelu concerning this issue, in the last chapter; when the protagonists gather again in Nigeria, Ifemelu criticizes the American childhood, telling her beloved man,

...I realized that if I ever have children, I don't want them to have American childhoods. I don't want them to say ‘Hi’ to adults. I want them to say ‘Good morning’ and ‘Good afternoon.’ I don't want them to mumble ‘Good’ when somebody says ‘How are you’ to them. Or to raise five fingers when asked how old they are. I want them to say ‘I'm fine thank you’ and ‘I'm five years old.’ I don't want a child who fits on praise and expects a star for effort and talks back to adults in the name of self-expression.⁷²

Similar to Lahiri, Adichie has presented a set of stereotypes and criticism for Americans and British on many occasions in her narrative. She criticizes their exaggerated way of turning everything into mental diseases. This is widely illustrated in the novel through different scenes and situations. In chapter fourteen, Ifemelu passes through a conflicting situation due to her terrified experience in her first job as a sexual assistant, and her friend believes her to have depression, Adichie writes: “Depression was what happens to Americans, with their self-absolving need to turn everything into an illness.”⁷³

In England, when Obinze's cousin's wife tells him about her attempt to lose weight, by attending a program for weight loss, she declares that she senses herself being treated as someone who has mental problems, addressing to Obinze: "These white people think that everybody has their mental problems."⁷⁴ In this way, the narrator of *Americanah* clearly asserts that this kind of diseases can never be recognized by Africans or third world societies, making a clear distinction between western beliefs and the eastern ones. In addition, Adichie attributes another prejudice for westerners already mentioned in *The Namesake*, it consists of their preference for privacy, preservation and superiority, referred to in the novel, when Obinze's cousin's wife declares: "English people will live next to you for years but they will never greet. It is as if they have buttoned themselves up."⁷⁵

2-2-Identity

In *The Namesake*, the theme of identity is highly represented by demonstrating 'the importance of one's culture and background, gender, and name', ⁷⁶ in the construction of this concept. The novel stresses, particularly, the fact that the names of the protagonists do 'not only add meaning and directions to their lives, but give them a sense of cultural identity and belonging among other Bengali.'⁷⁷ In fact the Bengali culture attaches great importance for nomenclature. Thus, the Bengalis pay much attention to the selection of "good name" for their children as Lahiri clarifies: "Good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities."⁷⁸ However, for the Indian immigrants characters in *The Namesake*, these same 'Bengali names and heritage provide them with distress and discontent as they try to find their place in the American society'.⁷⁹

Through the story of the protagonist Gogol with his name, Lahiri tells her readers about the 'great sense of identity in one's name'.⁸⁰ Gogol's name acts as a disruptive element that prevents him to secure a place in the American society. He is teased for it in school, as he

is confronted with shame and malaise, Lahiri reports, “Other boys of 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.”⁸¹ Mainly, Gogol’s name connects him to his father and to his ‘background Bengali heritage of which he longs to break free’,⁸² putting him in struggle to settle his own identity.

However, by the end of the novel’s story, Gogol comes to balance the two identities. He learns how to match them together as he realizes that no one is more important than the other, and ‘that his identity is embellished by both cultures’.⁸³ Indeed, by matching the identities, the character comes to develop and shape his own identity, confirming Stuart Hall’s thought of ‘identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete,’ and ‘always in process’.⁸⁴

Similarly, Diasporas from the first immigrant generation, undergo some changes in their cultural identity. They ‘are in continuous state of formation and reformation’,⁸⁵ the case of Ashoke and Ashima who illustrate Hall’s second sense of cultural Identity to be ‘a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past.’⁸⁶ These characters have developed their identity according to their new land. Simultaneously, they struggle to preserve their first Bengali indigenous culture, basically, to avoid cultural betrayal since their ‘complete change of traditional values would also mean a betrayal’.⁸⁷ Preserving the cultural heritage is considered to be a compromise with their relatives from Calcutta, which they should never deceive. In the novel, Lahiri refers to this point when Ashima is about to leave with her husband, she writes: “Unlike her parents, and her other relatives, her grandmother had not admonished Ashima not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family the moment she landed in Boston. Her grandmother had not been fearful of such signs of betrayal”.⁸⁸

On another perspective, *The Namesake* has also demonstrated that cultural identity is defined by one's gender, symbolized in the novel through the introduction of the Ganguli couple whose roles differ from each other. On the first hand, Ashima's role consists of being the ideal housekeeper, the caring wife and mother, 'she has been primed for this role since her childhood spent keenly observing other women in her family',⁸⁹ Lahiri writes: "in spite of her growing discomfort, she'd been astonished by her body's ability to make life, exactly as her mother and her grandmother and all her great-grandmothers had done."⁹⁰ These observations have formed 'her identity as the primary care-giver'.⁹¹ In this way, Ashima's identity in life is related to her gender as a woman and a mother. On the second hand, Ashoke is presented 'as the head of the household'.⁹² As a man within the Bengali patriarchal culture, Ashoke is the first 'responsible for the well-being and happiness of his entire family'.⁹³

Identity is also an important theme in *Americanah*, the novel stresses on the role of race, national identity and culture in identifying our identities. In addition, it shows 'how our identities are in large part constructed by how others view us';⁹⁴ meaning that this novel accentuates 'the immense power that perceptions have in determining and manipulating identity'. Therefore, 'a stereotype or a norm, when held by party with significant power, can have massive, and sometimes destructive, impact on individual identities'.⁹⁵

In this fictional work, the immigrant characters are mainly confronted by race as a big challenge to conform one's identity. Adichie has clearly referred to the point through the protagonist Ifemelu who declares that 'race was not a big part of her identity until she came to America'.⁹⁶ On this way, the novel makes us think on 'how what you aren't can strongly affect what you are - once in place, where' you behave or look different from 'the majority population'. As a result, 'Ifemelu is instantly characterized by her external differences and becomes a 'Black woman' in America'.⁹⁷ The female character has a 'racialized experience'⁹⁸ that affects her immigration, it is highlighted in the novel through peoples' treatment of her,

due to her appearance, and through the hardships that she has encountered to find a job and stabilise in America.

Besides, Ifemelu's cultural elements are also pronounced in forming her identity in America. Among these elements, her accent, which displays her 'Africanness' to Americans, 'her repugnance of dogs',⁹⁹ as it is referred to in chapter twelve when Ifemelu tells her roommate that she doesn't like dogs, and the girl asks: "Is that like a cultural thing?"¹⁰⁰ In addition to her 'confusion over the American jokes and costumes',¹⁰¹ regarding the cultural gap between her indigenous culture and the American one. This confirms Stuart's claim that 'our cultural identities reflect' our 'shared cultural codes'.¹⁰²

Aunty Uju is another character in *Americanah* that has been affected by racial discrimination in forming her identity as an immigrant. Even though she struggles to improve herself as a 'black woman' in America, this character stills endure racist prejudices that affect her; her professional achievements are not glorified in America due to her blackness, which forms her identity within the American society. Consequently, this identity formation influences her on a personal level; Aunty Uju becomes the contrast of what 'she used to be', she becomes 'passionless, desperate and willing to marry a man who treats her terribly'.¹⁰³

Finally, Dike, who despite being grown in America, is still experiencing 'racism through micro aggressions'¹⁰⁴ because of his skin colour that acts as part of his own identity among Americans. Adichie illustrates this fact in several scenes, narrating about his days at school and with his friends. At the end of chapter seventeen, Dike tells Ifemelu about his camping saying: "My group leader, Haley? She gave sunscreen to everyone but she wouldn't give me any. She said I didn't need it."¹⁰⁵ As a result, Dike senses a sort of Un-belonging in the American society.

In this work, Adichie compares between the African-American and the American-African identity illustrating it through Ifemelu's relationships with African-American community in America, precisely with her boy friend Blaine. Ifemelu's 'racial experience is much the same as that of an African-American. After all, she is virtually the same as African-Americans in the eyes of white Americans'. Therefore, she shares with Blaine many feeling like their 'excitement around Obama's presidency.' However, Ifemelu still feels alienation among African-Americans community.¹⁰⁶

The distinction between African-Americans and American-Africans is widely referred to in the novel when Ifemelu attends a meeting at university, where they explain the difference between BSU which stands for Black Student Union, and ASA that stands for African Student Association. She wonders which one Dike will choose in the future. Adichie narrates: "as Ifemelu left the meeting, she thought of Dike, wondered which he would go to in college, whether as ASA or BSU, and what he would be considered, whether American African or African American."¹⁰⁷ It is suggested that this difference exists due to the unshared history of segregation and slavery¹⁰⁸ between the two communities. This is highlighted in the novel, when Ifemelu speaks about the case of an Ugandan woman in an American graduate school who does not interact with African-Americans, declaring: "Maybe when the African American's father was not allowed to vote because he was black, the Ugandan's father was running for parliament or studying at Oxford,"¹⁰⁹ This suggestion matches with Stuart Hall's explanation when he acclaims that cultural identity in its first way "reflects the common historical experiences...which provides us, as 'one people'".¹¹⁰

Similar to the immigrant characters from *The Namesake*, *Americanah*'s immigrant characters have also gone through changes in their identities. 'Several characters undergo transitions in *Americanah*, shedding old identities and developing new ones'.¹¹¹

First, the protagonist Ifemelu, whose immigrant experience affect the whole construction of her identity, after her return into Nigeria, coming back with ‘westernized’ behaviour. In addition, Aunty Uju and Emenike experience identity transformation through the process of assimilation, ‘to meet the approval of a dominant force.’¹¹²Therefore, their identity transformation seems to be linked to power. Thus it confirms Hall’s claim that: “Cultural identities...undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are the subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.”¹¹³

Endnotes

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⁵ Ibid. 5

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⁹ Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers. 2019), 38.

¹⁰ Ibid. 65

¹¹ Kacprowska, Katarzyna. *Aspects of Assimilation in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake*, (University of Bialystok, *Crossroads, A Journal of English Studies* 6), 3-2014, 5, Accessed on August 2022.
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¹² Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers. 2019), 64.

¹³ Ibid, 61-62.

¹⁴ Ibid, 162-163.

¹⁵ *The struggle For Cultural Assimilation In The Book The Namesake*,
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¹⁷ Ibid. 7

¹⁸ Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers. 2019), 66.

¹⁹ Ibid. 118

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General Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian-American author from the second immigrant generation and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian immigrant author in the United States of America. The two authors have contributed in the writing of Diasporic literature which belongs to the twenty-first century. Therefore, our research work conducted on the immigrant experience, has selected their two diasporic novels, Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). Its main concern turns around the influence of the authors' immigrant experience on their writings about immigration, and around the depiction of this experience within the two novels' different communities from a post-colonial perspective. It relies on Stuart Hall's definition of cultural identity and Homi Bhabha's hybridity and mimicry.

In the first chapter, we have focused on the two authors' biographies, withdrawing all the familiar elements to their own experiences from the novels. First, we have dealt with Jhumpa Lahiri's immigrant experience as a daughter of Indian immigrants in America, focusing on her struggles and concerns that have been transmitted through her fictional characters and sittings. Then, we have come into Adichie's own racialized experience as a black immigrant woman in the United States, when the author moved there as a foreign student. Similarly, we have focused on her attitudes toward racism and cultural discrimination entrusted in her writings about Black immigrants. In the second part of this chapter, we have made a comparison between Lahiri's and Adichie's immigrant characters, based on the common points between them, introducing Bhabha's concept of Hybridity.

In the second chapter, we have examined the issues of these immigrant characters, including our framed theoretical concepts. We have dealt with the immigrants' attempt to integrate, focusing on the changed aspects of their old selves and their ways to reach

assimilation, relying on Bhabha's concept of Mimicry, as we have distinguished between the first and the second immigrant generation in their adaptation into the process of assimilation. Furthermore, we have explored the encountered cultural conflicts between the western and the immigrants' cultural heritage that prevented the characters to accede into complete assimilation. we have discussed the resulting Hall's identity transformation on both the first and the second immigrant generation due to their different circumstances; the first immigrant generation's adoption into the new culture through the case of characters such as: Ashima in *The Namesake* and the protagonist Ifemelu in *Americanah*, and the second generation's reconciliation with their original culture as is the case with *The Namesake*'s male protagonist Gogol and the character Dike in *Americanah*. In the final part of this chapter, we have dealt with the aspects that effect the formation of "cultural identity" in the context of Diaspora in each novel, including Hall's explanations of the term.

Our two selected novels, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) contain themes that could be studied from different perspectives in future literary analysis. Thus, our dissertation has not exposed all the existing issues and themes of these novels. Therefore, we invite other students who are interested in these two literary works to investigate in, other studies, themes that are particularly related to immigration and discrimination.

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