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Diaspora and Cultural Identity in *the Namesake (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri, and Americanah (2013)by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: From Alientation to Assimilation.*

Presented by:

- DAHMANI Asma
- LAZIROU Tassadit

Supervised by:

Dr. AZIZ Rabéa

Board of Examiners:

Chairwoman: .	SEDDIKI Sadia	MCA,	University of Tizi-Ouzou.
Supervisor:	AZIZ Rabéa	MCA ,	University of Tizi-Ouzou.
Examiner:	LAOUARI Boukhalfa,	MCB,	University of Tizi-Ouzou.

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Dedications

To our family members and our dear friends.

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Abstract

This research paper investigates how diaspora and cultural identity are shaped by the ongoing tension between alienation and assimilation in The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri and Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Through the characters of the two novels,

the study explores how migration, race, gender, and cultural expectation influence the construction of identity across diasporic experiences. In both novels, displacement generates emotional and psychological dislocation, revealing identity as a process of continual negotiation rather than fixed belonging. Drawing on Stuart Hall's theory, diaspora is a shifting identity shaped by displacement, cultural hybridity, and the search for belonging. This analysis highlights key themes such as generational conflict, cultural retention, mental health, and gendered expectations. While Lahiri's characters confronts the burden of inherited Bengali traditions in the context of American life, Adichi's face the complexities of racial identity and cultural authenticity in the U.S. context. Together, these narratives illustrate how characters navigate assimilation's pressures while resisting complete erasure. Ultimately, the research reveals that both alienation and assimilation, though often painful, become spaces for critical self-awareness and the reimagining of cultural identity in the diasporic context.

Keywords: diaspora, cultural identity, assimilation, alienation, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah, The Namesake*

Contents

Introduction:

The present paper explores diaspora and cultural identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's*The Namesake* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* to compare and analyze how these literary works depict the complexities of migration, belonging and identity formation in a globalized world. Both novels provide a deep insight into the experiences of individuals navigating the tensions between their heritage and the cultures of their adopted countries. By relaying on the diaspora theory as a framework, this research seeks to examine how Lahiri and Adichie portray the struggles, adaptations, and transformations of their characters as they negotiate double identities in multicultural contexts experiencing both alienation and assimilation.In The *Namesake*, Lahiri presents the Bengali-American diaspora,developing the themes of displacement, generational conflict, and the search for self-identity. Adichie's *Americanah* highlights the intersections of race, nationality, and identity, offering a nuanced perspective on the African diaspora.

These narratives challenge and expand traditional notions of cultural identity, emphasizing the fluid and hybrid nature of diasporic experiences. By comparing and contrasting the two novels, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which Lahiri and Adichie use literature not only as an art, but a way to interrogate the impact of migration on personal (for the indian) and collective identities (for the African). Both novels explore the challenges of living between cultures,focusing on characters who struggle to reconcile their heritage with their experiences in a new country going through the processes of alienation and assimilation. While Lahiri's work delves into the personal and familial tensions of cultural dislocation,Adichie's novel broadens the scope to include race and collective Identity.

To deepen the understanding of how *The Namesake* and *Americanah* address issues of identity and migration or diaspora in general, it is important to first consider the existing scholarly conversations surrounding these texts.

Review of the literature:

Many Scholars have analyzed *The Namesake,and Americanah* in the context of diaspora experience. Scholars frequently explore how the protagonists of each novel grapple with alienation and the complex process of assimilation. Rather than treating these issues as straightforward or purely external, both novels reveal how deeply personal and emotional these processes are.

Sudesh Mishra, Anindyo Roy, and Shane A. McCoy, Stefanie Anna Reuter are four scholars whose insights have significantly shaped how readers understand the emotional and cultural landscapes of these texts.Sudesh Mishra, a prominent voice in postcolonial studies and diaspora literature, offers a detailed reading of T*he Namesake*, focusing on the symbolic and psychological role of names and heritage. Mishra explains that Gogol Ganguli's struggle with his given name is much more than just a personal preference; it is closely tied to a deeper discomfort with his roots and his cultural in-between-ness. According to Mishra, "Gogol's discomfort with his name reflects his discomfort with being tethered to a past he neither fully understands nor embraces" (Mishra, 2006, p. 213). In Mishra's view, the name "Gogol" becomes a marker of alienation: it connects Gogol to his Bengali parents' world, which often feels distant or burdensome to him, while also marking him as different from his American peers. Mishra further argues that even when Gogol changes his name to Nikhil, a move that might appear as a step toward assimilation, he remains emotionally unsettled. Mishra writes, "The name change allows temporary relief but doesn't resolve the split identity. Instead, it intensifies the conflict between who he is and who he wants to become" (p. 214). This

interpretation frames Gogol's journey not just as an external challenge, but as an internal struggle with identity that's shaped by cultural inheritance and a desire to belong.

Anindyo Roy, whose scholarship focuses on diasporic and transnational subjectivity, also contributes significantly to the conversation on *The Namesake*. Roy approaches, in *Diasporic Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake, the* novel through the lens of cultural identity. He suggests that Gogol's experiences highlight the tension between wanting to assimilate into American culture and being unable to fully separate from inherited traditions and values. Roy writes, "The desire for cultural erasure through assimilation is undercut by the persistence of diasporic memory and familial ties" (Roy, 2011, p. 63). This idea of "diasporic ambivalence" is central to Roy's analysis: Gogol is not simply rejecting his roots or embracing a new identity he is caught in between, which is what makes his sense of alienation so persistent. Roy's work helps position Gogol's identity crisis not as a failure to assimilate, but as a reflection of the emotional complexities that come with living across two cultures.

Turning to *Americanah*, Shane A. McCoy, in *The outsider within: Subversive identities in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah. Journal of Postcolonial Writing* offers, an insightful examination of Ifemelu's journey as a Nigerian immigrant in the United States. McCoy, a literary scholar focused on race and transnational identity, explores how Ifemelu's experiences are shaped not only by cultural difference but also by racial dynamics. He writes that Ifemelu "occupies a liminal space that allows her to observe and critique both American racial norms and Nigerian expectations" (McCoy, 2018, p. 88). McCoy's concept of the "outsider within" is especially useful in understanding Ifemelu's position: she is alienated not just by being African in America, but by becoming aware of what it means to be seen as Black in an American context, a racial identity she never had to think about in Nigeria.

McCoy also focuses on Ifemelu's moments of conformity and resistance. One key moment is when she alters her appearance, especially her hair, in an effort to fit into American professional culture.This is not just a cosmetic change but, as McCoy notes, "a performance of assimilation that comes at a deep emotional cost" (p. 89). Later, Ifemelu's decision to stop relaxing her hair and start blogging about her experiences as a Non-American Black woman becomes a powerful form of resistance. As McCoy puts it, "Ifemelu's return to natural hair marks a reclaiming of identity that defies the assimilationist demands placed on Black immigrant women in America"(McCoy,2018,p. 90). Through these acts, McCoy shows how assimilation often demands self-erasure, and how resistance to it can be a way to reclaim one's voice.

In a similar vein, Stefanie Anna Reuter, in her essay "*Becoming a Subject: Developing a Critical Consciousness and Coming to Voice in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah" (2015),* explores Ifemelu's transformation as a process of self-realization and resistance. Reuter argues that Ifemelu's journey toward critical consciousness is marked by her increasing refusal to conform to racialized and gendered expectations in American society. Her decision to write a blog and wear her natural hair are not merely personal acts but symbolic expressions of autonomy. Reuter writes, "The blog becomes a vital space of self-expression, in which Ifemelu can negotiate her position as a black African immigrant in the U.S. and transform her marginality into a source of agency" (Reuter, 2015, p. 143). This perspective adds depth to the understanding of Ifemelu's experience, highlighting that diasporic identity is not only about belonging or alienation but also about reclaiming voice and power.

The scholars discussed above approach the themes of alienation and assimilation from different but complementary angles. Mishra emphasizes the burden of cultural inheritance and how it plays out in the form of names and personal history. Roy highlights the internal contradictions that come with being diasporic wanting to blend in while feeling a strong pull

toward the past. McCoy focuses on the racialized dimension of assimilation and how identity is shaped by both resistance and compliance. Reuter adds another layer by focusing on voice and agency, showing how Ifemelu's refusal to conform particularly through her blog and natural hair becomes a form of resistance that allows her to transform marginality into power.Together, these scholars show that assimilation is not a one-time act or a clear path to belonging. It's a continuous and often painful negotiation between visibility and erasure, self-definition and societal expectation.

In both *The Namesake* and *Americanah*, alienation and assimilation emerge as central forces shaping the characters' emotional lives. What these three scholars Mishra, Roy, and McCoy help clarify is that assimilation is never neutral. It demands a kind of negotiation that is shaped by family history, cultural memory, and racial identity,With Reuter's insight, we also understand how personal expression especially through writing and physical appearance can serve as tools of self-definition in the face of pressure to assimilateThrough their analyses, we see that alienation is not just about being physically away from "home," but about feeling emotionally and culturally displaced regardless of where one is..

Issue and working hypothesis:

The above review of the literature underlines that identity formation in the two selected immigrant narratives is rarely about total assimilation or complete rejection, but about learning to live in a space that holds contradiction. As such,this research paper explores the interactions between diaspora and cultural identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), putting a focus on the journey from alienation to assimilation. Both novels explore cultural dislocations experienced by individuals navigating life between two worlds: their homeland and the adopted societies they inhabit.

Lahiri's *The Namesake* centers on the Indian-American diaspora, portraying the generational and cultural tensions between first- and second-generation immigrants as they face problems with questions of heritage, assimilation, and belonging. On the other hand , Adichie's *Americanah* delves into the Nigerian diaspora, highlighting issues of racial identity, cultural adjustment, and the personal negotiations required to exist within a transnational framework.

The issue at the core of this study is how alienation and assimilation are depicted in both texts as unavoidable elements of the diasporic experience marked by cultural dislocation, fractured identity and social exclusion, alongside the gradual processes of adjustment, self-discovery, and the effort to belong. This research also investigates how assimilation is viewed as a transformative process that redefines and shakes the characters sense of self and belonging.It compares and contrasts Lahiri's and Addichie's portrayals of the Indian and African diasporas experinced in their novels, focusing on the influence of the hosting environments on their characters identities.

Lahiri deals with individual identity (family and traditions) and Adichie focuses on collective Identity (race and culture). Both of them present assimilation and alienation as inevitable processes in the diaspora experience.

Moreover, both *The Namesake* and *Americanah* show the movement from alienation to assimilation as an important process for understanding the diasporic experience. Lahiri presents alienation as a struggle rooted in generational and cultural divides, focusing on the internal conflicts of second-generation immigrants who must reconcile the expectations of their parent's homeland with the realities of life in America.

Adichie's *Americanah* offers, in the other side, a different perspective, centering on how alienation begin from encounters with racial and cultural otherness in a foreign context. The character's experiences in the United States reveal how diaspora complicates and modifies

notions of home and identity, leading her to confront issues of race, gender, and belonging. However, adaptation in Adichie's narrative is framed as an empowering act of reclaiming the African identity through self-awareness, transnational mobility and a return to one's roots.

Combined together, these two works suggest that alienation and adaptation are not linear or uniform processes, but dynamic and multifaceted responses to cultural dislocation

I. Method and Materials:

1. Method :

a. Diaspora theory:

Diaspora theory is a farmworke used to study and examine the condition of displaced communities living outside their ancestral homelands, and how their identities are shaped by the tension between belonging and exclusion. One of the foundational figures in this field is Stuart Hall, who is often credited as the father of diaspora theory. In his influential essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Hall argues that cultural identity is not fixed or singular, "but constantly constructed through history, culture, and power". He explains that identity is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (Hall, 1990, p. 225), emphasizing that diasporic identities are shaped by the ongoing experience of migration and the need to navigate multiple cultural frameworks.

Hall adopted the concept of a "third space," where diasporic subjects exist between the culture of their origin and that of the host nation. This space is marked by assimilation, the pressure to conform to dominant cultural norms, and alienation, which arises when individuals feel a disconnection from both their homeland and the society they now inhabit. While assimilation may offer social acceptance, it often requires the erasure or modification of one's original cultural identity. Alienation, on the other hand, reflects the emotional and psychological distance that can result from such cultural dislocation. Hall's theory highlights

the hybridity of diasporic identity, arguing that rather than being fragmented, it is layered and dynamic. This idea is supported by Paul Gilroy, who, in *The Black Atlantic,* describes "diasporic identity as being formed not through rootedness but through movement, interaction, and cultural exchange across borders"(Paul Gilroy, 1993,N.P). Together, Hall and Gilroy emphasize that diasporic identities are fluid, negotiated and shaped by both memory and contemporary experience.

b. Alienation, according to Stuart Hall:

Alienation means feeling disconnected from oneself, from others, or from society. The concept was first introduced by Karl Marx in his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, where he argued that workers under capitalism became estranged from their labor, their sense of purpose and their fellow human beings. He described how labor, instead of fulfilling human potential, becomes a source of loss and isolation, writing that "the worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces" (Marx, 1964, p. 71).

Since then, the meaning of alienation has expanded beyond the workplace. It now includes emotional, psychological and cultural forms of isolation that many people experience in different contexts. In the diaspora theory, alienation is especially relevant because it helps explain the internal conflict that arises when someone lives between two or more cultures.

Migrants often face racism, cultural dislocation, and identity struggles that make them feel they don't fully belong neither to the country they move to, nor to the one they left behind. This feeling of being "in-between," never fully accepted by either place, is a modern and widely shared form of alienation.

Frantz Fanon further developed this idea in Black Skin, White Masks (1952/2008), where he explored how colonized individuals internalize dominant white values in an effort to fit in, which leads to a deep sense of identity loss. He described the Black subject as living in a "zone

of nonbeing" (Fanon, 2008, p. 2), a space where one's cultural identity is neither recognized nor affirmed.Stuart Hall adds another important dimension to this discussion by emphasizing how identity itself is not fixed, but always in process, shaped by history, culture, and power. In his view, alienation in the diasporic context stems from the tension between how individuals see themselves and how they are seen by society. Hall describes cultural identity as a "production," always being transformed through memory, migration, and difference (Hall, 1990, p. 222). For diasporic subjects, this means living with a split sense of self belonging partially to multiple identities but never fully to any one of them. Hall's framework helps explain why many migrants feel fragmented and alienated not only because they are excluded by dominant cultures, but also because their sense of self is always shifting, caught between the past and the present, the local and the global.In this way, Marx, Fanon, and Hall each show how alienation whether economic, racial, or cultural, continues to shape the lives of diasporic individuals navigating fragmented identities.

c. Assimilation, according to Stuart Hall ::

Assimilation is the process by which individuals or groups adapt to a new culture, often by taking on the language, behaviors, and values of the dominant society. This idea is especially important in migration and diaspora studies because it brings up questions about identity, belonging, and the pressure to fit in. Many immigrants feel the need to change parts of themselves in order to be accepted,whether the way they speak, dress, or act and this can cause tension between keeping their cultural roots and blending into their new surroundings. One of the most well-known theorists of assimilation is Milton Gordon, who explained the process in is book *Assimilation in American Life* (1964). He introduced a seven-stage model that starts with acculturation and ends with full structural assimilation, where immigrants are accepted into the social and institutional life of the dominant group. Gordon describes this final stage as when individuals "enter the social cliques, clubs, and institutions of the core society" (Gordon,

1964, p. 81). His theory treats assimilation as a step-by-step process, but it has been criticized for assuming that all immigrants can or even want to fully assimilate.

Later, thinkers like Stuart Hall took a different approach. In his essay" Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), Hall argued that identity is not something fixed that people can simply give up or switch out. Instead,it is "a matter of becoming as well as of being" (p. 225), meaning that it's always changing, shaped by both the past and the present. For many people in the diaspora, assimilation doesn't mean completely letting go of their original identity. It often creates a complex situation where they feel stuck between two cultures trying to adapt to one while still holding onto the other. And even when they do try to fully assimilate, they might still not be accepted,especially when race or appearance sets them apart. So, assimilation according to Hall, is not always about choice; it can be about pressure, exclusion, and the difficult balance between adapting and staying true to oneself.

2. Materials:

a. Primary texts:

- The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri(2003):

Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake (2003) delves into the intricate journey of Gogol Ganguli, a second-generation Indian-American, as he navigates the complexities of cultural identity and belonging. Born to Bengali immigrants in the United States, Gogol's life is a tapestry woven with threads of his parents' heritage and the American culture he is immersed in. His name, "Gogol," becomes a symbol of his internal conflict, representing the duality of his existence and the struggle to reconcile two distinct cultures. A pivotal moment in Gogol's quest for identity is his decision to change his name to "Nikhil." This act signifies his attempt to forge a new path, distancing himself from the cultural baggage associated with his birth name. However, the name change does not alleviate his sense of dislocation. Despite adopting

a more conventional name, Gogol continues to grapple with feelings of alienation, highlighting the persistent challenges faced by second-generation immigrants in defining their identities within a multicultural landscape.(Lahiri 2003)

Lahiri further explores the theme of identity through Gogol's relationships. His involvement with Maxine, an American woman, marks a period where he immerses himself in a lifestyle starkly different from his upbringing, leading to a temporary estrangement from his roots. Conversely, his marriage to Moushumi, who shares his Bengali background, underscores the complexities of cultural compatibility. Despite their shared heritage, their relationship falters, emphasizing that common cultural backgrounds do not guarantee shared values or mutual understanding. (Lahiri 2003)

- **Americanah by Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi (2013**):

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah (2013) is a novel about a young Nigerian woman named Ifemelu who moves to the United States for university. The story follows her as she adjusts to life in a new country, dealing with everyday challenges such as fitting in, understanding new customs, and learning how race is viewed differently in America (Adichie, 2013). As she continues to grow and observe her surroundings, she starts writing a blog about her thoughts on race, culture, and identity.

While Ifemelu is in the U.S., her high school boyfriend, Obinze, tries to move to the United States as well, but ends up living in the United Kingdom without legal status. His story shows the difficulties of being undocumented and trying to build a life abroad (Adichie, 2013). Both characters go through personal and emotional changes while being far from home.

After many years, Ifemelu decides to return to Nigeria. Coming back is not as easy as she expected it takes time to adjust again to her old environment, and she starts to see how much both she and her home country have changed. Overall, Americanah is a story about moving

between places, discovering who you are, and figuring out where you belong. It explores themes like immigration, love, and the experience of living in different cultures, without offering easy answers https://books.google.com

b. Biographies of the two authors:

- Jhumpa Lahiri:

Jhumpa Lahiri, born on July 11, 1967, in London to Bengali Indian parents, is a distinguished American author renowned for her insightful exploration of the immigrant experience, particularly that of East Indians. Raised in Rhode Island, Lahiri pursued higher education diligently, earning multiple degrees, including a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies from Boston University.(https://www.britanica.com)

Her literary career commenced with the publication of her debut short-story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), which garnered the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000. This work illuminated the nuances of immigrant life and established her as a significant voice in contemporary literature. Lahiri's first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), further delved into the complexities of cultural identity through the narrative of a Bengali-American man grappling with his heritage.(https://www.britanica.com)

In the 2010s, Lahiri embarked on a personal and professional transformation by relocating to Italy. Immersing herself in Italian culture, she began writing in Italian, culminating in the publication of *Whereabouts* (2018). Beyond her fiction, Lahiri has contributed to literature through her translations of Italian works and her academic role at Princeton University, where she continues to reflect on themes of language and belonging.

- **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie :**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, born on September 15, 1977, in Enugu, Nigeria, is a celebrated writer acclaimed for her profound exploration of identity, race, and feminism. She grew up in Nsukka, within the campus of the University of Nigeria, where her father was a professor and her mother the institution's first female registrar.(http//:www.chimamanda.com)

At 19, Adichie moved to the United States to pursue higher education, earning a degree in Communication and Political Science from Eastern Connecticut State University, followed by a Master's in Creative Writing from Johns Hopkins University(chimamanda.com). Her literary acclaim includes her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which gained international recognition for its depiction of the Nigerian Civil War.(http//:britannica.com)

Her novel *Americanah* (2013) narrates the journey of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who migrates to the U.S., offering sharp insights into race, identity, and belonging within both American and Nigerian contexts. This work solidified Adichie's status as a leading global writer. Beyond her fiction, she is an influential feminist thinker, known for works such as

We Should All Be Feminists (2014) and *Dear Ijeawele* (2017), which have sparked global conversations on gender and culture.

Adichie's contributions extend to her recent novel, *Dream Count* (2025), marking her return to literary fiction after a 12-year hiatus. The novel comprises four interconnected novellas that explore the dreams and challenges of four women, reflecting Adichie's storytelling prowess (http//:vulture.com). Through her literature and activism, Adichie continues to shape contemporary discussions on culture, gender, and migration.

II. Results :

Our analysis shows that diaspora and cultural identity are central themes in both *The Namesake(2003)* by Jhumpa Lahiri and *Americanah (2013*) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,

explored through the tension between alienation and assimilation. In *The Namesake*, identity is deeply tied to culture, and Lahiri uses the experience of the Ganguli family to show how Indian immigrants and their children navigate life in America. Gogol Ganguli, born in the U.S. to Bengali parents, grows up feeling disconnected from his cultural roots. His unusual name becomes a symbol of his in-betweenness, too Indian for America, and too American for India. The novel emphasizes family as the foundation of cultural identity. The Gangulis maintain Bengali customs at home, and family ties act as a reminder of their heritage. However, for Gogol, this results in a sense of alienation from both his family and the American world around him. His attempts to assimilate, including changing his name to Nikhil, only increase his internal conflict. Over time, especially after the death of his father, Gogol begins to rediscover and accept his cultural identity, not by rejecting America, but by reconnecting with the Bengali values his family upheld.

On the other hand, *Americanah* presents identity through the lens of race. For Ifemelu, her Nigerian identity is uncomplicated until she migrates to the United States and is suddenly seen primarily through the filter of her Blackness. Adichie uses Ifemelu's journey to highlight how race in America becomes an imposed identity that African immigrants must confront. This novel focuses on community rather than family, as Ifemelu builds relationships within African and African American circles, particularly through her blog, where she reflects critically on race, class, and culture. Her alienation stems not just from being an immigrant, but from becoming racialized in a society that constantly defines her through stereotypes. Unlike Gogol, Ifemelu resists assimilation more deliberately. She retains her Nigerian accent, questions American norms, and eventually chooses to return to Nigeria, where she reclaims a version of herself that feels whole.

While both novels explore diaspora as a space of dislocation, they differ in their emphasis: *The Namesake* links identity to cultural heritage and family, while *Americanah* links

it to racial awareness and the communities that shape it. In both cases, the protagonists experience alienation, but they also respond to assimilation in contrasting ways. Gogol makes repeated efforts to blend into American society, starting from changing his name to adopting a Western lifestyle, yet, these efforts leave him disconnected and unfulfilled, revealing how cultural assimilation can intensify a sense of personal loss. Ifemelu, on the other hand, engages with American life on her own terms, but ultimately resists the idea that she must change who she is to be accepted. Her return to Nigeria is not a retreat, but a resolution. Through these parallel journeys, both novels show that assimilation is not a final destination, but a difficult choice that can either estrange individuals from themselves or lead them back to a clearer sense of who they are.

III. Discussion

CHAPTER ONE:Alienation as an Aspect of Diaspora in *Americanah* and the *Namesake*:

Alienation emerges as a profound and persistent undercurrent in diaspora literature, shaping the emotional landscapes of characters who find themselves caught between worlds. Both Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* explore this estrangement with remarkable depth, portraying characters who experience profound disconnection not only from their adopted societies but often from their homelands and even their evolving selves. These narratives reveal alienation not as a singular experience but as a multifaceted condition that manifests differently across cultural contexts, generations, and individual journeys.

In *The Namesake*, Lahiri presents a poignant exploration of cultural and existential disconnection through the life of Gogol Ganguli and his parents. As a second-generation Bengali-American, Gogol grapples with a fractured sense of identity estranged from his parent's heritage, distanced from American cultural norms, and uncertain of his own authenticity. Whereas, in Americanah, Adichie portrays alienation through the divergent journeys of Ifemelu and Obinze, whose experience in the United States and the United Kingdom respectively foreground the alienating forces of racial dynamics, immigration status, and national identity. Adichie and Lahiri's stories highlight how the search for belonging is continuously shaped and often thwarted by systemic and interpersonal forms of exclusion.This chapter undertakes a comparative study of alienation in *The Namesake* and *Americanah*, analyzing how it manifests through social exclusion, generational, internal fragmentation, and linguistic barriers. By examining the protagonists' navigation of unfamiliar social codes, racial hierarchies, and

diasporic tensions, this research aims to illuminate the diverse ways alienation shapes immigrant experience.

I. Alienation comparative analysis

1.social exclusion:

Social exclusion is when someone is left out or not included in society. This means they don’t have the same chances as others to go to school, get a job, or be part of a group. In

The Namesake ,Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, the first-generation immigrants,experience profound social exclusion as they navigate life in America while maintaining their Bengali identity. Her particularly struggles with isolation.Ashima's exclusion is evident, when Lahiri writes: "For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy,a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling of being out of place.”(p.49). In this quotation, Lahiri compares Ashima’s experience of being a foreigner to a lifelong pregnancy, highlighting the deep and ongoing emotional struggle of living in a new country. The metaphor suggests that, like pregnancy, it involves constant discomfort, waiting, and a heavy emotional burden. Ashima feels out of place, as if she never fully belongs to her new environment. The phrase"a perpetual wait" reflects her endless hope of feeling at home, and "a constant burden" shows the emotional weight of maintaining her identity in a foreign land.

In *The Namesake* ,Nikhil/Gogol Ganguli experiences social exclusion as he struggles with his cultural identity, caught between his Indian heritage and American upbringing.

His name becomes a major symbol of this struggle. In Gogol/Nikhil’s Life,Gogol feels different from his peers because of his unusual name, which isolates him socially and emotionally.

He does not fully feel part of American society nor Indian traditions, making him feel like an outsider in both. At home, he lives with Indian values; outside, he tries to blend into

American culture, which creates confusion and feelings of not truly belonging anywhere. “He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian.” (p. 76)

Lahiri feels upset about his name because it doesn’t feel like it fits him. It sounds unusual and comes from a place that has nothing to do with his life. It’s not part of his Indian roots or his American surroundings. Since it’s Russian, it feels random and makes him feel like he’s carrying something that doesn’t reflect who he really is. Because of this, Gogol feels confused about who he is,he doesn’t feel Indian enough. Most people around him have names that fit easily into American culture, while his stands out and often brings awkward questions.Excluded from both cultures, his name becomes a symbol of his struggle to belong anywhere.

Similarly,Sonia Ganguli, Gogol’s sister in *The Namesake*, experiences social exclusion, though her experience is quieter and less central than Gogol’s. Like Gogol, she lives between two cultures;her Indian heritage and her American environment ,and this creates moments of discomfort and disconnection.Sonia, like Gogol, grows up in a Bengali immigrant family in America. She sometimes feels different from her American classmates and neighbors because of her background, food, traditions, and appearance.

When Sonia decides to marry Ben, a Chinese-American man, she challenges traditional expectations in her family. Despite,her parents eventually accepting the fact, the choice reflects her navigation of identity and belonging outside her cultural group.

As a daughter in a traditional Bengali household, Sonia likely experiences greater pressure to follow cultural expectations about how women should behave, which can distance her from the freedoms her American peers enjoy. Yet, despite these expectations, she manages to adapt more easily to American culture. As the narrator observes, “Sonia has become an American in a way Gogol has not” (p. 67) .This quote shows that Sonia adapts more easily to

American life than Gogol, but this doesn't mean that she fully belongs either. She still submitted to cultural pressure and moments of being "different." Her seeming adaptation might even hide an inner struggle with social exclusion having to fit into two worlds while never being completely at home (This sense of "unhomeliness," as described by Homi Bhabha, captures the feeling of being caught between cultures a space where belonging is uncertain and identity is continuously negotiated) in either.

Maxine, in *The Namesake*, also experiences a form of social exclusion, but it's quite different from Gogol or sonia's. Maxine is a wealthy, white American woman who comes from a very different social and cultural background than Gogol's Bengali family. This difference sometimes makes her feel out of place or misunderstood when interacting with Gogol's family and community.

Class and Lifestyle Gap:Maxine's privileged lifestyle and social circle create a barrier between her and Gogol's immigrant family. She doesn't fully belong to their cultural world, which creates a subtle divide.When Gogol's relationship with Maxine ends, she feels emotionally excluded from his life. Their different backgrounds and values contribute to their growing distance, showing how social exclusion can also be emotional and personal, not just cultural."Maxine's family represents a stark contrast to Gogol's own, living a life that feels expansive, open, and effortless free from the heavy traditions and constant obligations that seem to follow Gogol wherever he goes. As described in the text, "Maxine's family is different, their life different vast and open and easy, without the weight of tradition and without the obligation that seems to follow Gogol wherever he goes" (p. 90).This quote highlights the social and cultural divide between Maxine's privileged, carefree upbringing and Gogol's immigrant Bengali family life. Maxine's world is described as "vast and open and easy," contrasting with the "weight of tradition" that Gogol carries. This difference creates a subtle form of social exclusion for Maxine, as she is essentially an outsider to Gogol's family culture and traditions.

Her ease in her own social environment emphasizes how disconnected she feels from the responsibilities and expectations Gogol faces, making her part of a different social world as she does not fully belong to his cultural roots.

While social exclusion In *The Namesake* is mainly related to culture and traditions,In *Americanah* ,Ifemelu experiences social exclusion mainly because of race and immigrant status in the United States. She feels out of place as a Black African in America, where racial identities and social norms are very different from Nigeria. She faces stereotyping, and struggles with her sense of belonging. Even within the Black community in the U.S., she sometimes feels like an outsider due to her accent and background. Ifemelu reflects on the persistence of racism in America, observing that the real change is not in the existence of racism itself, but in society's growing intolerance toward it. She explains:"The problem with America is not the racism. America has always been racist. What's new is the fact that it has become unacceptable to be racist in America."(p. 290) .Through this quotation Adichie shows Ifemelu's awareness of systemic racism in America. She recognizes that racism is deeply embedded in society, but the way it's expressed has changed, often becoming more subtle or hidden. This creates a constant sense of exclusion for her, as she navigates a society where she is judged by her race but also expected to adapt.

Social exclusion in the novel is also expressed through Obinze faces social exclusion in the UK as an undocumented immigrant. His legal status restricts his access to education, work, and social services, making him invisible in society. This exclusion is not just social but also institutional, causing fear, instability, and a loss of dignity. Obinze's struggles highlight the harsh realities of immigration policies and their impact on individuals. "He was a ghost, a shadow among shadows, no longer a person but a problem."(p. 320). This shows how laws and society push people like Obinze away and don't see their humanity.Obinze isn't just invisible in the physical sense he also feels forgotten and alone. Calling him a "ghost" means people act

as if he isn’t there, which makes him feel isolated. The laws make his situation worse by making him afraid of being caught or sent away. People’s fear and suspicion of immigrants also make him feel like he doesn’t belong.Through Obinze’s story, Lahiri shows how immigration rules and attitudes can make people lose their dignity and feel like outsiders. Obinze’s experience helps us understand how hard it is to live in a place where you are not accepted and are always worried about your future.

2.Generational Alienation:

Generational alienation is the feeling of separation or misunderstanding between people of different generations, often between parents and children. It happens when their values, beliefs, lifestyles, or cultural experiences are very different ,especially in immigrant families.

In *The Namesake* ,Ashoke and Ashima (First Generation) embody the immigrant experience of cultural preservation and gradual adaptation. As first-generation immigrants from Bengal, they carry the weight of their homeland's traditions, language, and values. Ashoke demonstrates a more flexible approach to American integration while maintaining his Bengali core identity. His relationship with American culture is pragmatic;he adapts for professional and practical reasons but remains emotionally anchored to his Bengali roots.Ashima represents the more traditional immigrant experience, particularly for women of her generation. Her adaptation to American life is slower and more resistant, driven primarily by necessity rather than choice. She maintains strong connections to Bengali culture through food, customs, and social networks. Her identity remains largely unchanged despite decades in America, and she views herself as perpetually caught between two worlds.”She has learned to do things she never thought she would do. She has learned to live her life in a place that feels like a foreign country."(p.27).Ashima's feels disconnected from her children who adapt so readily to American culture while she remains tethered to Bengali traditions. Her children's easy assimilation makes her feel more foreign in her own home.

Both parents share a deep nostalgia for their homeland and maintain the expectation that their children will honor and continue Bengali traditions. They struggle to understand their children's American perspectives and often feel disconnected from the cultural choices their offspring make.The narrator talks about a tough experience they shared, saying:”Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go."(p.195) .Ashoke tries to bridge the generational gap by sharing his immigration story with his children, but this very attempt highlights alienation his children cannot truly understand the sacrifice and journey their parents made.

Gogol represents the second-generation experience of negotiating dual cultural identities . He's journey illustrates the common second-generation struggle with inherited cultural identity versus self-determined identity.Gogol’s rejection of his Bengali name shows that he wants to move away from the cultural expectations of his family and background. Ironically, the name “Gogol,” which was only meant to be temporary, is not Indian or American it’s Russian. This makes his identity even more confusing. By first keeping the name and then rejecting it, Gogol shows his struggle with the labels given to him and his wish to fit in with American society, even though he’s not sure where he really belongs. Lahiri's said that:“He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know.Who doesn' t know him”(p.22). Gogol's alienation from his parents stems from his rejection of his Bengali identity and name. He cannot understand why his parents gave him such a name, and his parents cannot comprehend his shame about their cultural heritage. This creates a fundamental disconnect where neither generation truly knows the other.

Like Gogol, Sonia also experiences generational alienation, a feeling of being different or distant from her parents because of the cultural gap between them. Growing up in America, Sonia is more comfortable with American customs, language, and lifestyle, while her parents try to hold on to their Bengali traditions. This creates a quiet tension, as Sonia doesn’t fully

share the same values or experiences as her parents.“Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, the baby’s birth … feels somehow haphazard, only half true.”

While Gogol struggles with his fractured identity and feels alienated from both his Bengali heritage and his American upbringing, Sonia Ganguli represents a different response to generational and cultural divides. Unlike her brother, Sonia manages to balance her dual identities more comfortably. As Lahiri observes,“She married a non-Bengali, but she was still at home in her parents’ house, in her culture, in a way Gogol never was.”(p.120).This quote highlights the contrast between Sonia and her brother Gogol in how they navigate their cultural identity and generational alienation. Sonia’s marriage to a non-Bengali shows that she is willing to step outside traditional expectations and embrace change, reflecting the natural evolution of immigrant families adapting to new environments. Despite this, Sonia remains deeply connected to her roots she feels comfortable and accepted within her parents’ home and culture.In contrast, Gogol struggles with a fractured identity and never feels fully at home in either his Bengali heritage or American surroundings. He experiences alienation both from his parents’ traditional culture and from the American society he grows up in. Sonia’s ability to balance these two worlds suggests a more harmonious reconciliation of generational and cultural tensions, showing one possible way to bridge the gap that causes alienation for others like Gogol.

In *Americanah*, the relationships between Ifemelu, Obinze, and Obinze's mother reveal complex dynamics shaped by different historical experiences and cultural: Obinze's mother represents the educated Nigerian elite who came of age during the post-independence period. She embodies a generation that maintained strong connections to traditional Nigerian values while embracing Western education. Her alienation manifests in her relationship with both the younger generation and her own contemporaries whom she views as intellectually inferior. Adichie powerfully explores the theme of racial identity and alienation, especially through the

experiences of Ifemelu in the United States. As she reflects on the realities of being Black in America, she states:“I know you are a clever girl. … My advice is that you wait. You can love without making love. … And when you want to start, I want you to come and see me. I want to know that you are being responsible.”(p.70).This quote shows Obinze’s mother offering Ifemelu wise and caring advice about love and relationships. She acknowledges Ifemelu’s intelligence and maturity, which shows respect for her ability to make decisions. She advises Ifemelu to be patient and to understand that love doesn’t always have to involve physical intimacy right away.By asking Ifemelu to come to her when she’s ready to take that step, Obinze’s mother is encouraging open communication and trust, rather than secrecy or rebellion. Her concern is that Ifemelu makes responsible choices, understanding the consequences of her actions.

The mother's smart and confident way of speaking makes Ifemelu feel both impressed and nervous. She wants to be like her but also feels like she doesn't fully belong to that world."She wished she could be like Obinze's mother, who read books and knew about wine and could discuss politics with passion."(p.68). This reveals Ifemelu's awareness of generational and class differences through the contrasting attitudes toward relationships and responsibility. Obinze's mother represents an aspirational figure, someone who successfully navigated modernity without losing her Nigerian identity. Ifemelu's alienation stems from feeling caught between her parents' more traditional approach and this sophisticated Nigerian intellectual model.

3.Internal fragmentation

Internal fragmentation is when a person feels divided or torn inside, usually because of different parts of their identity, emotions, or experiences. It’s like feeling caught between two worlds or not fully knowing who you are. In *the Namesake*, Ashima struggles to adapt to a new culture, language, and identity. She often feels disconnected or out of place like part of her is

present, but another part is left unused or unexpressed."She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived."(p.8).This quotation reveals Ashima's profound sense of isolation and cultural disconnection when giving birth to Gogol in an American hospital. The fragmentation here is deeply personal; she experiences motherhood, one of life's most fundamental experiences, completely severed from her cultural context. In Bengal, childbirth would be surrounded by female relatives, traditional rituals, and familiar customs. Instead, she faces this pivotal moment "alone" and "deprived" of cultural meaning. Her internal fragmentation manifests as a feeling of incompleteness; she's physically present but culturally absent from her own life experiences. This displacement creates a psychological split where her body exists in America but her emotional and spiritual needs remain rooted in Bengali traditions she cannot access.Similarly,Gogol's mixed identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* shows the struggles of many children of immigrants who feel caught between two cultures. He was born in America to Bengali parents and finds it hard to balance his family's Indian traditions with the American way of life around him. His unusual name makes him feel different and unsure about where he belongs. Gogol often feels like he doesn't fully fit in with either culture; he's too American for his parents' world, but still feels like an outsider in American society. This makes him feel confused and disconnected, showing the challenges of growing up between two cultures."At times his name, an entity shapeless and weightless, manages nevertheless to distress him physically, like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced permanently to wear."(p.67). This quote shows that Gogol does not like his name. Even though a name has no shape or weight, it still makes him feel uncomfortable, like something bothering his body.Gogol feels this way because his name . It's not American enough for him to feel like he belongs in the U.S., and it's not Indian enough to make him feel close to his Bengali culture. So his name becomes a symbol of how he feels stuck between two worlds.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Moushumi Mazoomdar's complex feelings about her identity and life choices are revealed when she reflects on her journey. She thinks of her life as "a series of departures," recognizing how each decision especially her marriage 5has brought her to a place where, despite having settled, she still feels out of place: "She thought of her past life as a series of departures, all leading to this one, to this marriage, to this final place where she had settled and yet felt displaced."(p.120-130).This quote shows how Moushumi feels about her life and her marriage. She thinks of her life as many changes or "departures" moments when she left something behind to start something new. Each of these steps brought her to her marriage, which is supposed to be a final, stable place.But even though she has settled into this new life, she still feels displaced like she doesn't really belong or feel at home. This means that Moushumi feels torn inside; she has moved forward in life but still feels out of place and unsure about who she really is.

Meanwhile,in *Americanah,* Ifemelu experiences internal fragmentation as she navigates her identity between Nigeria and the U.S. She often feels torn between her Nigerian roots and her American life, with parts of her cultural identity feeling unused or alienated in both places."She was afraid that she would become one of those people who lose their original selves when they move to a new place, who cease to be Nigerian or American or whatever else they were, and become instead something awkward and unrecognizable "(p.174).Ifemelu fears losing her core identity as she adapts to life in America. Internal fragmentation parts of her Nigerian self are allocated to her new life in the U.S., but some parts feel unused or lost, leaving her with a fragmented sense of who she truly is. She struggles to fully occupy her identity in either culture, leading to emotional and cultural disconnection.

Similarly, Obinze struggles with his identity after moving to the UK, where he feels disconnected from both his Nigerian background and the foreign society he's trying to integrate into, creating a fragmented sense of self.Obinze's experience as an immigrant in London is

marked by a deep sense of invisibility and displacement. Despite living there, he feels like an outsider, unable to fully belong or feel at home. This feeling is captured when the narrator describes him as: “Obinze was a ghost in London, a shadow passing through, always aware that he did not fully belong there and could never quite inhabit that space.”(p.255).Obinze’s time as an undocumented immigrant in London shows how his identity is broken into parts. He feels connected to his Nigerian background his culture and memories but he is also trying to live in the UK and make a new life there. Because of laws and how people treat him, he can’t fully belong in Britain. This puts him in a confusing place, like having a memory that he knows but can’t use or act on.This broken feeling hurts him inside. Even though he is physically in London, he feels invisible and alone because he doesn’t fit in fully. He is stuck between two places Nigeria and the UK but doesn’t feel fully part of either one. This split inside him shows what many immigrants go through when they can’t fully join their new home, leaving them feeling lost and divided inside.

4.Linguistic Barriers

Linguistic barriers are problems or difficulties people face when they can’t understand or speak the same language. This makes it hard to communicate clearly with each other.

In *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, Ashima and Ashoke (Gogol’s parents) are the two main characters who face linguistic barriers after immigrating to the United States. Ashima and Ashoke speak Bengali as their first language, but they move to the U.S., where English dominates. This causes challenges in their social interactions, and sense of belonging. Ashima faces strong linguistics problems. She feels shy, misunderstood, and uncomfortable speaking English, especially in public.“She hates the way her husband says ‘protozoa,’ pronouncing it ‘pro-to-zo-a,’ as if it were Italian. She hates the way the check-out clerks at the supermarket speak so fast that she has no choice but to nod and smile and nothing”. (P.139).

This quote shows how language becomes a source of confusion and frustration for Ashima. She struggles with understanding fast-paced American English, and feels isolated because she can't fully participate in conversations. Her silence and discomfort are clear signs of linguistic barrier, making her feel like an outsider. Ashoke is more fluent in English;he also faces moments where his accent or word choice sets him apart. He often remains quiet in public spaces, partly to avoid misunderstanding or judgment, which is a subtle but powerful form of linguistic insecurity."He says nothing, content to watch her, grateful as always that she is his wife. It is a quiet gratitude; he prefers not to say such things aloud"(p.199)

This quote reveals how Ashoke often stays silent, even in moments of deep emotion. While he speaks English fairly well, his communication style remains quiet and reserved, partly due to his immigrant status and accent. He avoids speaking too much in public or expressing himself openly, especially in English, because of linguistic insecurity a subtle but real barrier.His silence is not just personality; it reflects a deeper discomfort with expressing emotions in a language that isn't fully his own, which is a quiet form of linguistic barrier.

In The *Americanah*, Although Ifemelu speaks English fluently when she arrives in America, she still faces linguistic barriers because of her Nigerian accent and cultural expressions. People often treat her differently, assuming she doesn't understand English well. This creates a deep sense of discomfort and exclusion.To be accepted and taken seriously, Ifemelu feels pressured to change the way she speaks, eventually adopting an American accent. However, this leads to an internal conflict she feels like she's losing a part of her true self just to fit in. Ifemelu feels how people treat her differently because she is a foreign student. When she talks to a school counselor, the narrator says:"The counselor's voice was overly bright, the voice adults used for children, and foreign students whose English was not perfect."(p.30). This quote shows how Ifemelu is treated differently because she is a foreign student. The counselor talks to her in a fake, cheerful voice, like adults often use when speaking to young children or

people they think don’t understand well. It makes Ifemelu feel disrespected and not taken seriously, just because her English isn’t perfect.

This highlights how linguistic barriers aren't always about grammar or vocabulary,but also about accent,confidence,and how others perceive you. She begins to feel misunderstood and looked down upon,which causes her to become self-conscious and eventually change her accent,a key moment of internal conflict and identity struggle. Obinze faces the same problem in the European context .Although he speaks perfect English, when he moves to the United Kingdom, he faces linguistic barriers because his Nigerian accent and expressions make him stand out. People speak differently with a British accent, slang, and rhythm and Obinze feels that he doesn't "sound right," even in a language he knows well.Obinze’s experience as a Nigerian immigrant in the United Kingdom highlights how linguistic barriers can create feelings of exclusion and insecurity, even when a person is fluent in English. The narrator captures his internal struggle with the way he sounds:“He spoke English, of course, but not that English. Not with that clipped, easy coolness.”(p.158). This quote talks about Obinze and how he feels different in the UK. He speaks English well, but not with a British accent. The “clipped, easy coolness” means the way British people talk quick, smooth, and confident. Obinze doesn’t sound like that, so he feels like he doesn’t fit in.It shows that speaking a language is not just about knowing words, but also about how you say them. This can make people treat you differently or make you feel like an outsider.

In *Americanah* and *The Namesake*, the experience of alienation is a powerful part of what it means to live between two worlds as part of the diaspora. Characters like Ifemelu, Obinze, and Gogol all face the challenge of feeling like they don’t fully belong neither in their home countries nor in the new places they live. Their struggles with language, culture, and identity show just how difficult it can be to find a true sense of self when you’re caught between different worlds.These two chapters remind us that being an immigrant isn’t just about moving

from one place to another it's about navigating a complex emotional and cultural journey. The alienation they feel may be painful, but it also forces them to grow, question who they are, and find new ways to belong. In the end, both novels beautifully capture the ups and downs of the immigrant experience and how it shapes a person's identity in deep and lasting ways.

CHAPTER TWO: Assimilation as an Aspect of Diaspora in The Namesake and Americanah :

Diaspora narratives often center around the tension between cultural retention and adaptation as individuals and families navigate unfamiliar environments. These stories frequently delve into the emotional and psychological complexities faced by immigrants and their descendants as they struggle to define themselves within hybrid cultural spaces. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* are two such novels that explore the intricate dynamics of immigration, displacement, and the pursuit of identity in Western societies. While the protagonists come from distinct cultural and national backgrounds Bengali-American in The Namesake and Nigerian in Americanah both novels offer a rich examination of the immigrant experience and the ways in which assimilation reshapes personal identity, familial relationships, and perceptions of race and belonging.

While the first chapter of this discussion looked at alienation as an aspect of the diaspora theory in the above mentioned novels, this chapter undertakes a comparative study of

The Namesake and *Americanah* through the lens of assimilation in five central concepts: identity formation, generational conflict, cultural adaptation versus cultural retention, and racial and ethnic perception. By analyzing the experiences of key characters such as Gogol Ganguli and Ashima in *The Namesake*, and Ifemelu and Obinze in *Americanah*, this chapter will explore how their respective journeys reflect the broader challenges and negotiations inherent in diaspora life. Through this framework of assimilation, this chapter highlights the similarities

and divergences in how these characters respond to cultural dislocation, Systemic pressures, and the evolving sense of self within different socio-political contexts America and the UK for Adichie's characters, and primarily America for Lahiri's.

Ultimately, this comparative approach seeks to deepen our understanding of how immigrant narratives portray the shaping of identity amid the persistent push and pull between cultural roots and the demands of assimilation.

I. **Assimilation Comparative analysis**

1. **Identity Formation:**

Identity formation is particularly complex for individuals in the diaspora, who must navigate between inherited cultural values and the pressures of a new society. This often leads to internal conflict, reinvention, or a fragmented sense of self.

In *The Namesake,* Gogol Ganguli grapples with this tension from a young age. His name, chosen by his father in honor of the Russian writer who indirectly saved his life, becomes a symbol of the burden of cultural legacy. "He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is" (p. 72).

This quote underscores Gogol's deep discomfort with his name not just as an oddity but as something that alienates him from the identity he wants to construct. The adjectives "absurd" and "obscure" reflect how Gogol sees his name as irrelevant in his American context. He views it as a symbol imposed on him by another culture and generation, creating a disconnect between his internal self and the external label he carries. His name becomes a daily reminder of his in-betweenness, marking him as different in ways he cannot control.

Feeling alienated from both American peers and Bengali customs, Gogol changes his name to Nikhil, hoping it will help him blend in.

Yet,this change brings only surface-level relief. After his father's death, he begins to reassess his identity, realizing that his name connects him to memory, family, and survival Lahiri says: "Without the name, he is no one. He would have no memory of the moment that made him who he is" (p. 289). Here, Gogol begins to understand his name not just as a source of embarrassment but as a narrative thread that links him to his father's survival and the history of his family. The phrase "he is no one" reveals a turning point: the name he once rejected now anchors his sense of self. This realization marks his shift from rejection to acceptance a recognition that identity isn't just constructed through personal choice, but also through inherited stories and loss. His journey reflects the slow acceptance of a hybrid identity, shaped by both heritage and experience.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu undergoes a different transformation. In Nigeria, she never thought of herself as "Black," but in America, she quickly learns that race is a dominant category. "I only became black when I came to America" (p. 220),She says, highlighting how identity is shaped by societal labels. This statement reveals how race, as a social construct, is not universal it is contextual. Ifemelu's racialization upon arriving in the U.S. points to how immigrants are often forced to adopt new identities based on how others perceive them. It's a moment of disorientation, where her self-conception must shift to accommodate a label that never applied to her before.

These experiences of fragmented identity formation can be understood through the lens of postcolonial theorists like Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. Fanon's concept of double consciousness resonates with both characters' struggles to reconcile their original identities with imposed external definitions. Similarly, Bhabha's notion of hybridity explains how diaspora subjects like Gogol and Ifemelu exist in liminal spaces, creating new forms of identity that are neither fully original nor completely assimilated.

Their journeys reflect what Bhabha calls the "third space" a zone of cultural negotiation where meaning is constantly being reconstructed. This theoretical framework helps us see that their identity crises aren't personal failures but rather the natural result of navigating between different cultural systems and power structures.

Through her blog, Ifemelu critiques racial dynamics and the assumptions placed on immigrants. She resists erasure and insists on nuance: “Dear Non-American Black, when you come to America, become black… America doesn't care” (p. 273). This quote is both ironic and urgent. The imperative “become black” criticizes the inevitability of racial categorization in America, while the phrase “America doesn’t care” exposes the harsh reality that one’s unique cultural background often gets flattened and ignored. Ifemelu acknowledges that in the American racial landscape, personal identity is often overshadowed by collective stereotypes. Yet, through writing, she creates space to define herself on her own terms, pushing back against these constraints.

Her identity becomes a blend of Nigerian roots and critical awareness of American systems. Upon returning to Lagos, she reconnects with her sense of self, suggesting that identity in the diaspora involves both adaptation and return.

While Gogol’s identity is shaped by cultural memory and personal loss, Ifemelu’s is defined through racial awakening and resistance. Both illustrate that diaspora identity is not fixed; it evolves through experience, reflection, and the push and pull of multiple worlds.

2. Generational Conflict:

In immigrant families, generational conflict often arises from differing relationships to culture, language, and social norms. Parents, shaped by their homeland’s traditions, frequently find themselves at odds with children who grow up in a different cultural environment,

navigating a hybrid identity. This tension, while rooted in love, often leads to misunderstandings, resentment, or emotional distance.

In *The Namesake*, Ashima and Ashoke make consistent efforts to preserve Bengali customs, language, and values for their American-born children. Ashima, in particular, holds onto traditions celebrating Indian festivals, preparing Bengali meals, and staying active in the local Bengali community. But over time, she begins to sense that her efforts are not connecting with her children in the way she hoped. "It is not for her children that she strives to keep her culture alive, but in spite of them" (p. 138). This quote captures Ashima's growing realization that cultural preservation has become a solitary act. The phrase "in spite of them" reflects not hostility, but disappointment an acknowledgment that her children, especially Gogol, don't share the emotional attachment to her customs. Her efforts are no longer about passing something on, but about holding onto a part of herself that is slowly being lost in a foreign land. This subtle grief points to a deeper generational disconnect, where shared heritage no longer guarantees shared values.

Gogol, in particular, resists these traditions. He finds the community gatherings dull,and he is uncomfortable with his parents' accents and rituals, he distances himself through choices that reflect American norms like dating outside his culture and rejecting arranged marriage.

His discomfort isn't just personal; it reflects the broader generational disagreement in many immigrant families, where the children grow up with a different relationship to their parents identity and belonging.

However, after Ashoke's death, Gogol begins to reflect more deeply on the sacrifices his father made and the cultural values he once pushed away. He starts participating in family rituals and begins to see meaning in the traditions he once ignored. His slow shift shows that

generational conflict can soften not through pressure, but through life experience and emotional growth.

In the context of assimilation, this generational conflict highlights a central tension: while the immigrant parents strive to maintain their cultural heritage in a new land, their children often feel the need to adapt to the dominant culture in order to fit in and thrive. Assimilation, for the younger generation, is often perceived as a necessary path toward identity formation and social acceptance, which can conflict with the preservation of the family's traditional values. The resulting friction creates a complex dynamic where the process of assimilation is not just about adapting to a new society, but also about negotiating one's connection to the past, often leading to internal conflict and a re-evaluation of cultural identity over time.

In *Americanah*, the generational divide appears in the relationship between Aunty Uju, Ifemelu's aunt and her son Dike, but it takes on a more emotionally complex and psychologically painful shape. After immigrating to the U.S., Uju works hard to assimilate, and this includes actively distancing Dike from Nigerian culture. She drops her Nigerian accent, insists they speak English at home, and reshapes their lifestyle to match what she believes will help Dike succeed in American society. Aunt Uju says: "This is America. You can't raise a child the Nigerian way here" (p. 113). Uju's words reflect the fear many immigrant parents carry, the fear that holding onto their culture might cost their children safety, acceptance or opportunity. Her decision isn't driven by shame, but by the pressure to protect her son from racism and exclusion.

Yet, in shielding Dike from his Nigerian identity, she unintentionally leaves him without cultural grounding. The result is confusion and dislocation; he does not feel fully American, but he also lacks the foundation to feel Nigerian. His depression and eventual suicide attempt speak to the emotional weight of growing up without a clear sense of belonging.

Dike's struggles reveal the fundamental impossibility of complete assimilation. Despite Aunty Uju's efforts to erase their Nigerian identity and fully embrace American culture, her son still faces rejection and alienation. His experience demonstrates that assimilation is not simply a matter of choice or effort societal barriers, racial prejudice, and the persistence of otherness make total integration unattainable. Even when immigrants abandon their cultural markers, they remain marked by difference in ways beyond their control. This impossibility creates a painful limbo where individuals like Dike are neither fully accepted by the dominant culture nor connected to their ancestral one, leaving them suspended in a space of perpetual displacement. Unlike Gogol, who eventually reconnects with his roots, Dike spirals into crisis, showing how unresolved generational conflict can lead to deep psychological harm.

Both novels show that generational conflict is not just a simple clash between old and new. It is a struggle between preservation and adaptation, between the desire to protect and the need to belong.

Ashima and Uju take different paths; one clings to culture ,and the other tries to erase it but both are driven by love. Yet, their children's responses make one thing clear: identity cannot be inherited or forced. It must be discovered often through tension, loss, and personal reckoning. These stories remind us that in the immigrant experience, generational conflict is not only about culture it is also about the universal desire to be seen, understood, and accepted within one's own family.

3. Cultural Adaptation vs. Cultural Retention:

The tension between adapting to a new culture and holding onto one's heritage is a central challenge for immigrants and their children. While some characters manage to navigate both worlds, others struggle deeply with this duality, experiencing alienation, loss, or

eventually, personal growth. These tensions form the heart of many diaspora narratives, including

The Namesake and *Americanah.*Characters experience this fundamental conflict in their struggle to assimilate to the new culture, where the process of integration often demands sacrificing elements of their original identity, creating an ongoing negotiation between belonging and authenticity.

In *The Namesake*, Ashoke Ganguli quietly embodies a balanced approach to cultural adaptation. He builds a successful career in America and moves with ease in professional circles, but he never abandons his Bengali roots. He reads Bengali literature, celebrates traditional holidays, and speaks the indian language at home. His decision to name his son "Gogol," after the Russian writer who unknowingly played a role in his survival, reflects the way he carries his cultural and personal history forward: "The name Gogol was the first thing he had given his son… something that came from survival" (p. 102). This quote reveals that, for Ashoke, naming is not just a cultural formality but an act of remembrance and gratitude. The name is tied to the trauma that shaped him and the second chance at life that brought him to America. Rather than enforcing tradition through rules, Ashoke models a quiet dignity and deep-rooted identity. His approach allows room for his children to grow into their heritage on their own terms.

After his death, this quiet strength becomes more visible to Gogol, who begins to reflect on what his father's values truly meant. Through Ashoke, Lahiri shows that cultural retention doesn't have to be loud or rigid, it can be steady, patient, and deeply personal.

His character demonstrates that assimilation need not mean complete abandonment of one's origins, but rather can involve a selective integration where immigrants maintain their core cultural values while adapting to new social and professional contexts.

In contrast, Americanah presents through Obinze's experience in the United Kingdom the emotional cost of forced adaptation. As an undocumented immigrant, he is forced to take on false identities and work in degrading conditions that strip him of his dignity. "In London, he was invisible. He could not believe how much it hurt" (p. 278).This quote highlights the deep psychological toll of being unseen not just legally, but existentially. Obinze's invisibility isn't just about paperwork; it's about how systems erase the person behind the immigrant. His experience exposes the darker side of assimilation, where survival sometimes demands self-effacement. Eventually deported, Obinze returns to Nigeria with a renewed commitment to living authentically. His return is not just physical, but emotional, a reconnection with his values, voice, and cultural foundation. His story suggests that adaptation, when it erases identity, becomes a form of harm. Healing, then, begins with reclaiming what was suppressed.

Meanwhile, Sonia Ganguli, though a more understated character in *The Namesake* offers a compelling example of cultural negotiation. Unlike Gogol, Sonia never seems to reject her heritage outright, but she also embraces her American identity without apology. Her relationship and eventual marriage to Ben, a Jewish Chinese-American man, reflect her ease in multicultural spaces and her comfort with fluid identity. Though Ashima is initially hesitant, she comes to accept Sonia's choices, signaling a quiet evolution in first-generation attitudes.Sonia's maturity becomes especially clear after Ashoke's death. She supports her mother emotionally, helps maintain family bonds, and participates in the very traditions her brother once resisted.

Her actions show that assimilation doesn't mean detachment; it can coexist with responsibility, care, and cultural respect. She represents a generation that doesn't feel forced to choose between identities but can live with both.

Together, Ashoke, Obinze, and Sonia offer three distinct responses to cultural assimilation. Ashoke preserves tradition while adapting with grace. Obinze endures the trauma

of erasure but ultimately reclaims his identity. Sonia blends cultures with emotional intelligence, modeling integration rather than conflict. Their stories reveal that adaptation isn't a betrayal of one's roots it's a negotiation. Through choice, reflection, and experience, identity can be shaped in ways that honor both past and present.

4. Racial and ethnic perceptions

Racial and ethnic perceptions shape not only how immigrants are seen by others, but also how they come to see themselves. These perceptions, often shaped by societal norms and expectations, can be empowering when they affirm identity, but more often, they act as limiting forces that reduce individuals to stereotypes or cultural roles. Both *The Namesake* and *Americanah* explore how these perceptions play out in personal relationships and internal struggles, especially for characters navigating multiple cultural identities.

In *The Namesake*, Moushumi provides a nuanced portrayal of how ethnic expectations within an immigrant community can become constraining. Despite being well-educated, self-sufficient, and intellectually curious, Moushumi constantly feels closed in by the assumptions others make about her Bengali identity. Her decision to marry Gogol, while seemingly a culturally appropriate choice, ultimately leads to dissatisfaction. The marriage is built more on shared background than emotional compatibility, and over time, Moushumi begins to feel trapped. "She resents the assumption that she and Gogol are a natural couple" (p. 213).

This line reflects Moushumi's internal frustration at being reduced to a cultural match rather than appreciated for her individuality. The word "assumption" suggests that their pairing is not based on mutual understanding or emotional depth, but on the expectations placed upon them by their families and community. This resentment speaks to a broader discomfort with how ethnic identity can overshadow personal agency. Moushumi's eventual infidelity and her attraction to men outside her ethnic circle are not just acts of rebellion they are deliberate efforts

to assert her own desires and to escape the cultural narrative that has been constructed around her resistance to these cultural expectations reflects her desire to assimilate on her own terms, rejecting the prescribed path of marrying within her community as a way to maintain cultural continuity. For Moushumi, true assimilation means the freedom to choose relationships based on personal compatibility rather than ethnic matching, even if this choice ultimately distances her from the cultural preservation of her family values.

Her story reflects the psychological burden of being reduced to a cultural symbol rather than being seen as a fully complex individual. When community members view her primarily through the lens of cultural preservation expecting her to marry within her ethnicity, uphold traditional values, and serve as a bridge between generations they take away her multifaceted identity and reduce her to a one-dimensional representation of Bengali heritage. The expectations placed upon her, both subtle and overt, reflect a community investment in preserving cultural continuity, but they also stifle her freedom to define herself beyond her ethnicity. She becomes trapped in a role where her personal desires, intellectual pursuits, and individual complexity are overshadowed by what she represents culturally. This creates a suffocating dynamic where her worth is measured not by her own achievements or character, but by how well she fulfills the community's vision of cultural authenticity and continuity

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's experiences with race, particularly through her romantic relationship with Curt, a wealthy white American, reveal how deeply ingrained and often invisible racial dynamics can influence even the most intimate spaces. While Curt genuinely cares for her, he lacks the tools to understand the systemic and emotional weight of her experience as a Black woman in America. Curt's state: "You can't write about race in America without being angry" (p. 312). This quote exposes Curt's discomfort and limited grasp of racial issues. His statement implies that discussions of race are inherently emotional or irrational, revealing a lack of awareness about the reality of structural racism. For Ifemelu, anger is not a

rhetorical tool, but an emotional truth rooted in daily experiences of marginalization. Curt's failure to grasp this highlights the gap between intent and understanding, between love and empathy.

His whiteness shields him from the very experiences that shape Ifemelu's sense of self, making the relationship feel unbalanced and emotionally unsustainable.

Eventually, Ifemelu chooses to end the relationship not out of lack of affection, but because she refuses to compromise her voice and her evolving understanding of herself. This decision marks a crucial step in her journey of self-definition, in which she prioritizes authenticity over accommodation. Her blog becomes a platform through which she claims her narrative, articulating the racial nuances that those like Curt are unable or unwilling to see.

Together, Moushumi and Ifemelu show how racial and ethnic perceptions operate on both social and emotional levels. Moushumi feels limited by internal community expectations, while Ifemelu confronts the external pressures of navigating race in a society that constantly defines her in reductive ways. Both characters respond by asserting independence, even when doing so leads to isolation or conflict.

In both *The Namesake* and *Americanah*, personal relationships become mirrors reflecting the larger forces of culture, race, and belonging. These characters teach us that the struggle for self-definition often involves rejecting the identities imposed by others, whether by one's own cultural group or a broader racialized society. Their stories are not just about assimilation, but about the courage it takes to carve out space for individuality within systems that seek to categorize and control.This tension lies at the heart of assimilation: the pressure to adapt to a dominant or expected identity while still holding on to one's personal truth. For Moushumi, assimilation means being folded into a cultural narrative that feels rigid and predetermined, one that celebrates sameness over difference. For Ifemelu, assimilation in

America requires her to navigate a racialized identity that often overlooks the complexity of her Nigerian background. Both characters ultimately push back against these forms of assimilation, not because they reject belonging, but because they refuse to let that belonging come at the cost of their authenticity.

As cultural theorist Stuart Hall reminds us in *Cultural identity and diaspora*., identity is not something fixed or final, but something "always in the process of becoming." (Hall,1990,p.225)This helps explain why both Moushumi and Ifemelu resist being boxed into narrow definitions; they are constantly evolving, shaped by their experiences and their refusal to conform completely. Their resistance reveals how assimilation is not always about fitting in; it can also be about choosing when and how to stand apart.

5 .Language and communication: .

In *The Namesake* and *Americanah*, language functions as a fundamental medium through which immigrant characters navigate the demands of assimilation. Their experiences reveal that linguistic adaptation is not simply a voluntary choice but a crucial strategy for achieving social acceptance and cultural belonging in their new environments.

In *The Namesake*, Gogol's discomfort with his Bengali name highlights the linguistic challenges inherent in assimilation. He admits, "He had never wanted to be named Gogol. The name was a source of embarrassment, a daily reminder of difference" (Lahiri, p. 70). This quote reveals how ethnic names are powerful linguistic markers that can isolate immigrant children by emphasizing their "otherness" in American society. Gogol's embarrassment shows that language carries social stigma and can reinforce exclusion. His rejection of "Gogol" symbolizes a desire to distance himself from cultural identifiers that mark him as different. This reflects the pressure assimilation places on immigrants to relinquish visible linguistic markers in order to avoid marginalization.

This linguistic shift becomes more explicit as Lahiri writes, “When he says Nikhil instead of Gogol, it’s more than just a name change. It’s a way to rewrite his identity in a language that is widely accepted in America” (p. 105). Gogol’s legal name change to “Nikhil” represents a deliberate act of assimilation through language. By adopting a name that aligns more closely with English phonetics and American cultural norms, Gogol gains access to social spaces and freedoms that were previously limited by his ethnic identity.

The phrase “widely accepted” emphasizes how assimilation is contingent upon conforming to dominant linguistic standards. Language, here, becomes a tool through which immigrants reimagine themselves to fit the expectations of the host society.

Adichie’s Americanah explores a more explicitly racialized dimension of linguistic assimilation through Ifemelu’s experiences. Adichie notes, “When she spoke to Americans, she learned quickly, her accent mattered more than her words” (Adichie, p. 158). This statement demonstrates that accent not only vocabulary or grammar acts as a social barrier to assimilation. Despite Ifemelu’s fluency in English, her Nigerian accent marks her as foreign and limits her social acceptance. Assimilation, therefore, requires adopting not only the dominant language but also its phonetic norms, illustrating how language functions as a social code governing belonging.Ifemelu further reflects, “She was not pretending anymore. She had taken on the American accent because it was what the job required” (p. 210). This admission reveals assimilation as a performative act driven by practical necessity. Linguistic adaptation serves as a survival strategy, allowing access to professional opportunities that might otherwise be denied due to difference. The phrase “not pretending anymore” suggests the emotional cost of this assimilation, highlighting the personal alienation involved in suppressing one’s authentic linguistic identity.Adding to this, Ifemelu’s insight that “Changing her accent wasn’t about vanity; it was about necessity, the unspoken rule of assimilation in America” (p. 214), exposes linguistic assimilation as an unwritten social expectation. This rule indicates that to succeed

and belong, immigrants must conform linguistically regardless of personal desire. The statement challenges any view of language adaptation as superficial, instead positioning it as a critical, often coercive, element of the immigrant experience.

Together, these examples demonstrate that language acts as a gatekeeper to assimilation. Immigrants frequently modify or suppress their native linguistic identities to gain access to education, employment, and social inclusion. Yet, this linguistic conformity can also fracture identity and generate cultural dissonance.

Ultimately, language serves as a double-edged sword: it is both a necessary means of assimilation and a site of cultural loss, negotiation, and resistance. Through language, immigrant characters perform assimilation, balancing the demands of belonging with the persistence of their heritage.

After examining key themes such as identity formation, generational conflict, cultural adaptation versus retention, and the impact of racial and ethnic perception,and language and communication,it becomes clear that both *The Namesake* and *Americanah* illuminate the complex and often painful journey of becoming. Characters like Gogol and Ifemelu and they are caught between cultures, trying to forge an identity in environments that continually challenge their sense of self. Their struggles are deeply personal, yet also shaped by larger forces family expectations, societal pressures, and inherited cultural frameworks.

Neither character follows a linear path; instead, their experiences reflect how fragmented and nonlinear the process of self-discovery can be for those living between worlds.

What these stories ultimately reveal is that assimilation is not a single destination or goal, but an ongoing, evolving negotiation. It requires navigating the tension between holding on and letting go between cultural preservation and change. This negotiation involves both gain

and loss: the comfort of familiarity may be sacrificed for independence, while new freedoms may come with a sense of rootlessness.

There is alienation, but also deep moments of connection and healing. In showing the contradictions of immigrant life, both Lahiri and Adichie present characters who must learn not only how to survive in unfamiliar worlds but also how to reimagine home and identity on their own terms.

Through their emotionally rich portrayals of life in the diaspora, The Namesake and Americanah reveal the courage it takes to build belonging in spaces that often feel unwelcoming. These novels remind us that becoming is a continuous process shaped by memory, place, and resistance and that the search for identity, though difficult, is also a source of strength and transformation.

Conclusion:

After our research regarding Diaspora and cultural identity in the *Namesake* by Lhumpa Lahiri (2003) and *Americanh* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi (2013) : Between Assimilation and Alienation.We come into a conclusion that, in both *The Namesake* and *Americanah*, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explore what it means to live between cultures and how the experience of migration shapes who we are. Through characters like Gogol, Ashoke, Sonia, Ifemelu, Obinze, and Aunty Uju, both novels show that assimilation is far from a simple process. It's not just about adjusting to a new country, it's about balancing different identities, expectations, and emotional ties, often while feeling like you don't fully belong anywhere.

We have learned also that one of the most powerful themes that runs through both novels is alienation. Characters often feel like outsiders not only in the countries they move to but sometimes even within their own families or communities. In *The Namesake*, Gogol's discomfort with his name reflects his deeper struggle to connect with both his Indian roots and American upbringing. Ifemelu, in Americanah, experiences a similar feeling of not quite fitting in when she moves to the U.S. and becomes aware of how race suddenly defines her in a way it never did in Nigeria. Their sense of being out of place is not just about culture it's also about the emotional distance that can grow between who they were, who they are becoming, and who others expect them to be.

Characters like Sonia and Obinze show quieter, but just as important, versions of this journey. Sonia, for example, finds a way to hold on to her heritage while also living a fully American life, marrying outside her culture yet staying close to her family. Obinze's story takes him from undocumented life in the U.K. to an uneasy return to Nigeria, showing how alienation can follow someone even when they come home.

These characters remind us that the immigrant experience is not the same for everyone; it depends on so many personal and social factors.

What both novels make clear is that the process of forming a cultural identity in the diaspora is ongoing and often painful. The feeling of alienation is real, and it shapes how these characters relate to themselves and the world around them. But they also show that identity can be fluid and that it's possible to carry more than one culture within you and to build a sense of belonging that isn't tied to just one place.

Together, The *Namesake* and *Americanah* offer moving, honest portrayals of what it means to live in-between. They don't offer easy answers, but they show how powerful and complicated the search for home, identity, and connection can be for people living in the diaspora. Through their characters, they remind us that being caught between cultures can be both a struggle and a strength and that in those in-between spaces, something new can be created.

Building on this foundation, future research could explore more focused themes such as gender and cultural expectations how traditional roles impact the choices, freedom, and identity of characters like Ifemelu, Aunty Uju, Ashima, and Sonia. These topics open up valuable discussions about the intersection of personal identity and societal norms across different cultures and generations.

Another important direction is the mental health and emotional displacement caused by migration and cultural conflict, especially seen in the quiet loneliness of Ashima, the internal disconnection Gogol experiences, and the depression Ifemelu goes through upon returning to Nigeria. These areas offer deep insight into how cultural and emotional pressures shape individual lives within the broader narrative of diaspora.

Further areas of research might include examining intergenerational conflict and how first- and second-generation immigrants negotiate different values, languages, and lifestyles. The impact of language and naming how accents, names, and ways of speaking influence belonging and perception could also be explored in greater detail. Additionally, the role of education and class mobility in the immigrant experience could offer another angle, particularly in how these factors shape relationships and self-worth. The influence of transnational relationships romantic or familial might also be an important topic, as characters maintain ties to their home countries while forging new lives abroad. Lastly, the function of place and setting, such as the contrast between urban and suburban spaces, or the symbolism of returning "home," could serve as rich ground for further exploration.

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