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Finding Oneself Far from Home: Identity Construction in Contemporary US Migrant Women's Fiction

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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY (ARTS) TO THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND,
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Abstract

This thesis discusses US immigrant women's narratives in terms of identity construction, adaptation to the host environment, and the resulting effects on the characters' sense of home and belonging. The thesis also compares women's immigrant narratives with expatriate fictions focusing on the experience of American women in the East. The project explores six specific novels: Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009), Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), Keija Parssinen's *The Ruins of Us* (2012), and Janice Y. K. Lee's *The Expatriates* (2016). These texts will be examined primarily through the lens of Homi Bhabha's theories of postcolonial 'third space' and hybridity, and Young Yun Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory. The thesis also engages with the extant scholarship on this topic. The goal of this thesis is to bridge a gap in the fields of literary and cross-cultural studies, immigrant women studies, and comparative studies, generating scholarship on neglected topics such as women's expatriate narratives in the East. This project connects the women writers discussed through the theories applied in interpreting their narratives and through identifying them according to two, different, geographical movements—immigration into America and emigration to the East. The first cluster of narratives explored in this thesis are those of migrant women who struggle with double exclusion: a woman of colour who migrates to the US experiences twice the difficulties that a man of colour or an expatriated White woman to the East would face. However, American women who migrate to the East also struggle with loss of autonomy due to cultural difference and differences in gender roles in the host culture. As American literature is now routinely defined as a phenomenon that exceeds national borders, looking at the works of the immigrant women writers discussed in

this thesis through the lens of the transnational turn in American studies changes and challenges our definition of what American literature is.

Introduction

This thesis discusses US immigrant women's narratives in terms of identity construction, adaptation to the host environment, and the resulting effects on the characters' sense of home and belonging. The thesis also compares these women's immigrant narratives with expatriate fictions of American women in the East. The project explores six novels: Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009), Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), Keija Parssinen's *The Ruins of Us* (2012), and Janice Y. K. Lee's *The Expatriates* (2016). These texts will be examined primarily through the lens of Homi Bhabha's theories of postcolonial 'third space' and hybridity, and Young Yun Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory. The thesis also engages with the extant scholarship on this topic. The goal of this thesis is to bridge a gap in the fields of literary and cross-cultural studies, immigrant women studies, and comparative studies by generating scholarship on neglected topics such as women's expatriate narratives in the East. This project connects the women writers discussed through the theories applied in interpreting their narratives and through identifying them according to two different geographical movements—immigration into America and emigration to the East. The first cluster of narratives explored in this thesis concern migrant women who struggle with double exclusion: a woman of colour who migrates to the US experiences twice the difficulties that a man of colour or an expatriated White woman to the East would face. However, American women who migrate to the East also struggle with loss of autonomy due to cultural difference and differences in gender roles in the host culture. As American literature is now routinely defined as a phenomenon that exceeds national borders, looking at the works of these immigrant women writers through the lens of the transnational turn in American studies changes and challenges our definition of what American literature is.

While recent scholarship on migrant literature has reflected increasing attention on women's identity, there has been relatively little focus on expatriate women's identity. This thesis is a comparative study, which seeks to identify a cluster of female-authored American immigrant and expatriate narratives: immigrant narratives set in the West, which deal with identity in the face of ethnic and religious discrimination. The thesis also addresses American expatriate narratives set in the East, which deal with identity in the face of family issues and cultural difference. Protagonists in all these narratives construct versions of Bhabha's 'third space' to mediate between divergent identities. This study also employs Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory, in its analysis of American expatriate narratives, to explore and explain the communication and adaptation process in a different cultural context. The core of this research is the term 'identity': this thesis focuses on the ways in which the female characters in the novels under consideration construct their identities and adapt to the host environment, assessing the effects on their sense of home and belonging.

The literary texts analysed in this thesis examine women living between cultures who share the experience of displacement and alienation. Examining identity in relation to White racism and discrimination is fundamental to exploring migrant women's experiences in the context of their changing sense of home and self. Set in America, the first four female-authored novels considered here present female protagonists who simultaneously embrace and resist both their ethnic and American cultures before they construct hybrid identities for themselves. Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009) and Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996) represent the lives of immigrant women of colour in America and the racism and discrimination they encounter there as they negotiate between the two cultures of which they are simultaneously a part. In the foreword to *Contemporary Arab American*

Women Writers: Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossings, Magali Cornier Michael notes that

American literature of the last few decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century has become much more diverse at least in part as a result of the increasing number of women writers from nonwhite and hybrid cultural and racial origins who are producing literary texts that address issues of gender, race, and ethnicity within the American context and that have achieved stature on the basis of popular and/or critical acclaim. (11)

There are many studies of the narratives of immigrants, of multiple ethnic and national origin, to the US. However, if we reverse the direction to look at the literature produced by Americans abroad, we find that attention is paid, almost exclusively, to the expatriate fiction of the Lost Generation writers of the 1920s (Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald) and on African American expatriates (Claude McKay, Richard Wright, James Baldwin), with little critical attention given to date to contemporary expatriation narratives, written by and about women, which focus on ethnicity, race and identity outside US national borders. Given that relatively little recent critical attention has been devoted to expatriate literature, particularly expatriation to the East, the final two novels to be considered in this thesis – Keija Parssinen's *The Ruins of Us* (2012) and Janice Y.K. Lee's *The Expatriates* (2016)– which are about American women expatriates in Saudi Arabia and China, are analysed in the context of comparative expatriate female identity. The first two chapters of this thesis are devoted to analysing immigrant narratives, while one chapter is concerned with expat narratives. The reason for this imbalance is that there is less material—both critical and literary—on the latter.

Arabian Jazz and *Americanah* have been more widely discussed and analysed than the other novels addressed in this thesis. I wanted to combine and compare very well-known

novels with some lesser-known examples to strengthen my thesis. I chose *Arabian Jazz* to represent how Arabs in America are classified as black; this theme links *Arabian Jazz* to *Americanah*. The aim of examining these novels was to compare manifestations of racism toward Arabs and black people in America. Two different responses to this racist treatment are represented: staying in and trying to create a space for oneself in the host community, or going back home. *Americanah* is chosen to show how racism can be very difficult to endure, and thus going back home—to a place much less civilized than the US—is preferred.

Meanwhile, *Mona in the Promised Land* is examined alongside *Saffron Dreams* because the second chapter of this thesis is interested in addressing the effect of racism on the religious identities of Muslim immigrants as well as those of other ethnicities. As contemporary expatriate fiction written by women is not given much scholarly attention, *The Ruins of Us* and *The Expatriate* are the most recent expatriate novels that have been praised and reviewed.

This research aims to answer the following questions: What is the role of US racism and discrimination in shaping immigrants' identities in contemporary US migrant women's narratives, and what is the effect of racism on their sense of being at home? What patterns of socialisation do the characters adopt for the purpose of adaptation? Do American expatriates in the East, as represented in contemporary expatriate women's narratives, face the same struggles as immigrants in America? What are the differences between immigrant and expatriate narratives in terms of identity issues, the sense of being at home and adaptation to a new society? Answers to these questions will be framed by analysing, comparing and contrasting the works of six contemporary women writers.

In the field of American migrant literature, the application of the term 'identity' is ubiquitous. According to Ilaria Boncori, 'The available literature on identity has developed so significantly that Ybema et al. (2009, inter alia) now refer to "identity studies" as a distinct discipline' (155). Identity – composed of gender, nationality, race, ethnicity and religion – is

an important component in any work of literature, and in migrant literature in particular. As William Q. Boelhower notes, ‘an immigrant protagonist(s), representing an ethnic world view, comes to America with great expectations and through a series of trials is led to reconsider them in terms of his final status’ (5). The author who has migrated from his/her original country and settled in another faces multiple difficulties in the new society and culture, including identity issues, where the solutions include ‘assimilation, hyphenation, or alienation’ (Boelhower 5). It is difficult for migrants to call the country of destination their home because they are singled out as different; the same situation faces children of migrants who are born in the host nation. Questions of identity emerge and become urgent as a consequence of these situations.

According to Fadi Ahmad Al-Issa, ‘The use of the term identity reflects the belief that each person’s identity [...] is deeply inflected by social features’ (6). The extent to which the new society is willing to accept immigrants determines the extent to which immigrants are able to retain their original identities. On the one hand, immigration is a driver of cultural diversity, since immigrants are of different ethnicities, cultures and religions. On the other hand, in the American and other national contexts, immigrants may be pressurised into adopting the majority culture. Conflicting views emerge, as the apparent homogeneity of American society is threatened by the presence of immigrants, whereas immigrants may view assimilation as the loss of their own cultural values. As Jonathan Culler states, ‘struggles about identity are struggles within the individual and between individual and group; characters struggle against or comply with social norms and expectations’ (111). Immigrants often discover the need to define their identities relative to their adopted community, so that they can create a space for themselves among foreigners. To achieve this, they need to assimilate into the mainstream culture; however, assimilation means elimination of the migrant’s cultural values and traditions, and may not guarantee full integration. Immigrant

women of colour struggle on two fronts in defining their identities: faced with double exclusion, their gender places them in a complicated relationship between the norms and expectations of the dominant culture and those of their family and ethnic group. As Judith Lorber notes, 'As part of a stratification system, gender ranks men above women of the same race and class' (66). She adds that 'From society's point of view, however, one gender [A] is usually the touchstone, the normal, the dominant, and the other is different, deviant, and subordinate. In Western society, "man" is A, "woman" is not A' (66).

The works of immigrant women addressed in this thesis embody several ethnic and religious identities, yet their individual narratives represent the wider struggle and ambivalence of migrants in affirming or discarding their identities or retaining both their new and old identities. All the novels under consideration here that are set in America reject traditional stereotypes of Eastern women as passive and submissive, and represent women attaining individual identities by resisting hegemonic attitudes. Meanwhile, the American expatriate narratives analysed in this thesis reassert American women's individuality in facing cultural difference. This body of writing, then, produces alternative ways of representing the migrant woman. All the female immigrant authors whose work is discussed here foreground cultural difference and identity issues as an enunciation of the lived experience of immigrant women.

My thesis focuses largely, although not exclusively, on Arab and/or Muslim women writers and characters, who are assessed in comparison with each other and with other ethnicities, including American, Asian, and African. American women writers 'whose identities straddle races and cultures' (Michael 11) and so highlight the lived experience of doubleness in their fiction. As Amal Talaat Abdelrazek states,

Arab American women live in an in-between space where they oscillate between the Arab and American cultures. While they long to embrace their Arab heritage, they

cannot identify with the patriarchal aspects of the culture. On the other hand, they cannot fully belong to the American culture, which often excludes them because of racial and ethnic differences. (11)

Arab American authors – such as Leila Ahmed, Mohja Kahf, Laila Halaby and Diana Abu-Jaber – have written about Arab American women’s exclusion ‘from the larger American community that subjects them to racism and discrimination’ (11). These women consequently inhabit an Arab American version of what Bhabha terms, the ‘third space’: ‘This third space, in-between Arab and American cultures, refuses categorisation, fixity, and closure. Instead, Arab American women live in fluid “third-time spaces,” which enables them to mix with both cultures, breaking down all dichotomies between an essentialised self and other while retaining and celebrating their differences’ (Abdelrazek 11–12).

As there is a relationship between feminism and immigration to the US, this thesis examines the status of women to see if it improves with migration. It also assesses the impact of immigration on gender relations. Do gender relations change with migration? How does migration affect sexual practices and identities? Immigrants are not often considered a powerful group and have no voice in the American host society. Thus, the US feminist movement is not achieving the desired results for women of colour’s rights and demands. Moreover, migration does affect gender relations. Conflicts between genders arise as a consequence of new living and working conditions as well as systematic gender inequalities in the host community, which discriminates between men and women of colour. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo states: ‘The earlier studies on women and migration were followed by a phase of research on gender and migration, which emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s. this leads to ‘the disruption of the universal category “women” by heightened awareness of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender relations and by the recognition of the fluidity of gender relations’ (115).

The identity of these migrant women, however, is also the product of the host community, in which women of colour experience discrimination, and, in some cases, oppression within their own ethnic groups and families. Thus, race/ethnicity and gender are significant factors in defining the identities of migrant women of colour. Since the 1980s, feminists have studied and understood gender in intersectional terms, in relation to other social identities, such as race and ethnicity. Feminists of colour have long distinguished the experiences of women of colour, in comparison to both men of colour and White women. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw is a prominent theorist of intersectionality—the intersection of race and sex. She states that ‘Women of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds. When reform efforts undertaken on behalf of women neglect this fact, women of color are less likely to have their needs met than women who are racially privileged’ (1250). She defines the concept of political intersectionality, which

highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas. The need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing political agendas is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront. Indeed, their specific raced and gendered experiences, although intersectional, often define as well as confine the interests of the entire group. For example, racism as experienced by people of color who are of a particular gender—male—tends to determine the parameters of antiracist strategies, just as sexism as experienced by women who are of a particular race—white—tends to ground the women's movement. The problem is not simply that both discourses fail women of color by not acknowledging the “additional” burden of patriarchy or of racism, but that the discourses are often inadequate even to the discrete tasks of articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism. Because women of color experience racism in

ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color, and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, dominant conceptions of antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms. (1251-52)

The negotiation between race/ethnicity and gender is challenging for women of colour. The struggle of Jemorah, in *Arabian Jazz*, lies in her effort to meet the dominant culture's assimilation requirements from one side and the pressure of her aunt Fatima to follow her family's Arab traditions on the other. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's experience is affected by her location and is shaped by the intersectionality of her race as Black and her gender as female. Her struggle with her hair, particularly, marks her experience, as she is torn between her preference (her natural hair) and White society's preference (relaxed hair). In *Saffron Dreams*, Arissa's gender intersects with her ethnicity as a Pakistani woman and her religious affiliation as Muslim. She struggles with the issue of veil, that, particularly post 9/11, reveals her identity as Muslim. By removing her veil to assimilate into the mainstream, she risks experiencing a double exclusion, subjecting herself to the accusation of infidelity by her own community. Finally, the eponymous protagonist of *Mona in the Promised Land* struggles both with her parents' Chinese values and their perhaps paradoxically assimilationist approach, and the racist treatment she encounters because of her skin tone and facial features. She is doubly excluded, as her parents abandon her when she converts to Judaism.

Diana Abu-Jaber was born in Syracuse, New York, to a Jordanian immigrant father, (originally Palestinian), and an American mother. Moving between America and Jordan as a child exposed her to a variety of cross-cultural issues which she addresses in her four novels, *Arabian Jazz* (1993), *Crescent* (2003), *Origin* (2007), and *Paradise of Birds* (2011), and in her memoir, *The Language of Baklava* (2005). Abu-Jaber describes the conflicts animating Arab American writing of the 1980s and 1990s, 'such as identity politics and the fault lines between being Arab and American' (Suleiman 18). Abu-Jaber is one of the most influential

Arab American writers to address the experience of being both Arab and American and to illustrate Arab immigrants' struggles in negotiating their dual cultural identity in the US. As Elmaz Abinader notes, 'Abu-Jaber pulls no punches in her portrayals of life within the Arab community that are both self-effacing and funny, bittersweet and nostalgic. By refreshing the memory, she keeps the questions of survival alive' (5).

Pauline Kaldas notes that before the publication of Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* in 1993, a number of significant literary works by Arab American authors had appeared, across the genres of poetry, autobiography, the short story and the novel. However, 'their work did not specifically address Arab American themes. The publication of novels that explored the lives of Arab Americans seemed to be the next step in the growth of the literature' (167). That growth would be impeded by the marginalized status of Arab Americans in society, as well as within the literary establishment. Andrea Shalal-Esa notes that Abu-Jaber's second novel, *Memories of Birth*, remained unpublished for a number of years, during which Abu-Jaber put it aside and started writing *Crescent*:

Abu-Jaber discussed her second novel's odyssey and the difficulty of telling Arab stories in America at a conference in Washington in April, hosted by Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. Asked to rewrite her characters again and again, remove references to Israel, and provide historical evidence of the war crimes committed against Palestinians in 1948, Abu-Jaber said she finally reached a point – five years after beginning the book – when she had to put it aside. ("The Only Response")

Abu-Jaber wanted to reflect in her speech the problematics of publication for Arab American writers: 'She still doesn't know if the problem was her prose, or the results of racism and politics, but she told the conference that she eventually concluded, "The only response to

silencing – besides our paranoia – is to keep speaking” (“The Only Response”). As Hazel Galloway states,

One minority group that has suffered the stigma of not being easily accepted in the society is the Asian group and specifically the Arab society. Most of the Asians who have migrated to America have tended to stick to their culture thus further alienating themselves from the community that is so diverse [...] in a bid to change this situation, authors such as Abu-Jaber have come up with novels written in a form that would integrate the peculiarities of Arab literature with the mainstream American forms of writing as a way of finding acceptability in the American literary world. (“Arab Diaspora”)

Arabian Jazz is the first Arab American novel to reach a wide and popular US readership. The novel narrates the story of an Arab-American family, the Ramouds, who live in upstate New York: Matussem; his two daughters, Jemorah and Melvina; and his sister, Fatima. Matussem loves jazz music and immerses himself in drumming, while Fatima is the figure who represents the family’s Arab traditions in America. Jemorah and Melvina, the American-born daughters of a deceased Irish-American mother, try to create a balance between their hyphenated identities. The novel won the Oregon Book Award and was a finalist for the national PEN/Hemingway award, and yet a Hollywood producer, interested in adapting the novel for the cinema, ‘told Abu-Jaber he didn’t like the word “Arab” in the title. Perhaps, he mused, the book could tell the story of another, more acceptable ethnic group’ (“The Only Response”). The identity of some ethnic groups is secure because their place in American society ‘is at this point in time unquestioned’: in contrast, as Suhair Majaj indicates, ‘Arab Americans—[are] still subject to identity-based discrimination’ with the effect that ‘Arab Americans are pushed to the margins of available definitions’ (324-5). Carol

Fadda-Conrey concurs that the ambiguity of Arab Americans' belonging proves their "otherness" in the US (*Contemporary Arab-American* 16). This definitional gap prompts White Americans readily to associate Arabs with African Americans, a stigmatised minority. The father, Matussem, is referred to as a "sand nigger" in Abu-Jaber's novel, indicating the pejorative conjoining of Arab and African Americans in the US racial imaginary. Matussem's affection for jazz reinforces in a positive sense the relationship between Arab Americans and African Americans as marginalized communities. Like African American musicians, Matussem uses the improvisations of jazz to negotiate and understand his unstable racial identity in American society.

The US racial system determines people's rights and positions in American society. Nadine Naber explains the position of Arab Americans according to that system:

While many Arab Americans phenotypically (that is, hair texture or dark skin) pass as white, some live racially marked lives. Others are racially marked by choice, because they consciously decide to self-identify as 'non-whites' or as 'persons of colour' to distinguish themselves from European American whites and to align themselves politically with other racially marked groups, such as blacks, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and/or Chicanos(as)/Mexicans. They employ the label 'non-white' or 'people of colour' as a political strategy for claiming their rights in the face of racial/ethnic or religious discrimination. (51)

She adds that Arab Americans do not always have the right to choose 'to pass' or 'not to pass' as white because 'North Americans who associate Arabs with media images of the Arab world, the Middle East, or Islam often perceive Arab Americans, whether they are phenotypically marked or not, as different from and inferior to what is considered 'white'' (51). In *Arabian Jazz*, Abu-Jaber explores the situation of the immigrant aligning or

affiliating herself or himself with another minority group. She provides a 'third space' in her novel, represented in the character of Matussem, who plays jazz and thereby aligns himself with African American culture: 'on a pragmatic level, the anomalous position of Arab Americans within American racial categories means that Arab Americans may be unable to elicit responses to their concerns without affiliating with other minority groups' (Majaj 326). So the 'third space' in migrant narratives may resolve cultural clashes.

Arabian Jazz was widely reviewed, nationally and internationally. Nayef Ali Al-Joulani reads *Arabian Jazz* through the Orpheus myth, arguing that the novel 'adopts an orphic vision as a model for cultural hybridity' (637). The use of one of the foundational myths of the West is another index of the novel's hybridity. The Orpheus myth fits the novel, since Orpheus, like Matussem, is a musician whose wife (Eurydice, in the myth) is dead. Al-Joulani states in his analysis that 'music performs an orphic role of harmonizing the two contending cultures in the psyche of the Arab American to bring them into a state of coexistence' (647). In my interpretation, jazz music is Abu-Jaber's signifier of a 'third space' in her novel. Being marked as non-White, Matussem adopts a 'third space' in which, in the face of racism, he identifies himself in aligning with another group of colour, African Americans. As Bhabha states, 'Identification is a process of identifying with and through another object' ('The Third Space' 211). Jazz music is itself a fusion of traditions: considered a quintessentially American form, its origins are in African musical culture, and it borrows from Middle Eastern rhythms and inflections. That cultural fusion, and the vivid aesthetic of jazz, represents home for Matussem.

In contrast, Abdalwahid Noman and Shaily Asthana read the novel as revealing the Arab characters' cultural perplexity, which is defined by 'the combination of cultural features from both Arab and American cultures' (182), supporting their argument with reference to Salman Rushdie's and Edward Said's views on hyphenated identities: 'The novel presents the

reaction of Arab Americans toward the new culture when they found themselves in a hyphenated place. They are suffering from an ambiguous belonging' (Noman and Asthana 183). I differ from these critics in arguing that it is not their hyphenated position but rather White racism that is the driving force of the unease that Abu-Jaber's characters face in defining their identities. Melvina, for example, does not struggle with a clash between her Arab and American identities, as she achieves a form of acculturation which enables her to strike a balance between her dual identities. The major source of perplexity for Jemorah, on the other hand, is the racist treatment she encounters in the US. Fatima represents the maternal figure for Jemorah and Melvina after the death of their mother when the girls were very young. Jemorah, unlike Melvina, is affected by their upbringing by their aunt, who cherishes Arabic traditions: Jemorah eventually accepts that she must marry her cousin, Nassir. However, the racism to which Jemorah is subjected in her early years at school also determines her actions. As an adult, she is put under persistent pressure from her boss, Portia, to surrender her Arab identity, which leads Jemorah to take defensive action in asserting her Arab identity and discarding her American one. Mahalingam et al. state that 'In order to successfully challenge negative social representations of race, ethnicity and gender, ethnic minorities redefine their self-identities and idealize their ethnic identities to cope with their marginalized social status' (327-28). However, it is Jemorah's alienation which drives her to adopt a hybrid identity. Hybridity in this instance is the product of a tension between opposites for the migrant, who is pressured both to retain her cultural origins and to assimilate into the host culture.

In her reading of the novel, Ibis Gómez-Vega suggests that 'Through a meshing of stories from many different cultures, *Arabian Jazz* revises the traditional fairy tale in which marriage becomes the purpose of a woman's life' (146). Gómez-Vega argues that 'Through Fatima's "traditional" ideas about marriage, Abu-Jaber combines the messages inherent in

fairy tales with Arabian cultural expectations for women' (137). The family, in fact, is the first space in which gender segregation takes place. According to Salwa Essayah Cherif, 'Fatima has no conception of life outside the patriarchal social order that oppresses women' (203). In Fatima's "Old Country", girls should succumb to their parents' desire to choose husbands for them. In my analysis, Fatima views marriage, according to the beliefs with which she was brought up, as a means for a woman to have a home. In Arab cultures, the male is given privileges over women and he is dominant in his family. He is supposed to take care of women in his family, who are viewed as weak and dependant. Fatima remains loyal to her family's traditions in America and works toward teaching these traditions and values to her nieces. By narrating the story of her baby sisters being buried alive in order to provide a decent life for Matussem, who was 'so fortunate! Born a man' (334), Abu-Jaber starkly represents Arab women's oppression. Gómez-Vega's analysis, however, ignores the role of racism in Jemorah's experience and decisions. In my interpretation, Jemorah is trying to escape her struggle with racism in America. She appeals to Ricky the White boy, who is in fact half Native American, to connect her with American culture so that she may better identify with it. However, she discovers that he has his own struggles in connecting himself with the dominant culture. Jemorah, unlike Melvina, submits to her aunt's pressure to marry her cousin, Nassir, and she accepts because she strives to make a connection to both elements of her identity in order to find a home. Thus, Jemorah experiences double exclusion in America. In addition to the racial discrimination she encounters, she is subjected to patriarchal cultural oppression, transmitted from her aunt. Crenshaw states:

The experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as

both women and of color within discourses are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both. (1243-4)

Gender segregation for women complicates their relationships both to the host culture and to their own cultures and family. Juan et al. cite Pyke and Johnson's statement that 'A daughter's individual refusal to adhere to gender role expectations can bring shame to the family.' They add: 'These intersectional experiences of race/ethnicity and gender present unique challenges for women of color with repercussions on their sense of belonging to the family' (232). Jemorah's source of struggle, then, is assimilation into American society, as Portia asks her to change her skin colour, lighten her hair, and urges her not to marry a non-White man. All of this is radically inconsistent with Fatima's expectations that Jemorah should behave like a good Arab girl and marry an Arab man.

Abu-Jaber makes it explicit that she deploys, in her novels, Bhabha's concept of hybridity: 'Homi Bhabha talked about how for contemporary immigrants and exiles, what you can have in your life, instead of home culture, is a new tribe. When you're faced with not being allowed to return to your homeland, perhaps there is a way that you can resituate yourself' (Abu-Jaber, "The Only Response"). Fadda-Conrey speaks of immigrant writers as occupying an in-between space where the adoption of a hybrid identity is an imperative: these writers thus create 'a type of belonging that is neither alienating nor assimilative but one that is transnational and transformative in nature' (40). Fadda-Conrey views transnational belonging as a factor that leads to functional hybridity. Transnational, here, according to Fadda-Conrey, means that immigrants extend some of their cultural traditions, those that might best serve them, to their new location, in order to create a sense of belonging.

In migrant narratives, racism is very often directly connected to the characters' physical appearance: facial features, hair texture, skin colour, and clothing. Evelyn Shakir notes that Arab Americans' skin colour is used to classify them as foreigners:

Arab Americans come in a range of colors. Some are nearly as dark as sub-Saharan Africans, a few are blond and blue-eyed, most—eyes brown, hair dark, skin tending to be olive—occupy the middle ground shared by other Mediterranean people [...] The desire to assimilate has foundered on this hard rock, this physical evidence of foreignness with all its irrational implications of moral inferiority. (112)

This fact generates interconnections between Arab Americans and other immigrant groups, as well as African Americans. According to Sonia Farid, Abu-Jaber ‘asserts the impossibility of isolating the experience of one immigrant group from that of its counterparts as she links Arab-American to other ethnic communities that share the same dilemmas and go through the same arduous ordeals as they attempt to negotiate their hyphenated identity’ (152). In fact, there is much in common between Arab Americans and African Americans – particularly the racist stigmatization both minorities face. From a racist point of view, Arabs’ skin colour is not white, but akin to a blackness that has been a longstanding stigma in a racialized society like that of the US. For example, the racist treatment to which the Arab Matussem and Jemorah in *Arabian Jazz* are exposed because of their skin colour is similar to that experienced by Ifemelu, the Nigerian protagonist of Adichie’s *Americanah*. Matussem is insulted as a ‘dirty sand nigger’ (99), and Jemorah’s skin colour is referred to by her boss as a ‘damn shame’ (294). The racism which both Ifemelu and Jemorah experience in America generates a profound desire on the part of both women to go back home. Ifemelu, in the end, decides to redeem herself from the cultural and geographical alienation she experiences in the United States, whereas Jemorah resigns herself to it. ‘Home’ is more ambiguous for Jemorah, the Arab character for whom Jordan means ‘her people,’ while her deceased mother is an American.

Themes of inter-cultural relations, cultural conflicts, and racism are common in the writing of African as well as in that of other non-white immigrants. Both African American and African women writers, among them Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Adichie, portray strained race and gender relationships in their novels and explore potential solutions. Contemporary African writings explore the racial and hegemonic relationships between African countries and the US in the context of immigration. African authors depict the difficult experience of Africans in the US for those for whom assimilation has failed, and for whom the decision to return home is far from easy. Their writing illustrates how racial oppression makes it hard or even impossible for members of said groups to situate themselves in US society. Tim Wise contends, in *White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege in America*, that race remains a highly vexed issue in the US today and that colour-blindness is a myth:

Americans have a long history of wanting to believe that everything is fine when it comes to race in America, and that it's time to move on to other things. And when we hear claims that we've finally entered a post-racial, color-blind society with the election of Barack Obama, we need to remember this story. Because the fact is, racial inequalities still exist and racial bias still affects the way that we view others. (Audio book)

Adichie likewise critiques the myth of colour-blindness in *Americanah*, a novel that confirms the persistence and pervasiveness of racism in US society. The novel depicts the experience of two Nigerian immigrants to the West: Ifemelu, who emigrates to the US, and Obinze, who emigrates to the UK. The focus of this thesis is on American narratives, and so my analysis focuses on the experience of Ifemelu, who goes to the United States for higher education and who hopes 'to prosper in America' (77). However, in America, Ifemelu, for the first time, realizes herself as Black, a label that is not applicable in her country of origin.

Her struggle begins with this realization, and it ends with her decision to return to her homeland. Adichie, as suggested by Bimbola Oluwafunlola Idowu-Faith, makes ‘literary interventions’ in changing ‘forced return migration’ to ‘a voluntary’ return. Adichie’s *Americanah* is a significant work because it presents a form of theorized fiction. The same may be said of *Arabian Jazz* and Abu-Jaber’s explicit use of Bhabha’s concept of hybridity in the novel. As Idowu-Faith says of Adichie’s novel,

In spite of the fact that her diaspora home is more beautiful and promising than her origin home, Ifemelu still chooses to go back to Nigeria and she returns to stay. With this dimension in Ifemelu’s migration story, Adichie makes a literary intervention to migration theory by postulating a return to the origin home as the closure of every migration, not caring whether or not the diaspora home gives superior access to various socio-economic advantages to the migrant than origin home. (11)

I argue that this voluntary return is suggested by Adichie as a resolution for the struggle of immigrants in the host culture. Ifemelu achieves a sense of wholeness by going back to Nigeria, as I contend in my analysis of the novel, in which I draw on Sara Ahmed’s interpretation of home as ‘A space of belonging’ (341). Furthermore, I show that, despite her efforts to assimilate, for example by adopting an American accent and straightening her hair, Ifemelu is still subjected to racial discrimination, adversely affecting her sense of belonging in America. She attempts to compensate by recuperating her Nigerian identity in America: she stops faking the accent and relaxing her hair, returning to her former hair style of braiding. Moreover, she adopts a virtual ‘third space’ as a position of power through writing blog posts that address issues of race and of racism. She cannot rid herself of the uneasiness she feels in the US, however, and so eventually returns to Nigeria, where, despite the difficulties she faces in readjusting, she does attain a sense of belonging.

Americanah has been widely reviewed, and its treatment of the concept of race has elicited a good deal of commentary. Niyi Akingbel and Emmanuel Adeniyi suggest that the novel is an attempt to establish a transculturalism which fails because of racial intolerance: ‘as good intentioned as Adichie’s attempt at initiating a cultural dialogue in America’s racialized society, its untrammelled practicability is up against a brick wall. Invariably, factors such as stereotyping, racism and racial stratification ingrained in American society continually prevent the realization of her transcultural objective in the novel’ (43).

Transculturalism is defined here as ‘a socio-cultural ideology that seeks the conflation of culture with a view to smoothening relations’ (40). Akingbel and Adeniyi view Ifemelu’s ‘nomadic love relationships’ as one example of transculturalism, as Ifemelu experiences ‘love and sex with people of diverse social and cultural backgrounds’ (48). As my analysis of the novel focuses on the effect of racism on Ifemelu’s identity, I concentrate on her relationship with Curt, a White American. Their relationship crystallizes the transcultural intention in *Americanah* that is hindered by American racism. Both Ifemelu and Curt are condemned by American society because their relationship transgresses racial barriers. A relationship between a Black woman and a White man in America, Ifemelu suggests, may be a solution to the issue of race: ‘Real, deep romantic love’ is rare and ‘American society is set up to make it even rarer between Black Americans and American Whites’, suggesting that, despite Ifemelu’s initial optimism, ‘The problem of race in America will never be solved’ (*Americanah* 296). Ifemelu struggles to maintain her relationship with Curt by alternating between assimilation and her African identity, while Curt refuses fully to acknowledge White racism towards Black people.

Chikaoha Justice Agoha deploys postcolonial theory to compare the racism depicted in *Americanah* with that represented in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: in Conrad’s novella ‘The Black man is regarded as being almost sub-human, irrelevant or simply a tool for the

realisation of the potentials of his White counterpart. In fact, the focal theme that reverberates through *Americanah* is racism' (43-44). My analysis of Adichie's novel compares the manifestation of racism in *Americanah* with racism towards Arab Americans in *Arabian Jazz*.

Agoha notes that in Adichie's novel, 'characters become victims of the colour of their skin' (65), and 'the human hair – a clearly visible component of every human identity - is depicted carefully as a powerful metaphor of racism' (69). His analysis demonstrates that 'Ifemelu's ever-changing hairstyle' reflects her unease in America (69). In my analysis, I relate Ifemelu's experience of discrimination in America because of her skin colour and kinky hair to Adichie's own experience. Both attempted to assimilate by relaxing their hair. Hair is a feminine trait that is connected to racial-ethnic identity, intersecting with gender. Thus, Ifemelu has to deal with two marginalized identities—being both Black and a woman in America. As Stephanie A. Shields states, the 'Black woman is doubly disadvantaged compared to the Black man, the intersectionality framework emphasizes the qualitative differences among different intersectional positions' (303). Adichie explains that 'Gender and class are different. Poor men still have the privileges of being men, even if they do not have the privileges of being wealthy. I learned a lot about systems of oppression and how they can be blind to one another by talking to Black men.' She adds, 'There are particular things that happen to me in the world because I am a woman' ("We Should All Be Feminists"). By straightening her hair, Ifemelu is attempting to pass as African American rather than be identified as African by conforming to Western norms of beauty. As Adichie reflects, 'The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are. Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn't have the weight of gender expectations' ("We Should All Be Feminists"). Ifemelu eventually decides to speak in her Nigerian English accent and to keep her natural

hair, choices which increase her marginalization in the US but affirm her pride in her African identity.

Mona Alebrahim explores Nigerian immigrants' experience of American racial prejudice, which results in low levels of education, lack of employment, and financial struggle:

People of color in America go through different battles; they first deal with being labelled based on their race, and then they are placed at a non-satisfactory position in the society. Adichie indicates that racial prejudice is an implicit social problem in America where people are classified according to their obvious color. (471)

My study differs from Alebrahim's in that it focuses on the effect of American racial prejudice on Ifemelu's identity construction and sense of belonging. Crenshaw states that 'Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different' (1242). As stated above, skin colour is a determining factor in the US racial system that, albeit unofficially, classifies and determines migrants' social status. Discussing interconnections between ethnic groups in minority narratives, Mazen Naous observes that 'These stories and soundings of profound connections are dispersed by the "dominant chord," by the dominant culture' (76).

Differentiating Arab American identity from other ethnic American identities is nonetheless a critical issue in migrant narratives, an issue that has gained in urgency post 9/11. The history of American foreign policy in the Middle East parallels the historical discrimination against African American, Chinese American, and other minorities in the United States. The American racial system, in addition, considers Arabs and Muslims to be

one group. Stereotypically, and misleadingly, Muslims and Arabs in America are conflated.

As Mervat F. Hatem explains,

Arabs and Arab Americans trace their national roots to the twenty-two member states of the league of Arab States: Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Comoros, Morocco, and Mauritania. Religiously, they include Muslims (Sunnis, Shiites, Alawites, and Ismailis), Christians (Protestants, Catholics, members of the Greek Orthodox Church, as well as members of regional churches like the Copts, Chaldeans and Assyrians, and Maronites), and Jews. (11)

She also traces the national origins of Muslims in America: ‘American Muslims represent a much larger diverse national group that includes Arabs, Africans (from East, West, and southern Africa), South Asians (from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), Indonesians, Turks, Iranians, and African Americans speaking many languages and representing many histories and cultural traditions’ (11). As Hatem observes, the cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of Arab and Muslim communities in America is not widely understood in the US, certainly not by ‘those individuals who committed hate crimes against members of these communities leading to indiscriminate assaults on Arab Muslims and Christians, but also South Asian non-Muslims like the Sikh’ (11-12).

The literature of Muslims and Arabs in America after 9/11 provides an important insight into the lived experience of Arabs and Muslims in the US. In 1993, when Abu-Jaber published *Arabian Jazz*, Arabs and Muslims were marginalized; however, their status has changed drastically since 9/11, with Arabs and Muslims alike coming under public scrutiny and frequently regarded as a threat to national safety and well-being. As Hatem states:

The fact that the September 11 attacks were led by Arab Muslim men [...] led to the general suspicions of Arabs and Arab and Muslim Americans, who were seen by the larger public as homogeneously complicit in these horrific events. As a result, members of these distinct but overlapping communities (especially women in Islamic dress) bore the brunt of the early attacks by an angry American public. (11)

Anti-Arab and Muslim racism is central to American race relations, and as Steven Salaita confirms, '9/11 merely validated it' as there are 'countless examples of anti-Arab racism before 9/11' (*Arab American* 111). Salaita refers to a Ronald Stockton survey, conducted seven years before 9/11: images of Arabs in cartoons and other forms of popular culture lead Stockton to conclude that 'an exceptional proportion of all hostile or derogatory images targeted at Arabs are derived from or are parallel to classical images of Blacks and Jews, modified to fit contemporary circumstances' (quoted in Salaita 110). Stockton's data confirms that anti-Arab racism is not solely an after-effect of 9/11.

Racism of this kind would intensify after the attack on the Twin Towers, however, and is critiqued in Laila Halabi's novel *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), the story of Jassim and Salwa, a Jordanian couple who move to America in pursuit of the American Dream. Their dream is shattered in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, as their background as Arab and Muslim marks them as suspect. As Salah Hassan notes:

Although Arabs and other people from the Middle East are classified racially as white according to the US Census and most affirmative action forms, since the 1960s, the US government has unofficially constituted them as a distinct racial group by associating Arabs with terrorism and threats to national security. Unlike other racial constructs, such as blackness or Asian-ness, which are defined officially in opposition

to whiteness, the contemporary racialization of Arabs appears to be linked to US foreign policy in the Middle East and its translation into the domestic context. (18)

Post September 11, all Muslims are put under a microscope. The Pakistani writer Kamila Shamsie summarises the situation in her novel *Broken Verses*:

‘And then?’

‘And then the Towers fell.’

‘And you stopped being an individual and started being an entire religion’ (45).

Abdelrazek points out that ‘since 9/11, Arabs and Arab Americans have increasingly received more overt discrimination, negative stereotyping, and hostility in the United States’ (7). She adds that ‘American society tends to lump all women from Muslim countries into the Arab category [...], to view all Arab as Muslims, and to consider all Muslims as practicing a particular, rigid kind of Islam’ (7). Arab Americans ‘face a conflation of ethnic and religious identity when, in fact, not all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are not Arabs’ (7).

The literature of Arab American and Muslim writers post-9/11 represents characters in the process of constructing hybrid identities as a survival strategy in a hostile host society. Pakistani American Shaila Abdullah’s *Saffron Dreams* represents the status of both Muslims and Arabs at this critical time from a Pakistani Muslim woman’s point of view. Arissa loses her husband, Faizan, in the tragic events of 9/11; at the time, she is pregnant with a child whom, she later learns, will be born with multiple disabilities. In order to negotiate her place in an antagonistic American society and to attain individual agency, Arissa sacrifices her veil. The veil, instead of covering her, exposes her Muslim identity. By taking off the veil, Arissa hides the visible marker of her Muslim identity, without losing her religion. She inhabits what Bhabha calls the ‘in-between’ space, the hybrid space that provides her with power to

prove her individuality in the face of both White discrimination and the mores and traditions of the Muslim community. As Anne Sofie Roald states:

The Muslim woman is faced with a modern construction of female individuality that is independent of traditional biological and social roles. This process requires the individual to define her values and to choose the social model, whether Islamic or western or a blend of the two, that she wishes to conform to according to her needs and priorities. (13)

Double exclusion is experienced by Arissa in America. In her family, wearing the veil is more closely related to tradition than to religion; however, in America, the veil is a sign of her identity as Muslim. To other Muslims, her act of removing the veil may be construed as a betrayal of her faith. But as Mahalingam et al. state, ‘Marginalized group members negotiate dual worldviews, expectations, and demands to successfully navigate the realities of their marginalized social status. Hence, they are in a unique position to construct vibrant, creative, often idealized hybrid identities’ (327). Arissa, then, succeeds in disrupting both patriarchal structures and the oppression of the dominant culture, constructing her individual identity within both her own ethnic group and the host community.

There is little extant critical commentary on *Saffron Dreams*. An exception is Nabila Ali Marzouk Ahmed’s comparative study of Abdullah’s novel and Laila Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*. Ahmed examines the exercise of power on individuals and the effect of this on relations between individuals and institutions, using Foucault’s understandings of concepts like “Normative judgments”, “metaphysical and political freedom” and “force relations”. In her study, she notes that

Laila Halaby and Shaila Abdullah depict the changes that overtake the rhythm of life in the US after the 11th of September. Muslims from different nationalities are held responsible for the disastrous attack and, in a sense, have to be placed under the

watchful gaze of the American nation lest, in another ominous, careless moment, they carry out other attacks they could possibly be plotting. (516-17)

She adds that ‘*Promised Land* and *Saffron Dreams* reveal how countries empower themselves and enfeeble others by dominating human and natural resources and how individuals tend to abide by the strong side that holds the lucky cards’ (518).

My analysis conforms with Ahmed’s insofar as I agree that, in US migrant narratives, characters seek the best of what Western culture provides to minimize their distress. My analysis shows that, despite racist treatment and discrimination in the aftermath of 9/11, Arissa chooses not to leave the US, as she seeks her son’s best interest where the best medical care is available. To deflect racist attacks, Arissa removes the veil which identifies her as Muslim. My analysis of the novel expands the existing scholarship in its comparison of the effect of racism on Arissa’s religious identity with the effect of racism on Mona’s religious identity in *Mona in the Promised Land*. In comparing Arissa’s narrative with that of Mona, I demonstrate that Mona, who does not have the choice of leaving the US, takes advantage of the American value of individuality to diverge from both her parents’ and the dominant culture’s imposed identities. Thus, Arissa’s and Mona’s experience of constructing their religious identities in a hostile environment serves as a comparative illustration of the influence of racism in undermining or reinforcing immigrants’ religious identities.

My analysis draws on Bhabha’s concept that cultural diversity or multiculturalism is the source of White racial prejudice and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities. My analysis of *Saffron Dreams* critiques the received Western view of the veil as a symbol of the male domination of women in Muslim cultures. My analysis here extends to my discussion of Keija Parssinen’s *The Ruins of Us*, in representing Muslim women’s views in the East, particularly in Saudi Arabia, on the subject of the veil. I compare and contrast

Arisa's experience of removing the veil with Rosalie's, the female American protagonist in *The Ruins of Us*, reverse experience of the act of veiling.

Abdullah has been called a 'Word Artist' by critics, and *Saffron Dreams* has been assigned as a set text on programmes taught at the University of California, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Indiana University, Boston University, California State University, and George Washington University. Diana Abu-Jaber, in an interview with Robin E. Field, explains the importance of the novel as a genre in mediating and explaining cultural difference, suggesting that:

The best thing a novelist can do is create characters that you really connect with, because if you feel with your characters, then I think that it enables us to feel with other people. Novels are tutorials in how to connect and empathize with others. Novels are one of the very few forms that we have available to really instruct us in the experiences of others. (211)

In *Saffron Dreams*, the character of Arissa appeals to the reader, who sympathizes with her experience. "Changing Race Boundary Perception by Reading Narrative Fiction", a study conducted in 2014 by a research group from Washington and Lee University, found that reading a 3,000-word extract from *Saffron Dreams* had the effect of diminishing racism in its readers (Johnson et al.). Abdullah, like Abu-Jaber, deploys a politics of inclusion: fittingly, since both are hybrid writers, both attempt to avoid the perpetuation of racial and ethnic antagonisms. In an interview with Tyler Tichelaar, Abdullah states that

The geopolitical concerns that have drawn Islam and the West into many conflicts since 2001 have also generated a thirst for multicultural literature—fiction and nonfiction, with a Muslim angle. At a time when much of the world associates Islamic culture with oppression and terror, the new genre is tackling such universal themes as

love, hope, and women's issues. I find that there is a great thirst among readers today to learn more about Muslims and what drives them. The interesting thing is even the followers of mainstream Islam can't tell you what drives terrorism. We are as clueless as the rest of you but keep reading. At least you will learn something about the true face of Islam. (4)

I argue that Abdullah wants to deliver a message through her protagonist, Arissa's, reaction to the racist treatment she receives post-9/11. Through her job as a writer and through her responses to media attacks on Muslims, Arissa works towards defending Islam and vindicates it from terrorists who claim that they are Muslim. Abdullah thus succeeds in inducing sympathetic responses in her readers in her representation of Arissa and her husband not only as innocents, but as victims themselves.

The increased attention paid to Arabs and Muslims after the 9/11 attacks encouraged the Muslim and Syrian American Mohja Kahf to write her novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), the story of a Muslim family in 1970s Indiana that draws on Kahf's own experience. The novel is the story of the lives of Khadra Shami and her family, who are racially stereotyped as a threat to the American community, and so serve as an example of the way in which "outsiders" are perceived as a threat to the "purity of the native culture" diluted with influx of people with different skin colour, culture and in many cases religion' (Kofas, "Western Xenophobia"). This xenophobic attitude arises from stereotypical images of people of colour, including Asian Americans. Elizabeth Martinez and Elizabeth Martc condemn the stereotype of Asian Americans as "whiz kids," which 'hides so many harsh truths about the impoverishment, oppression and racist treatment they experience' (15). Jonathan Freedman likewise notes prejudice against Asians, who have long been associated with rats, disease, opium-dens, sexuality, and other negative images. At the same time, the

Chinese immigrant was feared because of qualities like industriousness and intelligence which distinguished the Chinese from Others like African Americans, Mexicans, and the Irish (81). At the same time, Yen Le Espiritu notes that ‘As neither black nor white, Asians are also unmistakably “yellow” and embody for many other Americans the yellow Peril—a military, economic, and social threat to the United States’ (110).

Racism has played a major part in the perception of Asian writers in the US. The Chinese American author Edith Maude Eaton (1865-1914), in her articles and short stories, was the first to articulate the racist treatment and struggles of Chinese immigrants in the United States and Canada. In the 1970s and 1980s, Asian American literature changed course: rather than representing characters assimilating to American society, authors focused on first and second generation immigrant families who challenge negative views of their ethnic group. A ground-breaking anthology titled *Aiiieeee!* (1974), edited by Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn HsuWong, collects short stories, poems, and plays written by a group of young Asian American writers who rebelled against earlier Asian American literature’s themes of assimilation and the adoption of American values.

Asian American literature represents Asian writers in America who define themselves as American and produce literature that expresses their own views through their own experiences as people with hyphenated identities. Among these, the most prominent are Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and Gish Jen. Jen is a second-generation immigrant American writer whose recurring themes are immigration, Asian immigrants’ relationship with American society, individualism, and the individual’s right to choose how to live her life. Kai Hang Cheang notes that ‘In the aftermath of the wild success of Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), the family narrative has become synonymous with Asian American literature’ (218). In *Mona in the Promised Land*, Jen, like Amy Tan, depicts the conflict between the Chinese immigrants’ parents and their daughters; in Jen’s case, Ralph and Helen,

and their two American-born daughters, Callie and Mona. Generational conflict is a common theme of migrant fiction and it is the main theme of this novel. The source of conflict between the two generations as depicted by Jen is that where the parents prioritise assimilation into the dominant culture, the daughters, by developing ethnic awareness and debunking the myth of the model minority, adopt hybrid identities. Callie becomes more Chinese and she is proud to be Asian American, while Mona creates a new religious affiliation by converting to Judaism. Refusing assimilation, Jen's characters nonetheless appropriate to their own ends the quintessentially American quality of individualism.

Critical responses to Jen's novel have highlighted issues of racism confronting Chinese immigrants and discuss the new version of inter-ethnic hybridity posited in the novel. In a recent review, Fu-Jen Chen draws on Lacan and Žižek to support her exploration of 'a new mode of subjectivity in today's postmodern capitalist regime' (379) as represented in *Mona in the Promised Land* and in Rebecca Walker's autobiography, *Black White and Jewish*. Chen suggests that 'While *Mona in the Promised Land* features characters who perform identity and *Black White and Jewish* chronicles a shifting self, both works center on identity movement in a postmodern era' (378). She writes:

Today, the postmodern global capitalist regime favors a new mode of subjectivity: one experiences one's self as an agent who is caught in a particular context but is also incessantly shifting between hybrid identities. That is, rejecting a stabilized or unified identity, one experiences identity as a matter of choice and an act of performance, and one floats from one to another identification and temporary embodiment. The postmodern subject embraces contingent—that is, random—identity performances. This new mode of subjectivity is especially embraced and celebrated by major characters in Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* and Walker's memoir. (381)

In her novel, Jen depicts the hard experience of the adolescent Mona in trying to find herself. Jen presents Mona's story in the wider context of Chinese American immigrants' quest for identity. However, the hybrid identity Mona chooses for herself, that of "Catholic Chinese Jew," is a new mode of identification which differs from the hybridity represented in earlier writings by Asian American women. Mohammed Ilyas states that Asian immigrants in America struggle in defining their ethnic identity, 'trying to carve it out from the memories of their past and trying to assimilate it with their current experience of the land of America. There is a hybrid identity because they wish to be called as Asian Americans and not members belonging to any Diaspora' (113). With a concentration on racism's effects on Mona's identity, my interpretation of the novel demonstrates that Mona is caught in a complex situation where assimilation is imposed upon her by her parents at the same time that she is referred to as a foreigner within her American community. Ilyas describes this dilemma as a major concern of Asians in the US, who find themselves 'to be a part of hybridity in a multiethnic culture and yet not belonging to any single culture' (113). Mona resolves this dilemma by appropriating the American quality of individualism in her conversion to Judaism. She occupies her own version of Bhabha's 'third space', and, in this space, she is free from both American and Chinese cultures' constraints, able to adopt an identity she believes is more appropriate for herself.

David Brauner examines the issues of race, ethnicity, and hybridity represented in *Mona in the Promised Land* in comparison with the treatment of these themes in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000), and Richard Powers' *The Time of Our Singing* (2002). He claims that in these texts 'Jewishness and other liminal, 'yellow' identities, such as Chinese American and mixed-race, are used to dramatise the paradox at the heart of all discourses about race' (109). He adds that the authors of these novels and their protagonists 'try to invent for themselves alternative notions of identity—to situate themselves outside the

ordinary parameters of racial categories—but in the very fact of doing so they confirm the idea that race defines their identity, whether positively or negatively’ (109). Brauner suggests that ‘Mona’s ‘conversion’ demonstrates both the possibilities and the limitations of ethnic self-determination, both the potential for transcending conventional racial boundaries and the impossibility of ever fully doing so’ (112). He confirms that Mona’s ethno-racial status remains unchanged, despite her conversion to Judaism.

Michele Byers compares Mona with the character of Neil in an earlier Roth novel, *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), noting that

In their quests for their missing pieces, they find that the materiality of their bodies often forces them into situations where the identities they long to “try on” simply do not fit, while those that do fit at times take them away from the world that they want to live in. (102)

She argues that Mona, in her quest for herself, finds a desirable American identity in Jewishness. However, ‘Mona’s insistence that Jewishness is, for her, an appropriate articulation of mainstream Americanness is met with frustration and disapproval, as is her sister Callie’s desire to connect with the Chinese identity her parents have abandoned’ (Byers 107).

My reading of *Mona in the Promised Land* focuses on the impact of racism on Mona’s religious identity—an aspect of the novel that critics and reviewers have failed to address. I argue that White racial discrimination of ethnic minorities like the Chinese is the driving force of Mona’s affiliation with another minority group, the Jews. I examine and contrast the ways in which Mona and Arissa in *Saffron Dreams* seek divergent identities from their ethnic groups by claiming their individuality. Mona realizes that assimilation has not worked for her Chinese American family or for herself. Affiliating with the Jews, the model minority, which, unlike the Chinese, has achieved a high status in American society, and

converting to their religion, is the only choice that Mona believes is available to her as an American-born Chinese woman. Her decision comes out of her desire to gain recognition or claim a higher status in American society. She claims her individuality back from her family and from other Chinese immigrants who seek assimilation into the dominant culture.

However, Mona becomes a “solo Jew”, and her parents relinquish her, as her conversion to another religion contravenes the Chinese values to which they adhere, despite their assimilationist beliefs. Mona’s mother asks her, ‘How can you be Jewish? Chinese people don’t do such things’ (*Mona in the Promised Land* 45). As Juan et al. note, ‘Those choosing to assert themselves against hierarchical gender roles may also experience conflict due to having a major part of the self—their identity as a woman—devalued by their family or racial/ethnic group’ (235). Again, gender, for immigrant women, is a source of tension in relationships with both the host culture and their family. The intersection of racism and patriarchy shapes Mona’s identity. Mahalingam et al. state that ‘Immigrant families frequently impose severe restrictions on the social lives of their daughters [...] to maintain the idealized image of their ethnic group and family’ (328). For centuries, the role of Chinese women has been to be obedient, to follow Chinese cultural traditions such as modest manners and adherence to family norms. Mona, by affiliating with the Jews, asserts her individuality against her parents’ patriarchal restrictions. She chooses the American advantage of freedom of choice to align herself with the minority group that most appeals to her.

Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Arabian Jazz* is a pre-9/11 novel in which Arabs still imagine that the US is a New World of opportunity and freedom. Matussem, who believes in the American Dream, fantasises about migrating to the US before he does so in actuality. It is not only Arabs who believe in the American Dream. In all the novels discussed in this thesis, characters are initially seduced by the myth of the New World: Ifemelu in *Americanah* claims that America is her dream country; Arissa in *Saffron Dreams* understands that New York

offers her opportunities of a kind she would not find at home in Pakistan; Ralph and Helen in *Mona in the Promised Land* believe in the myth of the model minority. All these characters come to recognize the illusory quality of the American Dream due to their lived experience of discrimination and racism. Accordingly, protagonists of these narratives construct versions of Bhabha's 'third space' to create a space for themselves in an antagonistic society.

There are many studies of the narratives of immigrants, of many ethnic and national origins, to the US. However, if we reverse the direction to look at literature produced by Americans abroad, we find that attention is paid, almost exclusively, to the expatriate fiction of Lost Generation writers like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and, to a lesser extent, to that of African American expatriates like Wright and Baldwin. Recent expatriate writings, particularly writings about American emigration to the East, have received much less critical attention, and there are few comparative studies of expatriation and immigration. An exception is Ahmad Rasmi Qabaha's *Exile and Expatriation in Modern American and Palestinian Writing* (2015), a comparative study of expatriation and exile in modern American expatriate narratives and post-1948 exilic Palestinian writings. Likewise, Mohammed Ilyas, in "Expatriate Experience and the Fictional World of Diaspora" (2018), attempts to make a distinction between the concepts of expatriation and diaspora in fiction: 'the two terms "diaspora" and "expatriate" should be differentiated not so much by the manner of departure/arrival (voluntary vs. involuntary) but by the (im)probability or (im)possibility of return' (110). He calls for establishing a literary theory of expatriate writing and/or for considering it as a literary genre in its own right.

The different conditions of expatriation in comparison with immigration in US literature affect characters' identities differently, and yet identity is key to both. Expatriation provides a reverse mirror of immigration and is 'connected to it both in theory and in practice' (Green 309). Despite the fact that Americans in the East are insulated from racist

treatment because of the privilege of their ethnic status, profound cultural differences nonetheless trigger crises and cause identity issues. While American expatriates strive to retain a stable and coherent identity, they are faced with traumatic experiences that shatter their sense of self. Keija Parssinen's *The Ruins of Us*, set in Saudi Arabia, and Janice Y.K. Lee's *The Expatriates*, set in China, are examples of contemporary American women's expatriate narratives located in the East, where the focus is on the representation of women's identity, ways of adaptation, and sense of home. This thesis represents the first academic discussion of these texts, although both have been reviewed in online newspapers and journals, and the writers have been interviewed.

The term 'expatriate' now denotes more than mere geographical relocation and is related to the exiled self. Nancy L. Green suggests that the socio-legal history of the last two centuries consists of four periods in which expatriation has shifted from an inclusive to an exclusive concept. In the first two, inclusive, periods, an expatriate was imagined as someone coming to America, but 'By the early twentieth century, however, a third period, marked by the Expatriation Act of 1907, reflected a new, more worrisome figure', where the meaning of expatriate was 'now defined as someone leaving America, whether for love (American women marrying foreign men), for money (naturalized businessmen staying away too long), or just to write [the Lost Generation]' (310). In the fourth period, since the 1960s, the meaning of expatriation saw a further shift that led to 'a more inclusive consideration of citizens abroad,' such as 'the business expat' who 'has had a role in whittling down the list of legal expatriating acts, as voting abroad and even dual citizenship have become increasingly accepted' (310). Furthermore, the definition of the word "expatriate" as a noun in the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1993 edition, is, "Orig., an exile. Now, a person who lives from choice in a foreign country" (Green 308).

As Matthew Hart states,

Ambivalence about the social meanings of expatriatism seems to inhere, however, in the very meanings of the word. As an adjective or noun, ‘expatriate’ denotes the condition of choosing to live in a foreign country; its verb form, however, refers to the act of forcing a person or group to leave their native land. In this sense, the word implies an uneasy mix of freedom and coercion. Yet ‘expatriate’ has very different connotations from other words in the lexicon of migration. Whereas the exile, émigré, or refugee is generally presumed to have escaped from physical or spiritual oppression, the expatriate is more typically pulled to a foreign country than compelled to leave home. And unlike the immigrant who tries to assimilate to a new country, the expatriate is defined by remaining out of place. (3)

In all the novels addressed in this thesis, characters are self-motivated. Both immigrants and expatriates share the experience of displacement and alienation in their new cultures. However, the basic differentiation between them is that American expatriates to the East are not subjected to overtly racist treatment, and are not compelled to integrate with the host community. Because of their ethnic strength, American expatriates need to adjust to cultural difference for their psychological health. In *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said notes that ‘Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. Hemingway and Fitzgerald were not forced to live in France. Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions’ (181).

Hart suggests that it would be more appropriate to expand the meaning of “expatriate fiction” to include ‘not just narratives written by (or about) Americans abroad but also the texts of foreign nationals resident in the U.S., especially when their writing engages American culture from the perspective of one who is simultaneously intimate and alien’ (4). The term “expatriate fiction” is used sometimes interchangeably with “emigration fiction,” and expatriate writings have always been considered part of emigration studies and not an

independent field of study. Diaspora, on the other hand, refers to ‘mass migration of people across continents, often involuntarily, to describe the colonial ambitions of nations like Britain, the slavery trade of the African nations, Jewish expulsion from their native lands and their moving out globally and then concentrating themselves to Europe and America’ (Ilyas, 108-109).

Novels on the subject of American expatriates to Saudi Arabia are rare. Keija Parssinen, in an interview with Ben East (2012), points out that ‘there is a dearth of ‘expat lit’ set in the Gulf. Which I find strange, as so many people have lived there for decades, even grown up there’ (“Keija Parssinen’s Novel”). The best known American women authors to write about Saudi women and culture are Zoe Ferraris and Jean Sasson¹. The lesser-known Keija Parssinen is an American author who was born in Saudi Arabia and lived there for twelve years while her father was working for the Aramco corporation, before her family returned to the US.

The Ruins of Us is the story of Rosalie, who, like Parssinen herself, is an American woman, born and raised in Saudi Arabia, whose family returns to the United States when she is twelve. Back in Texas, Rosalie is nostalgic for the Saudi Arabia that she considers her home. At the University of Texas, she meets Abdullah, a Saudi student, and falls in love with him, partly because of his nationality. They get married despite objections from both families. Rosalie then migrates with her husband to Saudi Arabia. They live happily for 25 years until Rosalie discovers that Abdullah has taken a second wife two years earlier.

Deborah Lindsay Williams, in her review of the novel, notes that Parssinen’s ‘experience helps her to avoid the clichés of the standard expat novel; she neither exoticises nor

¹ Less well known novels written by American women about Saudi Arabia include Sheila Flaherty’s *East of Mecca* (2013), Kim Barnes’s *In The Kingdom of Men* (2013), and Emma Gates’s *Praying For Rain* (2014). There are also a number of memoirs and autobiographies by American expatriates in Saudi Arabia, such as *At The Drop of a Veil* (1971) by Marianne Alireza, *American Chick in SA* (2012) by Jean Sasson, and *Thank God, It’s Wednesday: An American Family in Saudi Arabia* (2013) by Maralyn Doyle.

romanticises what it means to live “with a foot in two worlds” (“*The Ruins of Us*”).

Parssinen creates characters living between two worlds, trapped by competing desires: living here (Saudi Arabia) but having absorbed US cultural values. Williams identifies what makes Passinen’s novel unusual and valuable. Her portrayal of Saudi culture is more objective and accurate than that of other American writers – for example, Zoe Ferraris. Ferraris, in her trilogy *Finding Nouf* (2008), *City of Veils* (2010), and *Kingdom of Strangers* (2012), represents Saudi Arabia as a site of terror and a theatre for a series of crimes and murders. Saudi men are depicted as excessively religious and irrationally violent towards women. Saudi culture, moreover, is represented as barbaric, anti-modern, and misogynistic. Amira Jarmakani points out that depictions of Arab and Muslim women in American writing often ‘serve as receptacles for U.S. centered concerns and anxieties, rather than presenting any of the actual social conditions that determine women’s lives’ (149). Ferraris’s novels provide an Orientalist picture of Saudi women and Saudi Arabia to satisfy Western audiences’ expectations about the country and the lives of women there. In an interview with David B. Green, Ferraris declares:

What I feel is that there’s so much that Americans don’t know, and so much they need to know—namely the basics, like how people live, and basic rules and customs. These are things that most people don’t have a handle on. So, my primary aim has been to open up the door a little bit. (“Conversation With Zoe”)

Ferraris’ detective fiction depicts the struggle of Saudi women to achieve their rights, but she also presents Saudi Arabia itself as a place of intrinsic mystery and dread.

On the other hand, Parssinen writes her novel about Saudi Arabia in order to rectify the present picture of the country, particularly post 9/11, correcting stereotypes which are antithetical to her own knowledge and experience. In her interview with East, Parssinen discusses the challenges of writing the novel:

“I was really daunted when I started it,” she says. “I know all the contradictory things written about Saudi. I know, having lived in New York post-September 11, that there's this fear and demonising of the place and I really didn't want to add to that. So the way I approached it was through this family - an American mother Rosalie and a Saudi father. The radical son Faisal, and the daughter, Mariam, who is quite progressive, writing her blog and defying traditions. It became easier to control, less polemical, that way. (“Keija Parssinen’s Novel”)

Parssinen wanted to write a novel specifically for Western readers, to provide a new understanding of Saudi people and, simultaneously, to narrate an expatriate experience which she calls ‘the third culture.’ Parssinen means that she, as well as other children of expatriates, has grown up as what is known as TCK, ‘A Third Culture Kid’, which is defined by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken as:

A person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years outside the parent’s culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. (13)

Identity construction of TCKs and their intellectual development take place in an international environment in the host culture, or ‘the third culture’, where the first culture is the culture from which one’s parents originated and the second culture is that in which they currently live. Some scholars indicate that ‘the third culture’ is a combination of these two cultures. What differentiates TCKs is their experience of living in different cultures, their openness to cultural difference, and their relative success in managing that difference. The TCK embodies Bhabha’s ‘third space’, the ‘in-between’ space that carries the burden and

meaning of culture and of the hybridity which marks the emergence of new cultural forms from multi-cultural experiences.

Parssinen remarks on her American readership's struggle to understand why Rosalie doesn't fight for her rights:

They can't believe she would subject herself to that kind of culture, with its restrictions and rules. But they forget that Rosalie grew up in Saudi. She goes back there with Abdullah knowing that this could easily happen, that she would have to give up a lot of herself to be with this man she loves. Her eyes are open. ("Keija Parssinen's Novel")

Parssinen adds, 'Yes, she's very indignant about the situation she finds herself in, she feels betrayed and shocked, but at the same time she comes to terms with living in a culture that permits his behaviour. So if she wants change, she'll have to leave' ("Keija Parssinen's Novel"). In my analysis of the novel, I apply aspects of Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory, such as 'predisposition' and the great 'preparedness for change' which shows that Rosalie is well prepared to accept and follow the country's strict traditions and rules as applied to women before she arrives there. She is alert to gender segregation, the country's dress code of veiling (as Madawi Al-Rasheed states, in Saudi Arabia, the 'total veiling of the body' for women is 'a requirement in the public sphere'), and the car she is not allowed to drive. She is aware that, in Saudi, 'sex segregation should always be respected' (Al-Rasheed 116), and 'banning women from driving' is essential to ensure the confinement of women to traditional gender roles (Al-Rasheed 129). Rosalie does not rebel against any of the country's rules; instead, she assimilates to them to such a degree that her American identity is eliminated, as she is motivated by her love for the country she grew up in and her love for her husband. According to Kim, Rosalie is ready for 'intercultural transformation', which results in the emergence of an 'intercultural identity' through her positive response to the culture's

traditions. However, she never considers the permitted practice of polygamy, because she knows that Abdullah's family is modern, and that the practice is only retained by traditional Bedouins. She also believes in Abdullah's love for her and is certain that he will not betray her. After discovering her husband's infidelity in taking a second wife, her American traits reappear, particularly her Texan bellicosity, and she begins expressing anger towards her husband, while considering the idea of leaving him. Hybridity is thus adopted unintentionally by Rosalie.

My analysis also draws a comparison between Rosalie with Arissa in *Saffron Dreams*, who assimilates to the dominant culture by removing her veil. Rosalie, in contrast, assimilates by wearing the veil. Arissa adopts a hybrid identity in America, keeping her faith and her personal allegiance to her country of origin, Pakistan, yet abandoning the cultural tradition of veiling, which is not compatible with her current location and situation. As Muddassir Quamar states:

Traditionally, the veil has been part of women's public attire in many Muslim and even non-Muslim societies (for example, many Hindu women in India use the veil). It has much to do with the idea of honor and dignity of families concerning female sexuality that should not be exposed, hence confining women to households. In those cases where it is necessary to leave the house, the attire has to be modest, hiding the woman's physical features, beauty and face in order to protect her and the family's dignity. (317)

By practicing veiling, as well as following the strict Saudi Arabian rules, Rosalie abandons the American half of her identity in seeking to please Abdullah and his family.

Michael Hoinski, in *Texas Monthly*, cites Parssinen's reflections on writing a novel about Saudi Arabia, particularly post-9/11:

“I feel like prior to 9/11, I had been very naive about the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia,” Ms. Parssinen said. “I had this romantic vision because of my family's wonderful Saudi friends. And so when 9/11 happened, and I learned that many of the terrorists were Saudi, I felt very betrayed. Why are they doing this? There must be some good justification.” (“The Drop Everything List”)

As Hoinski states, ‘Parssinen’s book about a family living in Saudi Arabia that comes undone amid polygamy, expatriotism and radicalism—is not a justification for those acts, but it helped the author to process the event and find her voice’ (“The Drop Everything List”).

Parssinen has commented that

I’m often asked what the future might hold for Saudi, and it’s so difficult to judge. Bloggers are starting to be bolder, there is definitely more freedom allowed than when I was there, I’m just grateful that the process of writing this has given me a more realistic understanding of the country. (“Keija Parssinen’s Novel”)

By making Mariam, the Westernized daughter, a blogger, Parssinen is anticipating changes in the country in terms of women’s rights and empowerment. Mariam writes in her blog about women’s rights in Saudi Arabia and her aspirations for changes in the country which could potentially anger the ruling family. My interpretation of the novel draws on Kim’s concepts of ‘acculturation’ and ‘deculturation’, which are essential for cross-cultural adaptation, to explain Mariam’s attitudes. Mariam’s need to acculturate is inconsistent with her war against deculturation, where she wants to maintain Western aspects in Saudi Arabia, such as not wearing a veil. I also apply Bhabha’s ‘third space’ to Mariam’s use of the blog. Like Ifemelu’s blog in Adichie’s *Americanah*, which acts as a virtual ‘third space’ in and from which she expresses her opinions about race and racism, Mariam operates the blog as a powerful instrument to defy Saudi cultural traditions and to attempt to change the realities that women face. Mariam’s blog is an example of how Saudi women, who are restricted to

the private sphere, are taking advantage of communication through the Internet and appropriating the virtual world as a space for self-expression and a source of empowerment and agency, and for sharing ideas changing the Kingdom. From Hala Guta and Magdalena Karolak report, from the 2012 Gulf Studies Conference in the UK, it emerged that ‘50% of Saudi blogs are written by women’ (116), an indication that women in Saudi Arabia have equal access to the Internet and make more subversive use of it than men. The authors of the report add that ‘The activity of female bloggers is innovative in the sense that it enables full participation of women in this new public sphere and it enhances their ability to acquire a form of influence in society’ (116) and thus to contribute ‘to the public sphere in ways that are not possible outside of the virtual world’ (117). Saudi Eve, Saudiyat, Saudiwoman’s weblog and the women2drive campaign are examples of blogs written by women ‘trying to bring about a change of their status in Saudi society’ (117). The development of globalization, particularly post 9/11, has brought about numerous changes to the status of Saudi women, who have ‘become less likely to accept traditional models of political and gender regimes’ (Mirdamad Yosefy Sadat, “Globalization and International Women’s Movement” 41).

The experience of expatriate American women in China has proved a more popular subject than that of expatriate American women in Saudi Arabia: examples include Nicole Mones’ *Lost in Translation* (1999) and Rachel De Voskin’s *Repeat After Me* (2009). Janice Y. K. Lee’s *The Expatriates*, her second novel, is about three American women living in an expat community in Hong Kong. Mercy is a Korean-American, who was born and raised in America, and has recently graduated from Harvard. She travels to Hong Kong to look for a job and struggles there more than she did in America, particularly in finding steady work, thereby causing disaster for Margaret and her family, who hire her as a babysitter for her three children. The younger child is kidnapped during a family trip to Korea, while in

Mercy's custody. The event deepens Mercy's depression and further destabilises her sense of identity. Consequently, she forms relationships with two very different men: one is American and married (Hilary's husband), and the other is Chinese. Pregnant by the former, Mercy spends her time with the latter. Mercy is an example of the individual who crosses cultures yet fails to adapt, experiencing a sense of dislocation that leads to 'psychological distress' (Kim, "Finding a Home" 7).

Margaret, the bereaved mother, suffers anguish after losing her child. She questions her maternal identity and seeks relief and stability by spending a considerable amount of time in a secret apartment, contemplating and taking long baths. In my analysis, the apartment represents a negative 'third space', a private space, unlike Bhabha's. Margaret's 'third space' contrasts with that adopted in American immigrant women's narratives, where the 'third space' may be personal but is, also, a public space, where interaction with the host American community is inevitable.

Hilary, the anxious wife who yearns for a child both to fulfil her maternal instincts and to save her marriage, spends her time on the Internet trying to reconstruct her identity after her husband leaves her for another woman—Mercy. Thus, Hilary becomes less sociable and spends most of her time online in expatriate online forums, posting and chatting while using a created online or virtual identity. Margaret and Hilary experience disequilibrium in the cross-cultural environment in which they live: instead of trying to socialize and communicate with others to alleviate their alienation and pain, they pursue 'avoidance' and 'withdrawal' (Kim, "Finding a Home" 5).

By spending her time in a virtual space, Hilary provides a new version of the 'third space'. It is unlike Margaret's space in the sense that it is both private and public, and it is a place of creativity, social interaction and free expression. While Ifemelu's and Mariam's blogs provide a 'third space' in which women may defy social attitudes and express their

opinions freely, Hilary's time spent in the virtual world, or the 'third space', provides an insulation from the painful reality of her actual life. Moreover, while the adopted 'third space' in the women's narratives set in America considered in this thesis is long lasting, and in some cases, a continuous condition, the 'third space' for Margaret and Hilary is temporary. They leave this space once they achieve a new sense of identity, as the third chapter of this thesis explains.

Writing in *The New York Times* in 2016, Maggie Pouncey states that Lee is 'A female, funny Henry James in Asia.' She adds: 'Janice Y. K. Lee is vividly good on the subject of Americans abroad [...] Lee observes an affluent community of contemporary Westerners, but more specifically, those who "crossed over into that other country of motherhood," another foreign land requiring expatriation,' where 'the only role left for them is motherhood. An invidious acquaintance whispers to Hilary, one of three central characters, "Out here, you're not a real woman unless you have four kids"' ("The Expatriates"). Pouncey adds that 'Lee's eye for the nuance and clash of culture, class, race and sex is subtle and shrewd' ("The Expatriates"). The expatriation of American women, in the two texts of this kind considered in this thesis, leads to gender role conflict in the host society. In the expatriate communities in which the novels' female protagonists find themselves, wives cannot work, and they have household staff, so even domestic tasks are unavailable to them. All they can do is take care of their children, although even here hired help is common. However, if an expatriate wife has no children, like Hilary, and her husband is busy at work, what role is left for her? Hilary spends eight years as an expatriate in China with her husband, and although she participates in activities in the expat community, her marriage, like many others in that community, fails. In a 2015 review in *The Irish Examiner*, Mary Leland states that Lee's 'narrative sets her protagonists like figures against a background into which they can never merge' ("Book Review"). According to Kirkus Reviews (2015), Lee's is 'A richly

detailed novel that rubs away at the luster of expat life and examines how the bonds of motherhood or, really, womanhood, can call back even those who are furthest adrift' ("The Expatriates"). Anna James notes in *The Financial Times* (2016) that 'Lee excels at conveying the claustrophobic atmosphere of expat life' ("The Expatriates"). All these reviews highlight the difficult experiences of the American expatriate women represented in the novel. Expanding the remit of these reviews, and remedying its scholarly neglect, my analysis of Lee's novel demonstrates how cultural differences, changes in family routines, and separation from family and friends leads to identity crisis, loss, and unassuaged grief.

Saudi Arabia and China are representative middle and far Eastern nations: Saudi Arabia, the strict Muslim nation, and China, which the Global Relocation Trends 2003–2004 Survey Report identifies as the 'most popular destination' for expatriate American workers. China, however, is also marked as one of the most challenging countries of the far East for 'international relocation' (Rosalie L. Tung "Race and Gender" 93), with language and cultural differences cited as the major issues for expatriates and as the driving forces of the desire to return to the US. The two nations, China and Saudi Arabia, both have strong and traditional views on the primary role of woman in society as wife and mother, although Tung observes that 'in Asia Pacific, "foreign" women are viewed differently from local women' (Tung 102). Modernisation in Saudi Arabia has changed traditional attitudes and practices according to which 'women were confined to the household and preoccupied with traditional roles' (Al-Rasheed 116). Communism in China arguably improved women's status, albeit that gender equality remains a contentious issue in both countries, where the primary role of women is to 'contribute to the well-being of the family... (As such) a good wife must possess chastity, beauty, submissiveness, and diligence' (Tung 96). Polygamy is a legitimate practice in Saudi Arabia, and in China. As Tung states:

Jin Wu Di, a Chinese emperor around 200 A.D., specified that the wife of the heir to the throne (i.e., his oldest son) must possess the following attributes: xian (obey and be receptive to her husband having many wives), duozi (bear many sons), duan zheng (behave appropriately), chang (tall), and bai (white). (“Race and Gender” 96)

The primary role of American expatriate women in China is that of a wife and mother, as is the case for Rosalie in Saudi Arabia. Rosalie has been affected by the practice of polygamy, as is Tammy, a minor character in *The Expatriate*, an American expatriate wife and mother of two children whose husband has taken a second, Chinese, wife by whom he has had two children. Polygamy, illegal in the US, represents one of the major cultural differences between the West and the East.

The Ruins of Us and *The Expatriates*, despite being set in different cultures, share themes of identity and family relationship issues, and of gender role conflicts resulting from the crossing of cultural boundaries. The common theme in these narratives of American expatriates to the East is the struggle with cultural difference. In contrast, the major theme in the four immigrant women’s novels set in the US discussed in this thesis is racism and discrimination. As Juan et al. state, ‘Feminists of colour have long emphasized the uniqueness of the experiences of women of colour, particularly compared to White women’ (225), while ‘women of colour are subjected to treatment by others based on both race/ethnicity and gender’ (226), ‘Racial/ethnic privilege provides White women the opportunity to distance themselves from or remain blind to issues related to race/ethnicity’ (227). Their ethnic prestige offers White women insulation from race-related issues.

Theoretical Approaches and Methodology

All the narratives discussed in this thesis are written by women who are migrants to the US or are by or about American women living abroad. These texts are considered in a transitional

perspective: that is, women's immigrant fiction extends our understanding or definition of American literature. But to what extent are narratives like these considered part of the American literary canon, even if, as John Carlos Rowe (2002) states, 'Curricula and scholarship in American studies have changed significantly over the past decade, reflecting the important influences of women's studies, ethnic studies, and postmodern and postcolonial theories'? (51). American literary studies took what has been termed a 'transnational turn' in the early 1990s, following on from the cultural turn of the late 1960s, which opened up the US canon to the writing of minorities and of women, challenging earlier and narrower definition of US national literature.

As Mamoun F. I. Alzoubi (2018) suggests, 'Ethnic literature and transnationalism enter into a continuing dialogue. The primary strand of this critical conversation is dedicated to placing multi-ethnic America in a larger framework that examines interconnections with the world and searches for solutions beyond the narrow parameters of national borders' (26). In his 1998 essay "The Transnational Turn," Paul Jay had called for 'revising faulty narratives about the origins and emergence of "American" literature,' which include the 'monocultural narrative of American literature as a Puritan/Renaissance *New England* phenomenon—the product of a white Atlantic' (181). Before the 1990s, that is, American literature still reflected the American nation, understood in quite a narrow sense. American literary studies was more interested in how American-born writers interact with the wider world than in foreign-born writers or minorities who contribute to the American literary project. In the past, expatriate American literature was regarded with suspicion at home due to its purported foreign influence. As Hannah Skahill (2012) states, however, expatriate writings such as those of the Lost Generation and the Beat Generation are 'now considered to be American classics, while abroad. Both of these generations have greatly influenced the United States' literary realm in addition to shifting American culture' (2). She adds that

‘Place’ in their writings has influenced the American culture. They ‘brought aspects of international cultures into their writings, introducing customs and alternative ways of thinking to the American public. Most of this global influence came from Europe’ (11). The same may be said of writers who were and are immigrants to the US. Jay’s study focuses not on nationality but on “location” and how this is theorized by contemporary critics of American literature and culture; Jay’s particular interest is in ‘locations that are transnational and therefore associated with borderlands’ (166). He critiques American literary studies for confining itself within national borders, neglecting forms of cultural production in liminal borderland spaces. Americanists, Jay urges, should attend to locations ‘that are between or which transgress conventional national borders—liminal margins or border zones in which individual and national identities migrate, merge, and hybridize’ (167). Jay shares Carolyn Porter’s view of ‘the need to “remap” American literature around a new politics of location’ (167). Porter’s study conceptualizes border zones, defining these as ‘cultural force fields’ that link ‘the Caribbean and Latin America to the North’ (quoted in Jay 170). Jay, like Porter, advocates ‘the revised view of “American” literature that would result from recontextualizing writing in the United States in relation to “a quadruple set of relations” among Europe, Africa, Latin and North America’ (Jay 172). Jay suggests another approach to the literature of the Americas, ‘one that confronts the history of the region in terms of a revised conception of the emergence of modernity, and which, following Edouard Glissant and Paul Gilroy, attempts to identify “cultural zones” that cut across national boundaries and take our attention beyond the kinds of metropolitan centers Porter identifies’ (172).

However, Jay’s study, as he himself suggests, has to be augmented by a historical contextualization established in a new politics of location if American literature is to be resituated:

Literature written in “contact” or “border” zones, in geographical and cultural spaces “between” clearly demarcated lines of political or social division, almost always deals in fairly explicit—and often conflicted or unresolved—ways with issues related to the history of this contact, and to syncretic, hybrid, or creolised nature of identity and culture that develop from it. (183-84)

Jay further emphasises that “American” literature has to be remapped according to ‘cultural zones that cut across traditional borders’ (184) and must rehistoricize its origins (including, for example, the relationships between Spain and Mexico and the US Southwest, and between the Caribbean and New Orleans, as well as the African presence in the Americas). Reconfigured in these ways, American literature would reflect ‘the history of transcultural contact in the “black Atlantic,” or the nexus formed by Europe, Africa, and North and South America that Porter foregrounds as an alternative to the Anglocentric and relatively monocultural fixation on New England literature and culture’ (Jay 184).

Like Jay, Shelley Fisher Fishkin emphasizes the importance of ‘Borderlands, crossroads, and contact zones that disrupt celebratory nationalist narratives’ (19). Fishkin dedicates her study to Gloria Anzaldúa, ‘theorist of the arbitrariness of borders and the pain that they inflict’ (17):

In many of its earliest incarnations American studies aspired to overarching generalities about the United States. The field had little room for the dissenting voices of minorities and women, and a fixation on American innocence blinded many scholars to the country's ambitious quest for empire. But since the 1960s the field of American studies has increasingly become infused with understandings of American culture shaped by the anti- Vietnam War movement, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and other movements for social justice and social change in

American society. The field has been dramatically transformed over the last four decades as scholars recovered the voices of women and minorities [...] But the national paradigm of the United States as a clearly bordered geographical and political space remained intact. (20)

The US still views non-whites through the lens of the binary social relationship of “us” and “them,” the “domestic” and the “foreign,” the “national” and the “international.” American Studies, Fishkin suggests, must collapse these binaries, paying attention instead to interactions between and the merging of inside and outside, domestic and foreign, national and international.

Fishkin also recommends that, as the transnational becomes more central to American studies, scholars should reevaluate comparative studies of interracial literature, like Werner Sollors’, and studies of the effect of US foreign policy and imperialism in Mexico and the Philippines. ‘Focus on local spaces will attend to the ways in which these spaces participate in global phenomena – “internal” and “external” migrations, the diffusion of cultural forms, the spread of capital and commodities—and all the attendant consequences’ (Fishkin 24). American studies today struggles to reach a place where diasporic writings are given value, a place where the importance of American literature written in languages other than English is considered, and ‘a place where the cultural work done by American writing outside the United States is a valid subject of study’ (Fishkin 25):

The United States is and has always been a transnational crossroads of cultures. And that crossroads of cultures that we refer to as “American culture” has itself generated a host of other crossroads of cultures as it has crossed borders [...] African, African American, and Eastern European musical traditions met and mixed in the United States to produce jazz, [...] civil disobedience and jazz - are stories of transnational flow, as is the story of America itself [...] In the twenty-first century, American

studies is increasingly doing justice to the transnational crossroads that we are and, indeed, that we always have been. (43)

Taking Jay and Fishkin's transnational turn into new territory, this thesis reads Muslim and multi-ethnic women's immigrant narratives as an expansion of the American literary canon. In equal measure, this thesis defines narratives written by or about American women expatriates to the East as American literature, as a new iteration of the American expatriate narrative that diverges from its male and Eurocentric predecessors. Thus, this thesis identifies a body of American writing that has heretofore been neglected in the new, transnational, American studies. Theories of transnationalism in the US context have focused on border crossings, in particular the US-Mexico border, at the expense of other kinds of migration. Narratives of Americans who travel for work, or of American women who marry foreign nationals, have seldom been the subject of scholarly attention.

This thesis explores the negotiation of identity in a selection of contemporary, female-authored, US migrant novels. My methodology draws on Bhabha's concept of hybridity and 'third space', which is used to read the immigrant narratives set in America; Kim's theory of cross-cultural adaptation is used in my analysis of expatriate narratives set in the East.

The concept of hybridity is commonly used in postcolonial discourse to mean 'cross-cultural exchange' (Ashcroft et al. 119). The concept has been critiqued, however, for its failure to capture the tensions and conflicts that may arise from the hybridization of cultures. The dominant theorist of hybridity, Homi Bhabha, has contributed significantly to our understanding of migrant literature with his influential concept of 'third space.' Bhabha argues that hybridity is a form of in-between space: the 'cutting edge of translation and negotiation' that carries the meaning of culture and in which we 'emerge as the others of ourselves' (*Location* 56). Although migrant individuals may choose the identity they want for themselves, this does not mean that the chosen identity will remain pure, because immigrants

are in continuous contact with the host culture's meanings and symbols. Bhabha states that the 'third space', 'though unrepresentable in itself [...] constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity, that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew' (*Location* 55).

Bhabha defines the 'third space' as 'the contact zone of controversial potentials, presaging powerful cultural changes' (*Location*, 38) and hybridity as 'the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism and inequity' ("Culture's In-Between" 58). Michaela Wolf understands Bhabha's 'third space' as 'a sort of 'in-between-space', which 'is located between existing referential systems and antagonisms, and it is in this "third space" that the whole body of resistant hybridisation comes into being in the form of fragile syncretism, contrapuntal recombinations and acculturation' (13). For Wolf, however, Bhabha's theory is problematic in that it 'implies cultural pluralism, whose logic does not transcend the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion' (14). Ahdaf Soueif's alternative formulation, *mezzaterra*, denotes a meeting point for diverse cultures and traditions. In many respects complementary to Bhabha's hybrid 'third space', *mezzaterra* is a space that combines two or more cultures, constituting the best of each of these cultures in an overarching harmony. Yet, as Bhabha has warned, in "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha",

The changing nature of what we understand as the 'national population' is ever more visibly constructed from a range of different sorts of interests, different kinds of cultural histories, different post-colonial lineages, different sexual orientations. The whole nature of the public sphere is changing so that we really do need the notion of a politics which is based on unequal, uneven, multiple and *potentially antagonistic*, political identities. (208)

Bhabha encourages host societies to concentrate their efforts on inclusion and to embrace cultural difference, instead of compelling newcomers to discard their culture and adopt that of the host in the interests of ‘cultural diversity’ (208). For Bhabha, the ‘third space’ is an inventive space in which different cultures meet without one seeking to overpower the other. Yet this space is nonetheless contested, and in his view, it is not possible for integrated cultures to coexist peacefully and in harmony:

All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me, the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (211)

In postcolonial migrant narratives, the characters, through their encounters with cultural difference and the experience of discrimination, ceaselessly recreate their identities. As Bhabha suggests, ‘the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities’ (*Location 2*).

Like Bhabha, Ikas and Wagner understand ‘the encounter of two social groups with different cultural traditions and potentials of power as a special kind of negotiation or translation’ (2). Bhabha defines hybridity as ‘a problematic colonial representation [...] that reserves the effects of the colonialist disavowal so that other “denied” knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and engages the basis of its authority’ (*Location 114*). Moreover, Bhabha’s hybridity accounts for the plurality of identity in the ‘third space’ of encounter and interaction between the colonial and the colonised or the migrant and the host, where there is a potential for a new identity to be created for both groups, as Bhabha denies the purity or authenticity of either culture.

The difficulty of adaptation for immigrants is a primary subject in migrant literature. The ways in which migrant characters adapt to cope with their new lives, place and conditions, communication issues with the host community, and the insecurities and uncertainties they face are resolved in Bhabha's theory of hybridity and 'third space'. David Huddart argues that hybridity is an outcome of 'apparently "pure" positions that have been, for one reason or another, thrust together': 'Bhabha believes that hybridity calls into question traditional analyses of colonialism, which tend to merely reverse the terms of colonial knowledge' (23). For Bhabha, however, hybridity points to the 'necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination' (Ashcroft 9).

Bhabha's work is widely celebrated because, as Antony Easthope suggests, 'His writing makes available for the reader especially two forms of fantasy satisfaction. The first may be characterised as a structure of abreaction' (147). In other words, the reader who identifies with Bhabha's position is 'afforded an identity which is definitely not racist, not bigoted, not that of someone whose mind is closed out of fear of the other. This idealised self-image goes along with self-congratulatory compassion for the victim of racism' (147). Easthope refers to the second fantasy satisfaction as the pleasure of mastery, by which he means that 'the readers who identify themselves as subjects are supposed to be able to remain sure of themselves even when confronted with the appearance of difference on all sides' (148). Nonetheless, it is important to understand that Bhabha's 'third space' is not utopian: not all issues of identity can be resolved in this space, because it is partly a space of tension, a public space that requires communication with the host community. This concept of the migrant individual's communication with the host nationals is key to Kim's theory: she insists that the individual's openness, resilience, and ability to absorb cultural conflicts is the prerequisite for successful communication.

Kim's theory of cross-cultural adaptation, *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-cultural Adaptation* (2001), explores the individual and host culture relationship through the dynamics of their interaction and communication, which result in the individual's transformation. This transformation, and the development of the individual's identity, is defined by Kim as an ongoing process, comprising three facets: increased functional fitness, increased psychological health and the emergence of intercultural identity. In her reflections on her theory, Kim comments that

Although our identity can never be completely replaced by a new one, it can be transformed into something that will always contain some of the old and the new side by side, to form a new perspective that allows more openness and acceptance of differences in people, a capacity to participate in the depth of intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional experience of others. ("Theory Reflections" 1)

Kim's reflections accord with Bhabha's belief that there is no pure or authentic identity for individuals who are in contact with others in an intercultural context. Kim's theory also comports with Bhabha's representation of cultural identity as a combination of two or more identities within the individual 'that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (*Location* 4) and with his description of the 'third space' as enabling 'other positions to emerge' ("The Third Space" 211).

Kim's definition of the adaptation process represented in her cross-cultural adaptation theory refers to the identity transformation of individuals who, through intercultural communication, have developed individuated identities that are less tied to social grouping. Kim defines adaptation as 'a natural process of individuals striving to establish a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment. The theory explains that, through extensive, intensive, and cumulative experiences of intercultural communication, an individual's original cultural identity undergoes a gradual transformation' ("Ideology,

Identity, and Intercultural Communication” 243–44). This identity transformation results in an ‘intercultural identity’ which becomes more ‘universalised’ and ‘individuated’ in self-other orientation and is more flexible and less rigidly bound by group categories (Kim 244).

While Kim’s theory is compatible with the ‘melting-pot’ view of cultural identity, she also discusses the preservation of original cultural identity. Kim confirms that the development of intercultural identity ‘does not come about without “costs”’ (244). In Kim’s theory, the adaptation process is illustrated by a ‘stress adaptation-growth dynamic’ that indicates a complex process characterised by internal conflict in the individual between loyalty to the original identity and the need to adopt a new one. However, this stressful process of adaptation, as stated by Kim, encourages people to work towards retrieving their internal equilibrium. Kim notes that ‘this functional interrelatedness of stress and adaptation describes the process of organising and reorganising oneself, bringing about psychological “growth” at a higher level of self-integration’ (244). Kim’s theory, then, rejects the pluralist claim that individuals who undergo a process of assimilation are required either to discard their original identities or to choose one identity over the other. Thus, she posits the intercultural identity concept ‘as a viable self-other orientation that facilitates social integration and discourages unwarranted divisiveness along group lines’ (244).

For Kim, communication ‘lies at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation’ (*Becoming Intercultural* 72). Intercultural communication is defined as ‘the communication process in which individual participants of differing cultural or subcultural backgrounds came into direct contact with one another’ (Berger et al., *The Handbook of Communication Science* 454). Failure to communicate results in the failure of adaptation. As Vladimir Zegarac notes,

Whilst culture is characterised by meanings shared within a social group, communication is a mode of social interaction through which new meanings can be shared. However, communication is generally at risk of failure because the attribution

of meaning depends on the interlocutors' ability to reason in the way intended to select the right context for the interpretation of communication act. As there is no guarantee that the addressee will interpret the communicative act in the way intended meanings will consider. Since a person's cultural knowledge crucially determines the contexts which are available to them, the risk of miscommunication is generally higher in interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds. (*The Handbook* 33)

Kim concludes that cross-cultural adaptation is a life-journey in which people are responsible for the consequences of the choices that they make. Choosing to adapt to the host culture involves a change in identity, but also indicates the individual's success in crossing cultural boundaries. She highlights that 'although their tribulations can be staggering, they have worked through the setbacks and come out victorious with an increased capacity to see others, themselves, and situations in a new light' ("Theory Reflections" 2). She adds that such achievements point out the human capacity to adapt and defeat challenges and 'evolve into a greater self-integration that defies the simplistic and conventional categorisation of people' ("Theory Reflections" 2).

Identity is affected by migration, where the host culture's treatment of migrants determines the effect on the identity of the individual. In multi-ethnic American narratives, hybridity and the creation of a 'third space' are strategies of survival and of resistance adopted by characters who are exposed to racism and discrimination. In the American expatriate narratives discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, *The Ruins of Us* and *The Expatriates: Identity Issues and the Sense of Home in American Expatriate Women's Narratives*, the third space is a liminal space temporarily occupied or adopted as 'a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation' (Bhabha, "The Third Space" 211). The achieved understanding of one's self and of culture in this 'in-between' space results in the

construction of a new cultural identity. Here, Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory is applied to the fictional representation of expatriates' adaptation process through their communication with the host community. However, this thesis connects immigrant and expatriate women's narratives under the rubric of Bhabha's 'third space'. Thus, Bhabha's theory is central to this inquiry as a whole.

My thesis has a wider implications for the study of American literature by discussing the 'transnational turn' in American Studies since the 1990s, and the opening up of the American literary canon to include women writers from religious and ethnic minorities. This expansion of the canon still neglects or marginalises many of the writers discussed in my thesis. This thesis also focuses on 21st-century US expatriate narratives, where there is a cluster of such novels written by and focused on women's experience. Furthermore, my thesis is the first extended critical analysis of a number of Arab-American and Muslim women writers. I am identifying a cluster of Arab and other women's migration narratives, dealing both with migration into the US and with American women's expatriation in the Far and Middle East.

Expatriate fiction essentially differs from immigrant fiction in the concept of assimilation. An expatriate woman will always carry her culture with her and maintain her identity on a voluntary basis. The immigrant woman, on the other hand, embraces assimilation—whether voluntarily or under pressure from the host society—to avoid a culture clash. However, displacement, whether willingly or unwillingly, in most cases, causes struggle. Thus, writings of immigrant and expatriate writers might be referred to as exile literature. Although expatriate writers, unlike immigrant writers, spend just a part of their life in foreign lands, both group of writers create characters in their fictions exploring themes of displacement and identity construction in foreign countries.

As stated before, the double exclusion that immigrant women face has an essential role in constructing their identities. Women who migrate from Eastern cultures are often exposed to patriarchal treatment in their societies, where gender roles restrict them to being housewives and mothers. In Islamic societies, moreover, a dress code that enforces modesty is implemented for women. When they migrate to Western cultures, their social exclusion is doubled, for they are categorised in these societies as women of colour. Thus, gender intersects with ethnicity and represents a defining concept for immigrant women. This shows how intersectionality is important and necessary when looking at immigrant narratives, particularly when one's research is interested in analysing female immigrants' identities.

Chapter One: Identity Construction, Racism, and Sense of Home in *Arabian Jazz* and *Americanah*

Identity, and the sense of ‘being at home,’ is profoundly affected by migration. For migrants, ‘home’ may not be a particular place they inhabit, but a space in which individuals can find themselves, and in which they can find a measure of comfort and peace. It should be a place where they can connect with others in the community. Migration and forced displacement means that a space of belonging must be created within the host country. However, the process of belonging and the construction of a new identity is far from easy for diasporic people or migrants, who often carry traumatic histories and experiences with them. In addition, the host community plays a significant role in helping immigrants find their place, as indicated by Sara Ahmed in “Home and Away: Narrative of Migration and Estrangement”: ‘it is here [in the host country] that one is a guest, relying on the hospitality of others’ (330). Attempts to integrate often consist of uneasy encounters with the new community, as illustrated by the characters in Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Arabian Jazz*, particularly Jemorah, and by the character of Ifemelu in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*, for whom race is a determining factor in shaping identity.

The forced displacement of people is referred to as a diaspora. People who live outside their homeland are also called diasporas. Diasporas are defined by *International Migration Law* as ‘migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background’ (49). This definition of diaspora includes the children of first-generation immigrants. Though born in foreign lands, these children feel connected to their homelands culturally, linguistically, or religiously. Gabriel Sheffer defines modern diasporas as ‘ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and

acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—their homelands’ (3).

Robin Cohen presents nine common features for diaspora:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions.
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions.
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its locations, history and achievements.
4. An idealisation of a putative ancestral home, and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation.
5. The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation.
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and belief in a common fate.
7. A troubled relationship with the host societies suggesting a lack of acceptance.
8. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (26)

Most of these diasporas’ characteristics are applicable to the characters of the two novels addressed in this chapter. Diasporas migrate either forcibly or voluntarily from their countries of origin to escape poverty, persecution, or conflict. They often carry memories of their homeland, feel alienation in the host country, and desire to go back home eventually, as is the case with Ifemelu and Jemorah in *Americanah* and *Arabian Jazz* respectively. Their strong sense of connection to their home countries, Nigeria and Jordan, and their desire to

establish a self identity makes these characters resist assimilating to the host community. Onkar Prasad Dwivedi states that ‘Migration always implies change: and change involves the risk of losing one’s identity. Whilst the migrant does not recognize him/herself in his/her new image, the people around him/her do not accept his/her otherness. Therefore, s/he is compelled to face everyday life through a continuous oscillation between reality and dream’ (2).

Homi Bhabha points to two issues that are raised by cultural diversity—white superiority and racism. Both play an inevitable role in the life of immigrants in America, and these closely-related issues are explored in *Arabian Jazz* and *Americanah*. The search for a sense of home, and manifestations of racism, are areas of comparison between the two novels. Racist treatment is shown to affect Jemorah’s, Matussem’s and Ifemelu’s identities, and their process of adaptation. Jemorah, for instance, after frequent attempts and decisions to discard her American identity, and to move to Jordan, her Arab home, finally adopts a hybrid identity, and decides to remain in America. The kind of hybridity that Jemorah adopts is a harmonization between two contradictory worlds. Jemorah’s approach contrasts with that of Ifemelu, who adopts an antagonistic ‘third space’ through her blog posts, which she uses as a means of expressing her feelings and her experiences of racism in America. Due to her continuous sense of alienation and unbelonging in America, Ifemelu returns to Nigeria. Matussem, who is referred to as Black, aligns himself with the African Americans in his community. He adopts a peaceful ‘third space’ through playing jazz music, and, by means of his inter-ethnic musical affiliation, he regards America as his home.

In this chapter I draw upon Ahmed’s notion of home as I analyse the characters’ sense of belonging, and on Bhabha’s theories of ‘third space’ and hybridity as I explore the main characters’ conflicts with identity in *Arabian Jazz* and *Americanah*.

Arabian Jazz

A reader of Abu-Jaber's novel may conclude that the author tries to create a 'third space' in her novels where different identities productively interact. This desired space is characterised by difference: different ethnicities, different religions, different languages and different nationalities. However, that space may also be a shared, communal, space. As Bhabha argues, 'Despite the exposure of the third space to contradictions and ambiguities, it provides a spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (*Location 1*). In *Arabian Jazz*, the Ramoud family tries to create a 'third space' in their interactions with White America, albeit that they struggle in the face of racism. As Mazen Naous contends, 'the characters' dilemma of remaining in or leaving the United States is exacerbated by the racism they face in upstate New York. Their straddling of two cultures, two families, two identities, and especially two languages causes a need to improvise and intertwine their individual and collective identities as Arab Americans' (61). Thus, the 'third space' in *Arabian Jazz* creates a third culture from the two cultures represented in the novel, Arab and American.

The issues of unsettled racial identity that affected Jewish immigrants in the late nineteenth century and the Irish who emigrated after the Famine also affect Arab immigrants. These immigrants are categorised as 'white' or 'not white', and as Nayef Ali Al-Joulani contends, that racial classification 'contributed to the shaping of the Arab American sense of ethnic identity, which basically passed from a desire to assimilate to a yearning for minority status' (640-41). Consequently, the racism Arabs faced in America drove them to demand recognition as a minority group. However, according to Carol Fadda-Conrey in "Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Diana Abu-Jaber's 'Crescent.'",

The Arab American community currently faces a quandary in terms of its racial

classification. With the US Census Bureau situating it within the “white” category, this group has no legal position within the spectrum of minority cultures from which it can legally articulate its communal concerns about discrimination. (188)

Categorising Arabs as a minority group does not solve the problem of discrimination because the Arab minority is nothing more than a minority in name, without legal rights, and its voice ignored.

Ahdaf Soueif, an Egyptian novelist educated in England, calls for accepting difference in the process of identification within society in *Mezzaterra: Fragments From the Common Ground*. She rejects the attitude that makes people identify themselves ‘as one thing’, despite their own awareness that they are ‘a bit of this and a bit of that’ (4). She narrates her own experience of going to school in London, where the white girls considered her to be white and the black girls thought of her as black. However, this did not mean that she could associate with whoever she wanted; rather, she had to choose one group ‘and stick with it’ due to the “‘with us or against us” mentality’ (4). Soueif finds a way to collapse this racial binary in what she calls ‘mezzaterra’, meaning ‘this territory, this ground valued precisely for being a meeting-point for many cultures and traditions’ (6). She observes that the concept of ‘mezzaterra’ was not invented by her generation, but insists that she and her migrant contemporaries have the right to lay claim to the concept and the middle space it generates. Soueif’s definition of ‘mezzaterra’ indicates that she inhabits a version of Bhabha’s ‘third space’, which combines Western and Eastern (Egyptian) cultures.

Arabian Jazz depicts the experiences of immigrants in trying to find themselves and construct their identities in the US. Both Matussem and Fatima find their way through the hardships of adjusting to the differences between their home and host cultures. Melvina seems to be at peace with herself and views her hybrid identity as a given. Jemorah, however, struggles with the racist attitude that her Arab identity provokes. Jemorah thinks that

returning to Jordan, where people look like her, will end the clash of her Arab and American identities and fulfil her quest for a sense of belonging. However, Abu-Jaber suggests that this will not be the case, since returned migrants often feel like foreigners in their home country.

Examining *Arabian Jazz* through racial and ethnic discourse reveals the significant effect of these discourses on Arab Americans' identities. Fatima, Matussem and his daughters, Jemorah and Melvina, are identified as non-white by the white community in America; moreover, the Ramouds live in Euclid, a 'white-trash' neighbourhood that is rife with local racism against Arabs. As Michelle Hartman points out, 'the Ramouds do not quite fit into this poor white community that has few "ethnics," [and] their friends, family, and neighbours understand them in relation to African Americans' (153-54). This state of affairs has a profound effect on Jemorah, who thinks that 'she didn't fit even with them, those children nobody wanted' (94). In fact, what happens to Jemorah may happen to any immigrant. The host country constantly refers to Jemorah as different, although she is American-born.

Jemorah's character—and her concern with cultural difference and ethnic identity—is foregrounded in Abu-Jaber's novel. She is trapped in 'in-betweenness' between her father's origins as an Arab and her own; she was born in America to a white Irish-American mother. Jemorah and her sister Melvina's dilemma is that they neither feel any strong sentimental or rational attachment to their Arabic culture, nor do they consider themselves, or are considered to be Americans, due to their appearance. Their hyphenated condition means that they are not connected to a place but rather to an idea of it. Jemorah's experience on the school bus reveals that other children regard her as different, thus intensifying her sense of dislocation. While riding the school bus, Jemorah is scorned for her 'strange name and darker skin' (92). She even feels awkward when approaching her own home, where her family name, *Ramoud*,

is printed 'four inches high in bright red against the black box' (93). Thus, even her family name, the sign of her identity, makes Jemorah feel alien and different.

As she grows older, Jemorah realises that '[i]t's not enough to be born here, or to live here, or speak the language. You've got to seem right' (328). She struggles to determine her sense of belonging, prompting frequent dreams that reflect her inner conflict: 'In Jem's dreams the moon became Jordan, the place where her father came from. Her father was the gazelle and he waited by the black water's edge, staring at the moon [...] and then her mother's face would replace the moon' (77). Clearly, her dream signifies Jemorah's deep sense of loss, and the difficulty she has in determining whether Jordan or America is her real home. Accordingly, she does not know who she really is:

I'm tired of fighting [...] You don't understand. I'm tired of fighting it out here. I don't have much idea of what it is to be Arab, but that's what the family is always saying we are. I want to know what part of me is Arab. I haven't figured out what part is our mother, either. It's like she abandoned us, left us alone to work it all out. (307)

After her mother's death, Jemorah finds it difficult to pursue her life in Euclid and make connections with others. When she returns from Jordan to Euclid, she finds that her relationships with others, such as Portia, her boss, are a means of repression and control from which she must escape to regain her sense of self.

Sara Ahmed suggests that 'the question of home and being-at-home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being-at-home is a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel' (341). When Jemorah visited Jordan as a child, her mother, Nora, died of typhus. Nonetheless, Jemorah's view of Jordan is that it is the place in which she can regain a sense of her mother's existence and a feeling of home. As Ahmed states, 'the very failure of individual memory is compensated for by collective memory' (330). Jemorah has no experience of living, as a mature woman, in Jordan. Rather, Jordan, for her, is made up of

her last memory as a child with her mother, and her aunt Fatima's idealised talk and stories about the place.

Jemorah is also caught between the opposing sides represented by her mother and her aunt Fatima. 'I've spent so much of my life not daring to look up, look around at what there might be for me. I've spent so much time trying to please her, to guess what she wanted. And listening to Aunt Fatima telling me to be a good girl', she says (308). Ahmed asserts that 'the question then of being at home or leaving home is always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present' (343). There is a gap in Jemorah's life between the memory of her mother and her present life. The loss of the mother may mean more in an Arab and part-Arab family. Although her mother is not Arab but American, Jemorah clings to the notion of the mother's essential role in her children's life and so cannot be content with her father's care or her aunt Fatima's auspices. Therefore, home, for Jemorah, is an emotional space connected with her mother and retrieved through her senses and memories of the past: 'defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, [and] remembers' (Ahmed 341). Ahmad states that migration experiences 'are felt at the level of embodiment, the lived experience of inhabiting a particular space, a space that is neither within nor outside bodily space. Throughout the story, the trauma and pain of not being fully at home is narrated through skin sensations' (92).

Melvina, despite having the same formative experiences as her older sister, Jemorah, does not struggle with the clash of identities. Melvina is more balanced and accepting of her condition as hyphenated, and she sees this hyphen as a given. She chooses to create a 'third space' for herself and adopts a hybrid cultural identity. She identifies herself through her career as a nurse and devotes herself to it, keeping her dealings with the host community on a professional level. She maintains a position of acculturation, retaining her Arab identity while adopting the host country's cultural manners. Furthermore, Melvina is not as closely

connected to her mother as Jemorah, as she was only two years old when her mother died. She tells Jemorah that she remembers the night their mother died and that this is her only real memory of her: 'My consolation is that I believe she lets me know what she wanted [...] she didn't want us to be tied down to anything. She would say "I want my girls to be free"' (308). Melvina is not affected by her aunt Fatima's constant instructions to be a good Arab girl, and thus is following her mother's instructions: to be free.

Three characters in the novel deeply affect Jemorah's identity formation. The first is Portia, Jemorah's boss; the second is Ricky, her American boyfriend; and the third is her cousin, Nassir. Jemorah's quest for her identity is intensified by her boss, who had been a friend of her mother. Portia is disdainful of Jemorah's name and her skin colour:

'Oh, sure, you're tainted, your skin that colour. A damn shame. I've noticed that in certain lights it's worse than others. Your mother could have made such beautiful children – they could have been so lovely, like she was, like a white rose. Still it could definitely have been worse for you, what with his skin. Now, if you were to change your name, make it Italian maybe, or even Greek, that might help some. I'm telling you this for love of your mother. I feel forever I might have saved her when that Arab man took her and you kids back to that horrible country of his over there. It's a wonder you've survived that place, so evil, primitive, filled with disease!' (294)

Portia disparages Jemorah's father because of his origins: 'I am telling you, Jemorah Ramoud, your father and all his kind aren't any better than Negroes, that's why he hasn't got any ambition and why he'll be stuck in that same job in the basement for the rest of his life' (294). In effect, Portia is saying that Jemorah's father is American but is closer to African Americans, in her racist view of that minority, than to white Americans. Matussem's Arab origins make him vulnerable to racist insults like 'dirty sand nigger' (99) and 'damn fool, foreign A-rab that lives next door' (113). Portia tells Jemorah that Nora's mother 'had to ask

for a picture of [...] [Matussem] for her parish priest to show around to prove that he wasn't a Negro. Though he might as well have been, really, who could tell the difference, the one lives about the same as the other' (293-294). Portia here tries to show Jemorah the hardships that Nora and her mother had to face following Nora's marriage to Matussem.

Portia wants Jemorah to surrender her Arab identity, change her name and her skin colour, and to '[put on] some pink lipstick' and lighten her hair to look like an American (295). She tells Jemorah that she is willing to help her make these changes so that it will be easy for her to fit in with the dominant racial group. Steven Salaita believes that Portia thinks that 'true Americans [...] must be white, and uses the "Negro" as a symbol against which she can posit the superiority of whites ("Sand Niggers" 438).

Jemorah's reaction to her boss's offensive speech is surprising: 'My father's mother was black' (295). The statement is an expression of Jemorah's fury at her boss's antipathetic words, and she clearly wishes to differentiate herself from Portia, who identifies as white: 'The statement came from the back of Jem's throat, so sudden she hadn't known she was going to say it, the words like iron. "Yeah, a former slave. She married her master who had twenty-six other wives. They were black, brown, and yellow, and some didn't even have skin"' (295). Her struggle yields a connection which Jemorah makes between her family and black people, and which arises due to the racial categorization of the Arab as non-White. Jemorah then adopts a stance of fear and despair: 'It struck her [...] that the thin breath in her lungs and the tightening sensation in her stomach were fear. Not merely the fear of being caught, but of everything around her [...] of the world of these people, who didn't know her or want to know her' (298). An important transformation in Jemorah's identity takes place after her confrontation with Portia, which makes her more certain that she does not belong in that community. She determines to go 'home' to Jordan, to adopt her Arab and abandon her American identity:

She wants more, after so many years of holding back and losing herself in dreams. Her mother had left her before she could show Jem where her place might be. Jem averted her eyes as if her sadness clung to the windshield. She would not let herself vanish. She would live. (299)

Jemorah thinks that she can relate to Jordan more than to any other place because her mother died there. At the same time, she feels that her life in the US with her mother before visiting Jordan was like a dream, and hence she is unable to make any connection to the actual American environment in which she lives.

On the other hand, Jemorah's relationship with Ricky Ellis, half Native American, half-Onondagan, does make it possible for her to form a strong bond with American culture. The revelation of Ricky's experiences, particularly the loss of his own mother, and his frequent attempts to make a connection between himself and his mother's American culture, parallel Jemorah's efforts to relate to her mother's home—America. Ricky experiences the loss Jemorah feels, so he is hardly the perfect American to help Jemorah assign herself an identity. 'Ricky Ellis, the homeless boy, the orphan boy. His natural mother was long gone. Ricky would check himself from time to time for signs of her' (272-73). It is, as Al-Joulani suggests, 'by presenting the multi layered sides of this conflict' that Abu-Jaber 'attempts to harmonize all rather than side with any; she seeks a middle state' for 'cultural negotiation' (644).

Portia continues to intervene in Jemorah's life and tries to persuade her not to marry Ricky in order to avoid repeating her mother's mistake:

I love back talk; it tells me so much about a person. It explains why you're in heat over garbage like that Ellis kid. White trash worse than lazy dark skins. Multiplying your mother's mistake. That's what it leads to breeding worse and worse trash. Here I am offering you a real chance and your mind's too trash-low even to see it [...] This is

my whole point, I want to save whatever of your mother's clean blood is left. For your own good, I can't let you quit. Don't you see? You stay here, we'll work together, I'll scrub all the scum right off you, make you as pure and whole as I can. (295)

Portia positions herself as Jemorah's saviour. She relates Nora's death to her marriage to a black man, Matussem, and warns Jemorah of the perils of marrying a non-White. Jemorah then understands that Americans are not her people: she decides to marry her cousin Nassir and move to Jordan.

Eventually, Nassir, a son of the East and a student who has graduated from the finest Western universities, Oxford and Cambridge, helps Jemorah with her dilemma. Nassir's speech convinces Jemorah to maintain both of her identities. He clarifies that her thinking of Jordan as her home is merely a fantasy: 'this "home" that you seek is not there, not in the sense that you mean, not even close' (330). Jemorah considers going back to Jordan and spending the rest of her life with her family so that she can feel secure in her identity, but Nassir wakes her from her delusions: 'If you were to step outside your enchanted circle, you'd find the same sorts of suspicions and intolerances as here. There is nothing unique or magical about the Middle East; it shares xenophobias and violences with all the rest of the world!' (329). Jemorah then explains what she is hoping for from Jordan, although she is ambivalent about her decision to return:

'I am not completely sure,' Jem said. 'I only know that I want to change my life. A new start. It would be difficult in Jordan at first, I know. I don't expect miracles. But I might fit in some ways, a general, public way, where I could walk in the streets and ride buses and go into stores and feel like it's okay. There's all our family there. I wouldn't be such an outsider,' she said. (330)

Nassir encourages her to accept her situation as one of the first generation of Arab

immigrants to be born in America and to look at the positive elements of her situation:

To be the first generation in this country, with another culture always looming over you, you are the ones who are born homeless, bedouins, not your immigrant parents [...] You are torn into two. You get two looks at a world. You may never have a perfect fit, but you see far more than most ever do. Why not accept it? (330)

Nassir wants to convince Jemorah and her sister Melvina that they have two clear pictures about two completely different worlds, different cultures and a combination of identities.

Like Nassir, Edward Said, in *Reflections on Exile*, expresses the pleasures of exile, and, like Abu-Jaber in *Arabian Jazz*, Said phrases that pleasure in musical terms: ‘Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*’ (186). He recommends ‘acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be’ (186). Belonging to two cultures means there is a space of conflict and of negotiation for hyphenated people. Finally, Jemorah is able to understand the Bedouin saying that she learns from Melvina: ‘In the book of life, every page has two sides’ (6), which illustrates that being hyphenated means being free to evaluate and enjoy the advantages of both cultures. The power of hybridity being adopted by Jemorah thus lies in her attempt to harmonize the contradictions and ambivalence between her Arab and American identities. Bhabha states:

much one was politically and ethnically convinced of the imbalance and inequalities of power, I felt that there was always, in the very structure of authority, certain strategic ambivalences and ambiguities, and I felt that those who were oppressed, were actually empowered, by pointing to these, by being able to use these ambivalences and ambiguities, instead of representing power as a kind of homogenous, hegemonic block. (“Between Identities” 190)

In keeping with this, neither identity is discarded at the end of the novel. This might be interpreted as Abu-Jaber wanting to show her objective view of the identity of Arabs in America: that they are flexible and capable enough to create a balance between two different identities. Abu-Jaber comments on Shahana's character in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, who is able to keep a balance between two cultures and retain both her Eastern and Western identities:

Shahana is impressively fierce and independent-minded, full of her own will. She embodies the classic Westernized rebellious youth [. . .] He [Shahana's father] lectures them [his daughter] pompously about the past grandeurs of Bangladesh, India and Muslims, but Shahana resists the dictates of the past, moving into her own as a daughter of both East and West. ("London Kills Me", 26-27)

Jemorah eventually copes with her hyphenated condition as an Arab-American and realises that there is no clear solution to immigrants' identity issues. Instead, she must retain both identities and appreciate the benefits of being hyphenated, just as Shahana and Melvina do.

Fatima, in contrast to Jemorah, is all too certain of her identity and her sense of belonging. She maintains her Arab identity, keeping it safe from the influence of American culture. Fatima's character may be seen as representative of Arabs who live in the US and remain strongly attached to their home countries and Arab identities. For example, we are told that 'Fatima was true to the ways of her mother and mothers before her' (41). To keep her original culture alive within the family, she repeatedly insists on returning home and having her nieces marry Arab men. She continuously reminds Jemorah and Melvina that they are Jordanian and that marriage is the ultimate means of finding a home: 'Fatima looked at Jem and Melvie [...] and she murmured in English, "Beautiful! Beautiful babies! Pure as water. You come back home soon, come back to the Old Country, marry handsome Arab boys and make for us grandsons!"' (77). Thus, for Fatima, the only appropriate home for her

nieces is arrived at through marriage to Arab men and in maintaining their true identity in the 'Old Country' where their family lives:

At home, she [Jemorah] is surrounded by so much family, more family than she knows what to do with! People who love her, who protect her, who would cut their right arms off and give them to her! Not like here in this evil of evils where she is an outcast [...] In this country, they offer with one hand and take away with the other. So she will walk away from this [...] Let her go to people who love her. (329)

Fatima does not have any doubts about her identity or where her home is. She believes that the US is only a temporary place to stay, and tries to keep herself and the family from being affected by American culture:

She lived among Americans, in places they had built, among, their people, but despite this, she wanted to keep herself, her family, and a few friends apart from the rest. She wanted what the Americans had, but at the same time, she would never relax her hold on herself. It was not appropriate to mingle. Americans had the money, but Arabs, ah! They had the food, the culture, the etiquette, the ways of being and seeing and understanding how life was meant to be lived. (360)

Moreover, despite Fatima's traumatic history and painful memories related to her home country, she remains loyal to it. The family's forced emigration from Palestine to Jordan resulted in poverty so dire that Fatima must help her mother to bury her four new-born sisters alive:

You think you can go just cross the ocean and wipe our hands like the Roman King? [...] Babies I buried with my mother watching, so this rest could live, so my baby brother can eat, so he can move away and never know about it. [...] praise Allah he [Matussem] was born so fortunate! Born a man, not to know the truth. (334)

Fatima cannot forget these events, or rid herself of traumatic memories:

Fatima placed the baby girl in the hole. As she was told to do. As she must have been told to do. The hole was like a cradle. The infant stirred, and for a moment Fatima thought it might cry, but it merely bleated, a small, weightless sound that rose through the years, always floating near the surface of Fatima's consciousness. Sometimes she still heard it in the sound of bathwater or beneath the noise of a crowd. Sometimes, when she awoke, very early, in the stillest part of her mind where her dream opened into the dawn, came the tiny bleat—scarcely an echo, but enough to push Fatima from her bed to wander the house and yard, vaguely listening. (119)

By telling this story to her nieces and her nephew, Nassir, Fatima is attempting to free herself from pain and regret. ““This is the first time I have said it out loud,” she [Fatima] said. “I think maybe if I don’t say it, maybe, it will go away. But it doesn’t. It comes, it comes, it comes! I have no kind of peace”” (335). By choosing not to speak about these events for so long, Fatima has tried to suppress the memory of that which represents ‘the outsideness of the inside that is too painful to remember’ (Bhabha, “The World and the Home” 152).

Her memory of burying the infants causes Fatima to recall another traumatic event that occurred when she was sixteen years old. On her way to visit her relatives in the village, she was taken by Israeli soldiers and imprisoned without being told why. They put her in a crowded truck, and she was unable to move. Later, she was locked in a room, the colour of which Fatima will never forget: ‘There was no word for it in Arabic or in English. Later, if she saw this color—in a stranger’s eyes or flitting through the pattern of a woman’s dress—she would have to sit and put her head between her knees’ (120-21). She was imprisoned for four days, with no visitors and no food, with only some water in a bucket. Then, we are told, She was released. A mistake, the man turning the key said. He spoke English. Nothing happened. She was not beaten. She was released in a blue doorway of light, empty, the desert road. Some merchants found her there and drove her back to town.

Her family rejoiced when she returned. They rejoiced without asking where she had been. Not her husband. Not her mother. And she found that she could tell no one.

(121)

This memory has scarred Fatima deeply, and she cannot move past it: ‘They believe they let me out of there, she thought; they never let me out’ (121). She does tell the story, though, in the hope that she can overcome the trauma. To make sense of the event and create an explanation for it, Fatima convinces herself that what happened was God’s punishment for what she helped do to her sisters: ‘In Jerusalem, the Israelis come for me; this is my punishment, at the hands of God. I think they will kill me, they will starve me to death, for all the food those babies would have eaten. It is in their hands now, in the camp of my enemy [...]’ (335). Fatima remains a prisoner of her traumatic past. As Pauline Kaldas states, ‘the image of a series of rooms serves as a refrain in Fatima’s memories and weaves together the novel’s theme of enclosure’ (175). Kaldas adds that

Fatima’s memories of her sisters’ burials are crucial to her development as a character [...] Her sense of guilt and the silence that accompanies her memories continue to hold her prisoner. As the reader gains insight into Fatima’s past, her flamboyance dissolves and she becomes a central character [with her] struggle with [...] silence [,] [and] memory’ (175-76)

Even though Fatima is burdened by the trauma associated with her home country and then by silence, she still feels homeless in America. Because she is enclosed in her dark memories and guilt, these become her true home. According to James Clifford, ‘People whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be “cured” by merging into a new national community. This is especially true when they are the victims of ongoing, structural prejudice’ (307). This illustrates the Ramoud family’s experience with loss and tragedy: their exile in Jordan, the poverty that forced them to bury

their daughters, Fatima's seizure by Israel's military authorities and Nora's death.

Fatima decides to emigrate to the US one year after Matussem 'in order to keep an eye on him' (3). Fatima manages to develop relationships with others in the US, as she creates a temporary home that at the same time does not eliminate the old home, neither does it change her identity. Clifford states 'diaspora communities are "not-here" to stay. Diaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place' (311). Fatima visits Thanatoulos Bakery regularly, a place which multicultural immigrants frequent. She is also a member of the "Ladies Pontifical Committee" church group. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the 'Old Country' embodies Fatima's trauma, she does not repudiate it. She still regards Jordan as her home.

Matussem, on the other hand, is haunted by his parents' background in Palestine, the homeland they had to leave for political reasons. His parents were migrants who tried to raise their children as Jordanians, but Matussem repeats his parents' experience when he decides to move to the US for greater financial opportunity:

Lost to the world was Matussem's private land, like the country his parents tried to leave as they made lives in Jordan, as they let go of their children's memories and let them grow up as Jordanians. Matussem was only two when he left Nazareth. Still, he knew there had been a Palestine for his parents; its sky formed a ceiling in his sleep. He dreamed of the country that had been, that he was always returning to in his mind. (260)

With the phrase 'tried to leave', Abu-Jaber conveys how difficult it is for Matussem's parents, as well as the first generation of Palestinian immigrants, to leave their homeland. As Said, himself a Palestinian exile, suggests,

Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them. Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people. (*Reflections on exile* 140-41)

Exiled people are in constant search for a sense of belonging, seeking to retain their identities in the face of all the hardships they face in exile.

Matussem's emotional experience is reflected most accurately, perhaps, in Paul B. Armstrong's article "Being 'Out of Place': Edward W. Said and the Contradictions of Cultural Differences". Armstrong makes a comparison between Said's experience as a Palestinian immigrant and the experience of his own mother, a Danish immigrant in America:

I recognize this emotional landscape because of my mother's own experience, with much less intellectual intensity, to be sure, as a Danish immigrant who came to America after World War II and has always felt 'out of place.' Her fierce desire to assimilate to her adopted culture and have 'all-American kids' always alternated with pride in the hidden difference that she passed on to us (as much as we were supposed to be like everyone else, we were constantly reminded that we were not the same, even as we were warned not to show it) [. . .] She has felt uncomfortable and inadequate throughout her life, because she has never known for certain if her mimicry of American customs and conventions was quite right, but this unease has coexisted with secret contempt for friends and neighbours who were not as cosmopolitan as she was (although her fears of the new and the unknown showed her provincial origins, which she never overcame). Like Said, my mother has experienced her doubleness as both unsettling and valuable and has alternated between desiring to overcome it and asserting and protecting it. (102)

The doubleness Armstrong mentions in his comparison of Said's experiences in the West and those of his mother is also described by Said himself in *Orientalism*. He provides a disturbing picture of the political condition of Arab Palestinians in America:

The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening. There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental. The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny. (27)

Armstrong explains Said's statement on doubleness by suggesting that Arab immigrants in the US wish to assimilate into American society while, at the same time, enjoying the 'pleasures of multiple identities', which results in new forms of self-representation (101).

Matussem chooses jazz music as a form of self-representation. He uses jazz to create a 'third space' of cultural negotiation. Music may be used as a means to negotiate identities, and, through jazz, Matussem is able to express both his cultural identity and his affinity with others in the US community. As Al-Joulani states, 'Matussem's music and songs belong to the Arab and American cultures, hence creating a space in which these two worlds are brought to negotiate, coexist, and influence each other, in what seems a meeting point, a mezzaterra, or a borderland' (648).

Jazz connects Matussem, an Arab character, with a particular American figure: the African American. Hartman suggests that 'this work is defining a new sort of jazz, one which is Arabian. It also implies that Arabs can somehow be understood through jazz, or more broadly, in relation to African American culture' (154). Matussem has a passion for jazz music, which the reader can interpret as Matussem's manner of finding 'home'. In other words, jazz music forms his identity: 'Only at his drums did he seem to focus, concentrate

with the purpose of remembering, steering rhythms into line, coaxing a steady—in his word, peripatetic—pulse out of air’ (1). He plays jazz for several reasons, for example to lessen the pain of his bereavement and to reunite, through the music, with his dead wife: ‘His sense of loss was sometimes so potent that he became disoriented. His need to drum grew sharp as a knife cut’ (1). Euclid for Matussem is a place that connects him to his deceased wife: ‘I don’t know why I move to these balls-freezer place. Only your mother can get me to stay in these refrigerator’ (39). So his motive to stay in Euclid is Nora, and leaving it means abandoning his memories of her, which is, besides his music, home to him. With his jazz band, ‘[...] when he was playing. He was home, at last truly home’ (352).

Most importantly, playing jazz allows Matussem to be considered American, or, more specifically, ‘black’ American. As Hartman states, ‘Being marked as different, alien, and generally understood as non-white or outside the main-stream in the United States has prompted many Arab Americans to seek out and build links to other groups of colour, including African Americans’ (146). Rachmat Nurcahyo suggests that despite these social, racial and cultural conflicts, black music creates a powerful connection between Arab Americans and African Americans: ‘Often, invocations of African American music by Arab American writers are positive and celebratory, underlining a shared understanding through culture rather than establishing a bond between the two groups which is only based on shared oppression’ (2).

Jazz is transnational and promotes cross-cultural understanding. Abu-Jaber writes about Arab culture using jazz, an American product (albeit with African origins) to help her reach an American audience. Jazz enables Abu-Jaber to fuse African-American and Arabic cultures, creating a relationship between music and identity. In the book, jazz is hybridised within Arabic culture, and this fusion of cultures creates a new form of identification. People usually define themselves through their culture via its art, music, sports and food; this forms

their cultural identity. Jazz music provides a unique characterisation of African-American culture. Music, as stated by Suvi Laiho, has a pronounced role in the creation of identity and self-conception (51), and indeed jazz has a profound effect on the formation of Matussem's cultural identity. According to Bhabha:

Identification is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification—the subject—is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness. But the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. (“The Third Space” 211)

Jazz in the novel is thus the ‘third space’, the intervening space between cultures, a liminal space where ‘the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new [...] a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation’ (Bhabha 211). That newness is brought by the hybridizing of cultures in the ‘third space’, which is generated by being in a place other than home.

After Nora's death, Matussem chooses to adapt to the American way of life through humour. Matussem likes to wear silver rings, chains and a bronco belt buckle: ‘All that plus his hair, which appeared to have been dipped in car oil, made him look like a cross between Elvis and Dracula’ (56). Matussem's cultural view is made clearer when Matussem and Melvina are fighting over a plastic flamingo that Matussem has brought home as a garden ornament:

There is such a thing as one flamingo too many. I drew the line at the seven dwarves and now you come home with another bird!” “ [...] What American about this? I don't ask to see passport,” Matussem said. “Besides, see right there: Made in Taiwan! This ethnic bird. She beautiful.” “That's not what I'm saying. You're deliberately trying to

provoke me,” Melvie said. She let go of her end and Matussem sat flat on the lawn with the flamingo in his lap. (106-7)

Each May, since their moving to the US, Matussem goes

[. . .] through fits of exuberance, driving to the local hardware store and bringing home lawn decorations of deer, flamingos, and Disney characters the way some people bring home stray animals. The front lawn was littered with cartoon figures and exotic birds. Matussem didn’t arrange them with any particular design, but sprinkled them at random, even propped them up out in the fields and weeds, much to the delight of Peachy across the street. (106-7)

Abu-Jaber depicts Matussem’s attempt to integrate within the community of Euclid via his comical behaviour. Matussem also likes to go out walking in just his boxer shorts in warm weather. He frequently calls a ‘toll-free TV number for Christian broadcast transcripts, self-sharpening knives, and Voodoo aids’ (106). Abu-Jaber explains that ‘I think that humor came through my writing because it felt comfortable and it felt like a way to make the community that I was dealing with seem accessible, human, and familiar’ (Evans 43-44). However, Matussem also adopts this mask of comedy to hide his personal and cultural struggles. His actions reflect a sense of displacement, which Melvina reinforces when she says, ‘There’s only so much you can do to become an American!’ (106).

To conclude, we find that Abu-Jaber creates a ‘third space’ in the novel in which her characters negotiate their Arab and American identities. Jazz is Matussem’s means of integrating with other minorities in the community of Euclid. Fatima finds her way through the hardships of being part of a different culture from that of her home country. She adjusts to American society while maintaining Arabic traditions. Jemorah, finally, copes with her hyphenated condition as an Arab-American by considering the benefits of being hyphenated, just as Melvina precedes her in this reconciliation of Arab and American identities.

Americanah

Racism plays an inevitable role in the life of immigrants in America. As Bhabha states, ‘in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged, racism is still rampant in various forms. This is because the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests’ (“The Third Space” 208). Newly-arrived people of colour to a predominantly white community are marked by their difference, and consequently degraded. *Americanah* represents race as a social construct, presenting skin colour and hair texture as motifs of race in the United States, and demonstrating the ways in which racial signifiers affect Ifemelu’s construction of identity. Examining Ifemelu through a post-colonial lens, we find that although she retains her Nigerian identity, she also tries to pass as (African) American through adopting aspects of American culture, such as accent and straightened hair.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a third-generation Nigerian writer, is one of a new generation of African immigrants who are called Afropolitans. Simon Gikandi in *Negotiating Afropolitanism* defines the term: ‘Afropolitan is to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions; but it is also to live a life divided across cultures, languages, and states. It is to embrace and celebrate a state of cultural hybridity—to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time’ (9). Afropolitans are African emigrants who are deeply connected to their country of origin but who straddle two or more identities, cultures, and languages. The term denotes ‘toggling between cultures’ as Joel Whitney suggests (20), or choosing between multiple identities, like Ifemelu, who is conflicted as to which of her different identities to wear.

Adichie does not define herself as Afropolitan, and she has resisted having the term

applied to her: ‘I am not an Afropolitan. I am African [...] Many Africans are happily African, and I do not think they need a new term’ (Barber, “New novel”). Adichie has nonetheless been labelled Afropolitan by the Afropolitan community around the world, and *Americanah* has been reviewed as an Afropolitan book. Edem Torkornoo says in *Ayiba Magazine* that ‘*Americanah* may be about a Nigerian character, but it ends up echoing the story of the Afropolitan’ (“Review of *Americanah*”), presumably because the novel addresses the global issue of race and racism. In an interview, Adichie confirms that while she feels a connection to the United States, Nigeria is her home, the place in which she feels a sense of belonging:

I am somewhere between enthusiastically and reluctantly. I like America, but it is not mine. Nigeria is home for me. Nigeria is where I care about. But I also like that I can leave Nigeria. America has been such a part of me because I left Nigeria when I was 19. I was educated in the U.S. I find myself spelling the American way now, to my father’s absolute horror. So, there is a connection there for me to America, but also there is a strong and permanent pull of Nigeria. And I think this book is about that, that push and pull (“Adichie on Love, Race and Hair”).

While Adichie does not call herself Afropolitan, her description of her identity does indeed meet the definition. To further support this claim, we find that at the end of *Americanah*, Ifemelu goes back to Nigeria and starts blogging there. In one of her blog posts, she addresses people in the Nigerpolitan Club; a place where Nigerians who have recently returned from the United States and England gather every week to assist them in their attempt to readjust to their home country. The name of the club proves Adichie’s own hybridity, which she in turn passes on as Ifemelu’s hybridity.

In *Americanah*, Adichie portrays the difficulties that a new generation of African immigrants experience as they try to adapt to the dominant culture in the West. The struggle

is represented through the protagonist, Ifemelu, a Nigerian emigrant to the United States. Ifemelu's struggle there lies in finding an identity for herself as a black woman: 'I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America' (*Americanah* 290). Adichie has remarked that when she first arrived in the United States, a new identity was thrust upon her: 'I became black.' She adds that in Nigeria, identity is ethnic, and religious, and identity based on race does not exist. ("International Authors Stage"). Africans do not identify themselves as black in their homeland, but when they move to a culture where racism exists, they are defined in relation to the white majority. As Frantz Fanon states in *Black Skin, White Masks*, 'As long as the black man remains on his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others [...] For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man' (89-90). Accordingly, the life of immigrants in the United States is affected by skin colour and birth origin, indicating the racialized attitudes an immigrant will experience in her or his daily life there.

In her early twenties, Ifemelu decides to go to the United States to study. Ifemelu has led a normal life in Nigeria—living with her family, going to school, having a boyfriend. As an immigrant, however, she faces issues of cultural adaptation and identity construction. Ifemelu lives in poverty for years before her graduation because it is difficult to find a part-time job, even as a cashier or waitress, due to the racism she experiences. Race intersects with gender in the process of the construction of an identity for herself as a black woman in America, adding another layer to her struggle. When Ifemelu has no money to pay the rent for her apartment, a sports coach hits on her; when she tries to find a job in a gas station, the owner suggests that she can work for him 'in another way' (178).

Through Ifemelu, Adichie conveys to her readers what it is to be black in the United States: the struggle with a black racial identity is central to her novel. Adichie conveys the same feelings experienced by her character, Ifemelu, in an interview:

It didn't take me very long to realize that in America black was not necessarily a good thing, and that black came with many negative assumptions. And so I didn't want to be black. I'm not black. I'm Nigerian. I'm Igbo. I'm not black. Race was not an identity I was willing to take. ("Adichie in conversation with Damian Woetzel")

Race as a social class has affected Ifemelu's construction of identity and integration into American society. When Ifemelu is working as a babysitter in a house of upper-class white people, a carpet cleaner comes, and is surprised that Ifemelu might be the owner of such a fine property: 'He stiffened when he saw her. First surprise flitted over his features, then it ossified to hostility' (*Americanah* 166). He asks her if she needs a carpet cleaned? 'as if he did not care, as if she could change her mind, as if he wanted her to change her mind' (166). When Ifemelu answers him with 'Yes, Mrs. Turner told me you were coming', his hostility quickly disappears (166). Later, Ifemelu writes a blog entry on this episode with the title "Sometimes in America, Race Is Class", which ends:

It didn't matter to him how much money I had. As far as he was concerned I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked. In America's public discourse, "Blacks" as a whole are often lumped with "Poor Whites". Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites. A curious thing indeed.' (166)

This incident exposes the assumption that black people hold inferior positions in US society. Adichie, in addition, wants to illustrate that differences among black people do not matter in American discourse, whereas whites are classified according to socioeconomic status. When Ifemelu uses the work permit of someone who does not look like her, her aunt Uju confirms 'All of us look alike to white people,' (120).

Adichie suggests that perceived inferiority due to skin colour is a social construct. In one of her blog posts, Ifemelu addresses Africans who are new to the United States, telling them what they should expect, and how they should behave:

To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: in America, You Are Black, Baby Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now. (220)

According to Adichie's text, race—and not nationality or ethnicity or religious affiliation—is the determining factor in constructing an identity in the United States. In her post blog "Is Obama Anything but Black?" Ifemelu writes:

race is not biology; race is sociology. Race is not genotype; race is phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it's about how you look. Not about the blood you have. It's about the shade of your skin and the shape of your nose and the kink of your hair. (337)

Ifemelu claims that race is invented by society in order to classify people according to a hierarchy based on physical appearance. Katya Gibel Azoulay confirms this idea of social racial categorisation and its essentialising impact on the individual's identity: 'the question of physical appearance—phenotype—in the United States has had a significant impact on how people identify and are identified, as evidenced by the laws, social practices, and attitudes affecting people who in the past were involuntarily but officially categorized as 'Negro' or 'coloured' (8). The consequences of this social segregation are real and its impact even fatal. Dike, Ifemelu's cousin, attempts suicide due to feelings of otherness induced by US racism. He tells his cousin that in the school camp: 'My group leader, Haley? She gave sunscreen to everyone but she wouldn't give me any. She said I didn't need it [...] I just want to be regular' (183-4).

On the other hand, Adichie illustrates Americans' denial of racism, which has been referred to as the 'new racism', a racism 'which denies being racist', as Michael Billig notes (136). For example, Ifemelu and her Nigerian friend Ginika are in a clothing store, and at the checkout, the cashier asks them which of the saleswomen has helped them. Ginika cannot say the white girl helped, as the other is black: 'Because this is America. You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things' (127). In addition, Kimberly, for whom Ifemelu works as a babysitter, always refers to black women as 'beautiful' (146) in an attempt to avoid seeming to be racist.

Ifemelu's relationship with her white American boyfriend, Curt, emphasises such racism denial. Ifemelu feels that Curt cannot understand who she is or the reality of her life as an African woman living in America. For instance, one day Ifemelu wants to get her eyebrows waxed. In the salon, the woman behind the counter says to her, 'We don't do curly' (292). Ifemelu thinks it is not worth the argument, but Curt demands that they do Ifemelu's eyebrows, or he will shut the place down. Yet Curt never acknowledges race or takes the subject of racial discrimination seriously, which annoys Ifemelu: 'It was not that they avoided race, she and Curt. They talked about it in the slippery way that admitted nothing and engaged nothing and ended with the word "crazy", like a curious nugget to be examined and then put aside. Or as jokes that left her with a small and numb discomfort that she never admitted to him' (291).

Racial identification is the reason for the discomfort Ifemelu feels in her relationship with Curt. After their break-up, Ifemelu is at a dinner party with Blaine's friends, at which a black woman says that she had a relationship with a white man in California for three years and race was never an issue for them (290). Ifemelu takes violent issue with this:

The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I

did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're alone together because it's just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we won't talk about it. We don't even tell our white partners the small things that piss us off and the things we wish they understood better, because we're worried they will say we're overreacting, or we're being too sensitive [...] and when we come to nice liberal dinners like this, we say that race doesn't matter because that's what we're supposed to say, to keep our nice liberal friends comfortable. (290-291)

Ifemelu further explores her identity when she starts a blog after she ends her relationship with Curt (296). Race is the motive for the two actions Ifemelu takes: she ends a relationship that subverts the US racial status quo, and she starts a blog to expose and speak out about racism in America. By interpolating Ifemelu's blog posts into the text, Adichie radically changes the conventional form and structure of the novel, giving Ifemelu a public presence and platform through social media. As Serena Guarracino observes,

Adichie herself owns a sort of celebrity status: her videos show impressive number of online views, making her a 'viral' public figure both inside and outside the traditional boundaries of postcolonial academic discourse. *Americanah* exists in an almost seamless continuity with these media flows by and about Adichie, as she prolongs there the role of opinion maker she has recently assumed on matters such as race, gender, and the comparison between Nigeria and the US, her country of adoption. (2)

Adichie has a significant presence on the Internet through her Ted Talks and through her work as a public representative for Nigerian women and women of colour. Adichie has said that 'I wanted this novel to also be social commentary, but I wanted to say it in ways that are

different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction': one of the way she achieves this aim is by making the protagonist of her novel a blogger ("International Author's Stage").

The blog posts bring the public sphere into the private or subjective world of the novel, where people can interact with Ifemelu's posts, and engage in the discussion raised by the issues about which she posts. The reader feels engaged through Ifemelu's blogs, especially as she uses the present tense to communicate with her readers. For example, Ifemelu writes:

There IS an oppression Olympics going on. American racial minorities—blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Jews—all get shit from white folks, different kinds of shit, but shit still. Each secretly believes that it gets the worst shit. So, no, there is no United League of the Oppressed. However, all the others think they're better than blacks because, well, they're not black. (205)

In addition, to involve her readers in discussion, Ifemelu's strategy is to raise questions throughout her blog posts, or to end a post with a question. For instance, a short blog post titled "So What's the Deal?" ends with the question: 'Is race an invention or not?' (302). Another post titled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Do WASPs Aspire To?" concludes with a question that leaves the reader wondering: 'So if everyone in America aspires to be WASPs, then what do WASPs aspire to? Does anyone know?' (205).

Throughout her relationship with Curt, Ifemelu has to contend with the tension between assimilation and authenticity. Hybridity, for her, is far from a comfortable or a convenient position. Bhabha states that hybridity is a force that disorients the colonial presence 'and makes the recognition of its authority problematic' (*Location* 159). Ifemelu harnesses the power of hybridity in establishing a blog in which she is able to express her opinions on race and racism freely. The blog operates as a 'third space' created by Ifemelu to discuss race. Hybridity, Bhabha argues, 'is the name for the strategic reversal of the process

of domination through disavowal' (*Location* 159). Therefore, hybridity empowers the individual, authorizing them to reverse cultural dominance and create a space for resistance against the colonial power.

Ifemelu calls her blog "*Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known As Negroes) by a Non-American Black*", a title that indicates her hybrid power. The blog, which tracks the experience of African immigrants, attracts a considerable number of followers. The blog is also an outlet for Ifemelu when she wants to discuss her encounters with race and racism in the United States, and helps her gain insight into her own identity. Yet she stops posting eventually because she has come to feel that 'The more she wrote, the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false' (5). This feeling of exposure synchronizes with her decision to return to her home country.

Ifemelu's life in the United States consists of different stages, in each of which she stops to question her identity. She refuses to choose between her Nigerian identity and assimilation into American culture and society, attempting instead to encompass both and thereby to find a space—a 'third space'—in the host country. Ifemelu's adoption of biculturalism, as Chinenye Amonyeze argues, 'is a radical response to discrimination through taking pride in one's heritage and firmly holding onto that legacy through retention of prominent cultural attributes' (3). It is language that eventually causes Ifemelu to embrace her African identity. At the beginning, Ifemelu thinks in terms of linguistic assimilation: she banishes words like "fat" from her vocabulary because such words, at least as Ifemelu is accustomed to use them, do not comport with US linguistic proprieties (5-6). In addition, Ifemelu, at the beginning, experiences some difficulty in dealing with native speakers. The woman at the front desk of the university registration office speaks to her very slowly because she thinks that Ifemelu cannot understand her because of her foreign accent. Adichie

has had to deal with situations like those she depicts in Ifemelu's narrative: convincing people that she is able to speak English fluently, and that Africans are civilized people. In a TED Talk called *The Danger of a Single Story*, Adichie says that

My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my "tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey. She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove. (Adichie, 2009)

In order to be more convincing, Ifemelu adopts an American accent:

It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the t, the creamy roll of the r, the sentences starting with a "So", and the sliding response of "Oh really," but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of the lip, the curling of the tongue. (173)

Ifemelu's American accent is convincing enough, but she chooses to reject it nonetheless and embrace her Nigerian cultural identity. She decides to stop faking an American accent after a phone call from a telemarketer who tells her 'You sound totally American' (175). In reality, the American accent is not easy for Ifemelu to perform; it takes years of effort for her to master. After the call, Ifemelu starts to speak with her Nigerian accent, and she feels that 'this was the voice with which she would speak if she were woken up from a deep sleep during an earthquake' (173). Speaking in an American accent is a voice-based kind of passing—like the racial passing of an earlier era. Ifemelu attempts to pass into American and African American identity before she comes to realise that she is neither American nor African American, but African. Ifemelu comments on Blaine's accent: 'He spoke the kind of American English that she had just given up, the kind that made race pollsters on the telephone assume that you

were white and educated' (177). Ifemelu has adopted an American accent to assimilate into American culture and to fulfil the requirement of adaptation, but in doing so, she discovers that she is abandoning her Nigerian identity.

Ifemelu's accent is not the only part of herself that changes to reflect her struggles with identity. In *Americanah*, hair has an important role in the construction of Ifemelu's identity. Her hybridity prevails again when she tries to adapt to American standards of appearance by straightening her hair. When she was young, Ifemelu had braided her hair, and she retains this hair style when she moves to the United States. It is important to note that black women, both African and African American, have braided their hair for centuries. As Paulette M. Caldwell states, 'Wherever they exist in the world, black women braid their hair. They have done so in the United States for more than four centuries. African in origin, the practice of braiding is as American-black American-as sweet potato pie' (379). On her first job interview, however, Ifemelu straightens her hair for the first time because she has been told that braided hair or even natural hair is regarded as unprofessional:

My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky. (204)

At the salon, when her hair is straightened,

Ifemelu felt only a slight burning, at first, but as the hairdresser rinsed out the relaxer, [...] needles of stinging pain shot up from different parts of her scalp, down to different parts of her body, back up to her head. "Just a little burn," the hairdresser said. "But look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white-girl swing!"

Ifemelu 'did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; [...] the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss' (203).

Because of the relaxer, her hair starts to fall out, so Ifemelu cuts it and her hair regains its naturally kinky shape. However, she does not know how to take care of it, which makes her even more vulnerable to racist looks and hints. For instance, Ifemelu is with Curt in a farmers' market when a black man passes by and mutters, 'You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?' (212). He hints that Curt, the white man, is with Ifemelu because she is exotic and 'primitive'. She seeks advice online for the best way to care for her hair: here, Adichie again makes use of the world wide web to support Ifemelu. It is another way, beside the blog, to link Ifemelu to the public sphere. In a blogpost, Ifemelu speaks about hair as a metaphor of race. In the same post, she shares her hair regimen, and ends the post by asking readers: 'Any AB and NAB naturals out there who want to share their regimen?' (298). Eventually, she starts to feel confident about her Afro hair style. But before her return to Nigeria, she braids her hair and goes back to her old natural style, a sign that she is reclaiming her African identity.

Again, Ifemelu acts as a fictional surrogate for Adichie herself, who, when she first came to the US and was interviewed for an internship, was told by her sister that she needed to straighten her hair to look professional. 'The acceptable curly is the white people kind of curly. When I grew up in Nigeria, I did not think about hair, I did not need to. I started to think about hair here perhaps because I also discovered race, I think both were linked':

It became about questioning who determines what professionalism and why do we live in a world where professionalism is defined so narrowly. When I stopped straightening my hair, I felt ugly. Then I started to invest in many turbans because I just thought this can pass as being stylish, just hiding the fact that wearing my kinky

makes me feel like I am just not very attractive. I wanted to write about that in Ifemelu's journey as well because it is always not just hair, it is coming into a fullness of yourself, coming into your own, owing yourself as you are [...] I have done that and I wanted my character to do that as well. ("Adichie on Love")

Adichie adds that straight hair is what U.S. society tells us is beautiful, an image propagated on TV and in magazines, and which Adichie's novel addresses and challenges. Caldwell has also affirmed that the black woman's choice of hair style determines the level of her acceptance by the white community:

Hairstyle choices are an important mode of self-expression. For blacks, and particularly for black women, such choices also reflect the search for a survival mechanism in a culture where social, political, and economic choices of racialized individuals and groups are conditioned by the extent to which their physical characteristics, both mutable and immutable, approximate those of the dominant racial group. Hair becomes a proxy for legitimacy and determines the extent to which individual blacks can "crossover" from the private world of segregation and colonization into the mainstream. (383)

Other important facets of Ifemelu's search for identity are pointed up in Adichie's use of Barack Obama as an offstage 'character' in her novel. Obama has an important and even an intimate role, for example in sustaining Ifemelu's relationship with Blaine, the African American professor at Yale, for longer than would have otherwise been the case. Their shared support of Obama allows the couple to share the hope for 'Change' in the history of US race relations. Yet they eventually separate because of their different backgrounds: Blaine has always lived in the United States as a black American, whereas Ifemelu has not experienced blackness as difference until she comes to America. One example of their differences is evident on the day Blaine arranges a protest for an old black security guard at

the university library, whom the police suspect of drug dealing. Blaine expects Ifemelu to join the protest, but instead she goes for lunch with Kavanagh, an assistant professor. Blaine criticises Ifemelu for what he sees as the hypocrisy of hosting a blog about race and racism, but not considering that related matters, like the protest, are significant. He thinks that because Ifemelu is African and not African American she does not care about political matters in the United States.

Like Ifemelu, Obama did not experience the kind of discrimination endured by African Americans: the biracial Obama is the child of a white mother and a black African—not African American—father. He was brought up by his white mother, perhaps explaining the optimism about race expressed in his book, *Dreams From My Father*: ‘My identity might begin with the fact of my race, but it didn’t, couldn’t end there. At least that’s what I would choose to believe’ (111). Obama nonetheless conveys his struggle with his biracial identity: ‘The constant, crippling fear that I didn’t belong somehow, that unless I dodged and hid and pretended to be something I wasn’t I would forever remain an outsider, with the rest of the world, black and white, always standing in judgment’ (111). Obama has to negotiate his public image. On the one hand, he identifies with African Americans, but he doesn’t bear the historical burden of slavery. On the other hand, as half-white, he can identify with and appeal to white America.

When Obama won the Presidency, optimism about the racial future of the United States was widespread. The media transmitted Obama’s espousal of a ‘colour-blind’ principle, and his belief in a ‘post-racial’ future for the nation. Gregory D. Smithers states that ‘critical race theorists define ‘colour blindness’ as a rejection of ‘race consciousness’, a moral commitment to oppose discrimination against people on the basis of race, ethnicity, and religion, and the maintenance of a legal system that protects all American citizens without regard for biological or cultural background’ (2). Obama’s was an “historic” election

in that he was the first black President in the White House, and yet his election campaign made use of the colour-blind principle, since Obama avoided talking about racial policy. In an article, Sheryl Gay Stolberg cites a speech in which Obama clarifies his stance on the black community:

I can't pass laws that say I'm just helping black folks. I'm the president of the United States. What I can do is make sure that I am passing laws that help all people, particularly those who are most vulnerable and most in need. That in turn is going to help lift up the African-American community. ("For Obama")

According to Stolberg, 'close advisers say he is acutely aware of his role as the first African-American president and is trying to heighten racial sensitivity in constructive ways' ("For Obama"). Yet Obama knew very well that if he aligned with blacks, he would lose the respect and support of many in the white community. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Victor Ray state, 'He must [...] not talk about race or be seen as black in order to get elected' (181). This is what Adichie confirms in her novel: 'He can win only if he avoids race. We all know that' (357).

Nevertheless, Obama's election spread hope, stimulated by his subsequent speech:

Young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled, Americans have sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of red states and blue states. We have been and always will be the United States of America. (360-361)

Adichie's novel conveys the pride of black people like Dike, who texts Ifemelu immediately after the election results have been declared: '*I can't believe it. My president is black like me*' (360). Ifemelu, also, saw that 'at that moment, nothing that was more beautiful to her than America' (361). She might feel, at that moment, that race no longer exists in America but this is far from the reality.

The common view among black Americans is that Obama was unsuccessful in directing the race issue. Stolberg notes that ‘Mr. Obama conceded that there was “grumbling” among African-Americans, especially about his jobs policies. But he rejected the idea that he should pay special attention to them — an argument that Earl Ofari Hutchinson, a black author and political analyst, called “disingenuous at best, and an insult at worst”’ (“For Obama”). Likewise, Bill E. Lawson points to Obama’s acknowledgement that ‘Race and racism still plays important roles in the lives of black Americans, indeed all Americans. We cannot and should not forget this important social fact’ (“Of President Barack”).

According to critical race theory, Obama’s election does not mean that racism has come to its end, a theory Adichie confirms in her novel. Assumptions about race and about racism were challenged nonetheless by Obama’s election. Obama depended on the politics of hope in his campaign and his rhetoric and thus, to an extent he renewed people’s faith in change. Derrick Bell thinks that efforts to help minimize racism are short-lived and only have a temporary effect: ‘Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary “peaks of progress,” short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance’ (85). We might consider Obama’s election as progress in the struggle against racial inequality; however, race still matters today, and US society is far from colour-blind. *Americanah* states this reality plainly: ‘the problem of race in America will never be solved’ (296).

Although Ifemelu succeeds in the United States, she is not at ease there and, like Jemimah in *Arabian Jazz*, is preoccupied with thoughts of going home:

It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a

piercing homesickness. She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil. (6)

Ahmed confirms that ‘movement away is always affective: it affects how ‘homely’ one might feel and fail to feel’ (341). When Ifemelu moves to the US, she feels no sense of wholeness there, rather she feels constantly out of place. On her return to Africa, Ifemelu identifies the key difference between Nigeria and the United States: ‘Race doesn’t really work here. I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black’ (476). Ahmed suggests that ‘The issue is that home is not simply about fantasies of belonging – where do I originate from – but that it is sentimentalized as a space of belonging (‘home is where the heart is’)’ (341). The difference between Ifemelu and Jemorah is that Ifemelu has a real home back in Nigeria, whereas Jemorah fantasises about belonging in Jordan. Ifemelu has a family in Nigeria: she never felt ‘like an only child because of the cousins, aunts and uncles who lived with them [...] sometimes a relative or two would sleep on the floor of the living room for weeks’ (52-53).

Ifemelu remains hybrid after her return to Nigeria. “‘Americanah!’” Ranyinudo teased her often. “You are looking at things with American eyes” (385):

At first, Lagos assaulted her; the sun-dazed haste, the yellow buses full of squashed limbs, the sweating hawkers racing after cars, [...] and the heaps of rubbish that rose

on the roadsides like a taunt [...] And so she had the dizzying sensation of falling, falling into the new person she had become, falling into the strange familiar. (385)

Ifemelu indulges in a 'jumble of feelings,' where 'she recognized only confusion' (386). Indeed, 'She was no longer sure what was new in Lagos and what was new in herself' (387).

Yet Ifemelu is strong enough to readapt. She has a real desire to reacclurate to her native country and she asserts her Nigerian identity. She starts blogging there, which gives her an empowering public identity and way to overcome the struggle of readjusting. She writes a post in her Nigerian blog about the Nigerpolitan Club. This post reveals her hybrid identity, for instance in relation to food, and she encourages herself, as well as members of the club, to re-adapt to cultural difference:

Lagos has never been, will never be, and has never aspired to be like New York, or anywhere else for that matter. Lagos has always been undisputably itself, but would not know this at the meeting of the Nigerpolitan Club, a group of young returnees who gather every week to moan about the ways that Lagos is not like New York as though Lagos had ever been close to being like New York. Full disclosure: I am one of them. Most of us have come back to make money in Nigeria [...] Others have come with dreams in their pockets and a hunger to change the country, but we spend all our time complaining about Nigeria, and even though our complaints are legitimate, I imagine myself as an outsider saying: Go back where you come from! If your cook cannot make the perfect Panini, it is not because he is stupid. It is because Nigeria is not a nation of sandwich-eating people and his last oga did not eat bread in the afternoon. So he needs training and practice. And Nigeria is not a nation of people with food allergies, not a nation of picky eaters for whom food is about distinctions and separations. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken and cow skin and intestines and dried fish in a single bowl of soup, and it is called

assorted, and so get over yourselves and realize that the way of life here is just that, assorted. (421)

Ifemelu, finally, gains a sense of wholeness, by being at home and then by being a Nigerian blogger, writing for Nigerian society. At this moment, ‘she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had finally, spun herself fully into being’ (475).

To conclude, Ifemelu’s national cultural identity prevails over other identities that she performs in different situations. Firstly, she returns to her natural afro hair style. Secondly, she switches from an American accent to Nigerian English. And finally, she chooses to go back to Nigeria. Jemorah, on the other hand, after realising that in Jordan she will not find what she is looking for, which essentially is a sense of being at home, adopts a hybrid identity in America.

In their novels, Adichie and Abu-Jaber seek to balance dual identities. Ifemelu goes back to Nigeria, while Adichie keeps both her African and American identities by splitting her time between Nigeria and the U.S. Jemorah, like Abu-Jaber, chooses to stay in the U.S. Both writers, Abu-Jaber and Adichie occupy a hybrid ‘third space’ in a global society.

Both Abu-Jaber and Adichie experiment with the form of the novel in ways which reinforce the content of their novels. Jazz music influences the playful creativity of the free form that characterizes *Arabian Jazz*. As a hybrid writer, Abu-Jaber is drawn to the generative possibilities of bringing “Arabian” and “Jazz” together. Thus, the novel, in terms of its form, is constructed in a manner comparable to jazz improvisation and solos, whereby Abu-Jaber can move between the characters’ perspectives easily or freely. In *Americanah*, Adichie creates Ifemelu’s blog both to participate in, and to add to the discourse on race. She radically changes traditional narrative form in creating in it a social and public space, in which Ifemelu allows her own readers to engage in discussion with her. The blog posts

thereby reinforce the novels' theme, in giving Ifemelu the opportunity to control her identity and self-presentation, and to express her views.

Chapter Two: *Saffron Dreams* and *Mona in The Promised Land*: Individuality in US Narratives of Immigrant Women

Immigrant literature promotes the value of seeking a place in US society. It is a basic human desire to seek social acceptance and to find ways that facilitate integration. Issues such as White racial prejudice in the US, and the imposition of identity, impact the religious identities of immigrant ethnic minorities. Minorities, who desire to practise their own religion freely and preserve their own traditions in the host society, find themselves in a dilemma: they must choose between the path that they are pressurized to take by the host society—to assimilate—or a path that presents obstacles—to maintain their cultural and religious identities. This dilemma is more urgent for those ethnic minorities which are perceived as a threat to US national security, and which therefore face persecution as well as discrimination.

As Vincent N. Parrillo comments in *Diversity in America*:

The cultural diversity that exists in America today is misperceived as different, more widespread, and resistant to assimilation—which should be celebrated, respected, and maintained, say its proponents—thus making diversity, in the eyes of alarmed others, not only a new construction but somehow also a threat to the cohesiveness of American society. (5–6)

The dominant group views its reactions towards immigrants as ‘entirely legitimate’, since, as Amin Maalouf states, ‘If they feel that “others” represent a threat to their own ethnic group or religion or nation, anything they might do to ward off the danger seems to them entirely legitimate’ (107).

Shaila Abdullah and Gish Jen both highlight the value of individualism: both represent their protagonists, Arissa in *Saffron Dreams* and Mona in *Mona in the Promised Land* respectively, as achieving individuality and individual agency by making their own

choices as to how to pursue their lives in America. In the first instance, both novels show the characters' enchantment with the American Dream. Arissa reflects, 'For me, New York held so much promise, opportunities bursting at the seams' (35), while the American-born Mona states, 'American means being whatever you want' (49).

Arissa thinks of taking off her veil after she marries and moves to America with her husband, but he encourages her to keep it, as he 'had harbored a reverence for the veil—to him it defined a woman' (10); likewise Mona, whose parents raise her to be the embodiment of Chinese values. Arissa subsequently realises the stark reality of her outsider status, signified by her veil: 'I saw the silent acknowledgement in the eyes of New Yorkers that at once declared me an outsider' (35). Mona is likewise regarded and referred to as other, as Chinese and not American, due to her facial features and skin colour. Recognising that they always will be perceived as foreigners in the US, and subject to White prejudice, discrimination and racist treatment, Arissa and Mona both determine to release themselves from their cultural traditions and seek their individuality by adopting hybrid identities. Nonetheless, Arissa eventually realises that 'The place felt like home, but it wasn't' (36), while Mona admits at the end of the novel that 'I'm never at home' (231).

Bhabha's concept of hybridity is based on a consideration of the cultural structure of colonialism. Immigrants have limited choices: they can either assimilate or be hybrids; otherwise, they will be marginalized. As a result, some immigrants choose to hide their religious identities, as in the case of Arissa in *Saffron Dreams*, who removes her veil. As Maalouf suggests, 'Identity is made up of a number of allegiances [...] People often see themselves in terms of whichever one of their allegiances is most under attack. And sometimes, when a person doesn't have the strength to defend that allegiance, he hides it' (105). Other immigrant minorities might choose to affiliate with another religious group that they think is more settled and has greater cultural and economic power in the US, as is the

case for the protagonist of *Mona in the Promised Land*, who affiliates with Jewish-Americans. Maalouf speaks of the struggle of those immigrants who encounter hostility simply because they are different from the mainstream population:

Wherever there are groups of human beings living side by side who differ from one another in religion, colour, language, ethnic origin or nationality, wherever there are tensions, more or less longstanding, more or less violent, between immigrants and local populations, wherever there is a divided society, there are men and women bearing within them contradictory allegiances, people who live on the frontier between opposed communities, and whose very being might be said to be traversed by ethnic or religious or other fault lines. (109)

Furthermore, as Werner Sollors states, ‘In the complicated American landscape of regional, religious and ethnic affiliations, it could be very difficult to construct the self as an autonomous individual and as fated group member’ (173). Constructing one’s individual selfhood entails both requisites and consequences. Arissa, for example, has to abandon her veil, which from a Muslim perspective implies that she is betraying her religion, her Muslim identity, as well as her Muslim community. Similarly, by converting to Judaism, Mona becomes a “solo Jew” and as a consequence, she is deemed a religious maverick by her family.

Saffron Dreams

Saffron Dreams is the story of a young Pakistani woman, Arissa Ilahi, who lives in New York City with her husband, Faizan: he dies in the attack on the World Trade Center, where he works at the Windows on the World Restaurant. Arissa and Faizan grew up in Pakistan, and their marriage was arranged by a matchmaker, according to their society’s tradition. Faizan moves to the US for higher education, whereas Arissa moves as his wife. Throughout

the novel, the focus is on Arissa's efforts to work through her grief as she struggles to cope with life in America after losing her husband and learning that their unborn son, for whom she will be the sole carer, will suffer from CHARGE syndrome. She strives to redefine herself and reconstruct her identity as a Muslim woman in America.

In her novel, Shaila Abdullah focuses less on race hatred and Islamophobia than on the human story of a Pakistani Muslim couple, and on the psyche of the widowed Arissa. Muslim and Arab American women writers have been subjected to marginalization and silencing since 11 September 2011, because they speak out about racism and oppression. This is why, as Shakir Mustafa notes, writers like Diana Abu-Jaber and Monica Ali, a Bangladeshi-British writer, 'create contexts that enable Muslim characters to interact with and relate to the wider community' (284). Abu-Jaber notes in an interview with Andrea Shalal-Esa that, since 9/11, 'people are being extremely careful about what they say and how they're representing themselves. You hear whispers about McCarthyism, that kind of fearfulness. It means that you have to become a lot more cagey and strategic about the way you speak. You have to be smart about it' ("Diana Abu-Jaber"). Moreover, Mustafa notes that Hanif Kureishi, a British novelist of Pakistani descent, 'sheds light on other writers' endeavors to portray *devout* Muslims who, at least in the West, have been frequently denied access to representation, silenced, or represented as menacing' (285–86). Mustafa also refers to the pressure put on Muslim writers by publishers 'to make their writing more accommodating of public perceptions of Muslims and Islam' (286). He gives the example of Samina Ali, an Indian-American Muslim writer, who has stated that

When I was trying to sell my book [*Madras on Rainy Days*], I had editors ask me forthrightly to change parts of it: set half in the U.S. and half in India; have the American lover, Nate, storm Layla's wedding and 'save' her, like a literary Rambo

figure; show how Muslim women are repressed in India, denied their freedoms, asexual, while showing how America affords them freedoms they never dreamed up. Again, a perpetuation of stereotypes?—worse, it would have been coming from a Muslim woman! (quoted. in Mustafa, 287)

In her novel, Abdullah, like Abu-Jaber, embraces a politics of inclusion rather than exclusion—Abdullah emphasises Arissa's struggles to find her personhood rather than American hatred of Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11. Nonetheless, that race hatred is made explicit in two key scenes in the novel. The first is when Arissa and Ma [her mother-in-law] go to Prospect Park in New York City, where some boys are playing football, and one of them throws the ball towards them. When the children's mother comes to retrieve the ball, and Arissa and Ma attempt to assure her that the ball did not hit them, the woman says, 'No. I am just sorry they missed you' (*Saffron* 110). Arissa describes their response: 'We stood up and quietly picked up our belongings in our in-between world. The line between a resident and an outcast had grown very thin' (110). Arissa then decides to change her physical appearance, removing her veil, which later helps her to build her hybrid identity as a Pakistani Muslim woman in post- 9/11 America:

We each took a lesson back with us from the encounter that day: my decision was now strengthened, new plans germinating in my head, while Ma's stoic hold on tradition grew a few degrees brighter. I decided to add one more item to my list of things to do: *Let the guilt go.* (110)

The second event that reflects the tension of the times occurs when Arissa is followed and harassed by a group of young White American males. Her veil, again, makes her a target for a racist attack that in this instance involves actual as well as verbal violence: the young men cut her clothes, but when they realize that she is pregnant, they run away.

In a further incident, Arissa is subjected to ostracism. While on the street, she is captivated by a picture of a person who is missing as a result of the 9/11 attack and who resembles Faizan. She stops to look into the picture, and then steps back and collides with a man who is staring at her with hostility. She thinks:

There it was again, judgment by association.

‘This one is mine,’ I pointed to the flyer of the young man. I have no idea what made me say that. ‘Which one’s yours?’

He stared at me in disbelief. ‘None,’ he said finally.

I turned to leave.

‘I am sorry,’ I heard him say but I could not stop and answer. My scab had been scratched again and I was too busy bleeding. (87)

Hostility and discrimination against Muslims began decades before the attacks on September 11. As stated by Fareed Zakaria in an article in *Newsweek*, the 9/11 attack ‘has led some in the West to dust off old essays and older prejudices predicting a “clash of civilizations” between the West and Islam.’ Moreover, in her article “‘Where Does She Think She Is?’: On Being a Muslim, an American, and a Nurse”, Michele A. Baqi-Aziz narrates her experience of racial discrimination during a break in her work day as a nurse: “‘Where does she think she is?’, ‘How dare she dress like that in this country? I couldn’t dress like this in her country. She should go back to Saudi Arabia!’” (11). A Muslim-American who wear the veil, Baqi-Aziz was born not in Saudi Arabia but in the United States. The incident she describes took place four years before 9/11, and typifies the discrimination she has experienced throughout her life.

As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, Bhabha identifies two issues raised by cultural diversity—White superiority and racism. According to Bhabha, Western people view themselves as residents of ‘cultured’ or ‘civilized’ nations, and fail to acknowledge other

cultures' 'various historical and social contexts' ("The Third Space" 208). Westerners believe that other cultures are worthy of being explored, albeit that these cultures remain less civilized than the West:

The endorsement of cultural diversity becomes a bedrock of multicultural education policy in this country. There are two problems with it: one is the very obvious one, that although there is always an entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is always also a corresponding containment of it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that "these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid". This is what I mean by a *creation* of cultural diversity and a *containment* of cultural difference. ("The Third Space" 208)

Bhabha's thesis explains the Western view of veiled women: many Westerners have no idea of the background of the veil nor its cultural value. Westerners disapprove of the veil because they believe that it is imposed on women as a means of gender oppression. Leila Ahmed states that

Just as Americans 'know' that Arabs are backward, they know also with the same flawless certainty that Muslim women are terribly oppressed and degraded. And they know this not because they know that women everywhere in the world are oppressed, but because they believe that, specifically, Islam monstrously oppresses women.

("Western Ethnocentrism" 522)

This belief that Islamic societies place women under men's domination is widespread in the West, and the word 'veil' is 'synonymous in this country [America] with female oppression' ("Western Ethnocentrism" 523). Ahmed attempts to clarify the issue by stating that the veil is 'more than anything a symbol of women separated from the world of men, and this is

conventionally perceived in the West as oppression' ("Western Ethnocentrism" 523).

Conversely, Baqi-Aziz offers a further explanation of why Muslim women cover their heads:

In the *Qu'ran*, God instructs both men and women to dress modestly (as He also did in the Bible). For Muslim women, covering the head is an act of modesty, not enslavement. American society perceives us as oppressed, but nothing could be farther from the truth. We cover our heads because we believe in God's laws, not because we are intimidated. (11)

As Ahmed reminds us, in the eighteenth century, the writer and traveller Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had corrected her own stereotypical notion of Muslim women after she herself wore the veil:

She [...] said that having herself not only observed veiled women but also used the veil, she was able to assert that it was not the oppressive custom her contemporaries believed it to be and in fact it gave women a kind of liberty, for it enabled them not to be recognized. (Ahmed, *Women and Gender* 150)

Yet, today, some Western nations reject the right of Muslim women to wear the veil or discriminate against those who do, thereby imposing their own cultural assumptions on the Muslim Other. The West acknowledges diversity, but also questions and even takes away other cultures' right of equivalence.

For most Muslim women, the veil is a symbol of identity which is not easy to abandon. Ahmed notes that the veil is the 'most visible marker' of Muslim women (*Women and Gender* 152), and Valentine Moghadam suggests that veiled women have long been 'assigned the role of bearers of cultural values, carriers of traditions, and symbols of the community' (4). Hence, the veiled Arissa represents Islam and Muslims in the US, who, from the American point of view, had recently attacked the World Trade Center, even though the attackers do not represent Islamic identity or the US Muslim community. However, when

Arisa acknowledges that she must remain in America because of her son's disabilities, her inclination to remove her veil is strengthened. She wants to coexist with Americans, and assimilate. Tariq Ramadan, in *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, speaks of 'the principles to respect, the reality of the situation, and the reforms,' which he regards as 'necessary to face the challenges of life in Europe or in North America' (4). He argues that it is important for Muslim communities to find a way to 'live in harmony with their faith while participating in the societies that are their societies, whether they like it or not' (4). He also argues against the kind of 'passionate affirmation of identity' which leads to 'withdrawal and self-exclusion' (4). For Arissa, there is a gulf between her life before and after 9/11; to assimilate into American culture and survive, as well as to avoid being identified with the terrorists, she makes the decision to remove her veil. As she explains:

I was certain that [there] would be plenty of times when he [Raian] would be regarded differently, and the least I could offer him was one less deviation from the norm. Assimilate and accept it all, I decided. Only this society can give my unborn child what my own can't—a chance for a better life and abundant opportunities that he could seize and avail. (105)

In America, her son is guaranteed to receive the medical care that he needs; this would not be the case in Pakistan, where the majority of disabled children are simply a burden to their families. In performing the new identity that she is required to adopt after 9/11, Arissa is flexible and smart. She wants to derive what benefits she can from the culture into which she is assimilating. However, Arissa remains loyal to Pakistan. She does not deny her original culture nor abandon her religion and principles: 'When you leave a land behind, you don't shift loyalties—you just expand your heart and fit two lands in. You love them equally' (*Saffron* 174). Bhabha calls this living in the 'beyond,' which 'is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past' (*Location* 1). He further explains: 'We find ourselves in the

moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion' (*Location* 1).

Arisa wants to assimilate cultural differences, to inhabit what Bhabha calls the 'in between' space that provides 'the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood' (*Location* 1). By 'in between,' Bhabha also means hybridity, which 'carries the burden of the meaning of culture' and results in the emergence as 'others of ourselves' (*Location* 38–39). Bhabha calls this the 'third space', which is essential for the immigrant identity of the individual who wishes to maintain his or her original culture. The 'third space' makes the dividing line between two cultures less distinct, opening up for new opportunities and alternatives. The immigrant's ability to coexist within the 'third space' is affiliated with embracing a hybrid identity, which enables the immigrant to negotiate and exchange cultural values with others, thereby mediating conflict. For Arissa, assimilation into the dominant culture is an act of survival. In the introduction to his *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states that 'Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival' (1).

The veil signifies Arissa's identity as a Muslim woman, and she needs to avoid being a target of discrimination. The novel opens on a November night, two months after 9/11. Arissa is walking to the Hudson River, and 'for a brief sickening moment,' she 'debate[s] on which should go—the veil or herself' (2). She removes the veil and feels the chilly wind on her bare head. It is a new sensation for her. She states,

The wind tore the veil from my hand, making my task easier. I grasped the cold railing with one hand and swatted at the fleeting piece of my life [the veil] with the other as the wind picked up speed [...] I let it sail down toward the depths, its grave.
(3)

She thinks that, to a Muslim onlooker, the removal of her veil would constitute an act of betrayal. From her perspective, however, she is merely shifting the veil ‘from her head to her heart’ (3).

After 9/11, all Muslims were regarded with suspicion and perceived as a public threat. According to Suad Joseph et al., ‘While the trope of the “violent Muslim” has a long history, rooted in imperialist and orientalist representations, it has appeared with greater force and persistence since 9/11’ (230). Post 9/11, the lives of Muslim immigrants became more uncomfortable. Muslims were faced with numerous challenges, among them widespread racism, discrimination, and prejudice, to offset which ‘Many Arab and Asian immigrants put up American flags on cars and shops’ (*Saffron* 60). Arissa describes it thus:

With every horn or commotion on the street, they jumped, then withdrew a little more within themselves, guilt-ridden with sins they did not commit. They walked faster when alone. Some women took down their veils, afraid of being targeted, and adopted a conservative but Western style of dressing. Men cut their beards. Many postponed plans to visit the country of their origin any time soon. Those who did travel preferred to remain quiet during their journey and chose not to converse in their native language even among family members. A few close friends changed their names—*Salim* became *Sam*, *Ali* converted to *Alan*—in an attempt to hide identities. When asked their nationality, they offered evasive answers. (60)

As a consequence of 9/11, the manner in which Arabs and Muslims were viewed changed. Once a marginalized, invisible minority, whose issues were regarded by the dominant society as insignificant and who existed on the periphery of American society, Muslims became all too visible as people who were continuously under the public gaze. As Nadine Naber puts it,

these “invisible citizens” became “visible subjects” (“Arab Americans” 2). Moreover, as Esra Mirze Santesso states,

One immediate consequence of 9/11 was to make Muslim minorities living in the US visible: all of a sudden, bearded men and veiled women were identified not simply as ‘immigrants’ or ‘outsiders’ but as ‘Muslims,’ and their ‘marked’ bodies gradually came to represent a collective threat to liberal democracies in the West, regardless of nuances in their religious and ethnic backgrounds or political leanings. (644)

The reality of Muslims losing anonymity and any sense of normalcy is illustrated in *Saffron Dreams* through Arissa’s struggle with the veil, which, after the Twin Towers catastrophe, becomes a stigma and a sign of difference. Instead of feeling that her veil is covering her, Arissa feels exposed while wearing it. It differentiates her from others and subjects her to the public gaze. Her decision to remove her veil allows her to practise her daily life like normal people, although, initially, this is challenging: ‘In reality, the busy world around me scarcely noticed my loss or collective losses. I longed for the veil I had let go’ (116). After removing her veil, she becomes invisible in the society in which she lives, and she relishes being undifferentiated from others. It is paradoxical that it is being undifferentiated that enables Arissa to become an individual. In Arissa’s case, there is a connection between gaining her individual identity and being unveiled: it is the act of stepping into the ‘beyond, or moving to a state of in-betweenness’ that transcends the border of a religious cultural tradition in order to reconcile opposites. By removing her veil, Arissa is able both to hide her identity and assert her individuality. However, the media does not stop harassing her and shining the spotlight on Muslims, both inside and outside the US.

The media exacerbates the tensions following the September 11 attacks and plays a key role in connecting Muslims and Arabs in America with terrorism. Naber uses the term ‘neocolonialism’ to refer to anti-Arab media images, which help to ‘1) erase differences

among Arabs, Middle Easterners and Muslims; 2) portray a fixed boundary of difference between the “Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim” and the “white American”; 3) create an imaginary hierarchical relationship between the superior “white American” and the inferior “Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim” (“Ambiguous Insiders” 44). Moreover, as noted by Joseph et al., since 9/11, the US media has consistently depicted Arabs and Muslims as ‘other,’ emphasizing that ‘one cannot be Arab or Muslim and American at the same time’ (230).

‘Why did they attack us?’ The question popped up everywhere [...] A talk-show listener had called in to offer his take [...] ‘Why they want to harm us? Is it because of the teachings of their religion?’ ‘Precisely,’ answered the host [...] ‘Their faith teaches that if they harm nonbelievers, they will go to heaven.’ (*Saffron* 155)

Saffron Dreams shows that Muslims not only lost loved ones in the attacks, but were themselves attacked by the media and the government in the aftermath of 9/11. As Naber states, ‘Government policies, such as the PATRIOT Act, special registration, and FBI investigations put the logic of “good Muslim/bad Muslim” into practice by targeting noncitizens as “potential terrorists” or “bad Muslims,” and distinguishing them from “citizens” or “good Muslims”’ (“Arab Americans” 3). Abdullah depicts Arissa’s, and all Muslims’, struggle with the misrepresentations peddled by the media:

Day after day analysts applied new interpretations to the religion, broke the backs of bridges, and erected barriers too sturdy to take down or overcome. Gaps widened, our hearts divided, we struggled privately, each one of us, to make sense of our shrinking world. I witnessed the lynching of a religion and race again and again. Apart from the religion that we strived to preserve came another necessity of the times: salvaging our reputation. (155)

Arissa, however, challenges the demonization of Muslims, defending herself when a reporter calls and asks her:

‘Mrs. Illahi, being a Muslim, how does it feel to be attacked by your own people?’

Arisa responds:

‘They are not my people.’

‘They have the same religion as you.’

‘No, they don’t. They don’t have a religion.’

‘When you put all your potatoes in a sack [...] Some are rotten, some fresh. Just because they are clumped together doesn’t make them all the same.’ (123–24)

Her attempt to prove that not all Muslims are the same fails, however: ‘I winced. Don’t they know that terror has no religion? That religions don’t preach terror?’ (155). The objective of Abdullah’s novel is to show that ‘the whole concept of Islam’ is ‘based on tolerance, peace and bridge-building’ but also to show that ‘only a handful [of people]’ know this (120), a consequence of which is that Muslims in America, who were already peripheral to mainstream society, now feel that they ‘suspended in mid-air’ (60).

It is paradoxical that Arissa wants to show that not all Muslims are the same, and yet her own subjectivity is derived in part from the fact that, without the signifier of difference that is the veil, she, too, is absorbed into ‘sameness.’ In the same way, the veil itself is a paradox in that what is supposed to conceal and protect in fact uncovers and exposes her. For a Muslim woman like Arissa in post-9/11 America, there is an element of freedom in being absorbed into Western culture, as well as the loss of the visible emblem of her own cultural identity: looking at her reflection, Arissa says, ‘In the glass pane of a Starbucks, I stared at the new me—bold, unabashed, sans the veil that I had retired within’ (115).

Arisa’s decision to remove her veil is complicated, because, in Pakistan, the veil is considered traditional and unrelated to religion. Arissa’s mother-in-law assures her that wearing the veil is merely a cultural tradition, one to which she herself has conformed since she was ten years old. When Arissa marries Faizan and goes to live in New York, he urges

her to keep the veil, telling her that ‘for generations, women in his household had worn the veil. It’s just something that was done, no questions asked, no explanations needed’ (58). The case of Faizan’s family indicates that the process of socialization includes following cultural practices (to maintain peace in the family), even if they are uncomfortable with such practices. It is traditional, in some Muslim societies, to differentiate between males and females in regard to their rights and their roles. Thus, a gender regime is created to restrict the role of women in society and keep women within the accepted norms of behaviour designated by males. Violation of these norms marks women as disobedient, as it means that they have abandoned their modesty and rebelled against God’s law. In societies that adopt this view, the revocation of tradition means rebellion against the family, which may result in ostracism from both the family and society. As a result, women in such societies comply with familial conviction, as well as with societal beliefs and traditions. The veil serves as a marker of religious identity, or what Bhabha refers to as pedagogical cultural identification, and when it is removed, women break with the roles to which their society has ascribed them.

When Arissa considers removing her veil after Faizan has passed away, his mother approves Arissa’s decision, stating that ‘times have changed [...] the tradition also was to live back home’ (108). Thus, Arissa is not abandoning her religion but, rather, a tradition that is incompatible with her current situation. Françoise Gaspard and Farhad Khosrokhavar’s *Le foulard et la République* give three meanings for the veil. The first is the ‘veil of the immigrant,’ which indicates the ‘permanence of the identity of the origin’ (34). This meaning expresses Arissa’s condition, and her hesitation in removing the veil which signals her identity as a Muslim woman and ‘marks the permanence of the immemorial principles of the country of origin in the face of the traumatism of change and of transplantation into a different society’ (35). The other two meanings are the ‘veil of the adolescent’ and the ‘autonomous veil,’ which are representative of Mariam’s and Rosalie’s cases in *The Ruins of*

Us, as is illustrated in the following chapter. The aim of Arissa's journey is to achieve an individualized sense of faith. The removal of her veil is a religious negotiation, by means of which she needs 'to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences' (Bhabha, *Location* 1). Arissa now needs to ground her subjectivity in a sense of belonging, having lost her husband and giving birth to a child with multiple disabilities whom she has to raise and care for alone.

Abdullah, like Gish Jen, draws on aspects of her own lived experience in her fiction, although Abdullah insists that

The novel is not autobiographical, although there are many similarities between the character and I. We are both writers and artists and had arranged marriages. We both have flawed sense of directions but I will tell you this, certain characters of the novel were modeled after members of my family. A cousin who died after three years of marriage, leaving a pregnant wife behind drove the character of Faizan. The cousin's compassionate and loving parents inspired the characters of Faizan's parents, who step in to help Arissa get back on her feet. ("Interview with Shaila" 4)

Like Abdullah, Arissa is an artist, both a painter and a writer. She uses the brush to paint pictures that reflect her life, her thoughts, and her future decisions: 'I painted to liberate the thoughts and images within me. I merely provided them release' (139). For Arissa, painting is cathartic. She reflects that 'In all fairness, colors define me' (5). The colour black validates her 'state of being a widow' in America, and as she says, 'It is also the color of my hijab—the dividing line between my life with Faizan and the one without him' (6). She speaks of orange as the colour of saffron, which is 'also the color that Faizan dreamed of having on the cover of his unfinished book, a project he thought would make him a famous writer one day' (6). With its unique taste, saffron resembles Arissa's and Faizan's ambitions and the dreams

that Arissa wants to fulfil for him by proxy. She ‘considers the book his legacy and believes that he will continue to live on through that work’ (Abdullah, “Interview with Shaila” 4).

Arissa delves deeply into herself as she reshapes the personalities of the characters in Faizan’s unfinished novel according to her own point of view. The novel’s title, *Soul Searcher*, is a symbol of her life journey, and when Arissa completes the novel, she also attains her own individual selfhood. She is now able to plan her future, and determine the path which is appropriate for her. She casts aside all the social and cultural constraints imposed by Pakistan, ‘the country that shaped us’ (174). In contrast, ‘In my present [...] Some notions had vacated, some dreams redesigned, thoughts regrouped, new plans drawn. [...] I heard the thud of the past in my heart, the jingle of the havebeens, and weaved them in deftly with the soft tinkle of the present’ (232).

Abdullah also explores the theme of motherhood in contrasting the roles that Arissa’s mother and mother-in-law play in her life in order to show that, notwithstanding her struggles and losses, Arissa is able to endure and overcome: ‘I had survived, I realized with a degree of pride. I had not succumbed to the pain of my loss’ (162). Arissa misses her mother, just as Jemorah, in *Arabian Jazz*, misses hers, with the difference that where Jemorah’s mother has passed away, Arissa’s mother has abandoned her family. Ami, Arissa’s mother, is the embodiment of individuality: she is ‘a winged creature’ who views her country of origin, Pakistan, as imposing social constraints on women. Ami rejects this, stating, ‘I can’t be a prisoner here, now or ever’ (131), and tells her husband that ‘I hate being your wife, a mother. You stifle me, you and your kids. Especially them!’ (131). Ami escapes to America, seeking freedom from Pakistani social norms that suppress her subjectivity. Arissa says, ‘What can I say about the mother who abandoned us four times over a period of two decades?’ (15). Her father says to her, years later, ‘Your mother never learned to love. It took me years to understand that [...] She was born to be a free spirit. You cannot assign roles to

such a person' (15). Ami embarks on a love affair with another man, and leaves her family. She attempts to call her children from time to time, but they are unwilling to accept her, especially Arissa, who is the eldest child. Ami is absent from Arissa's wedding and does not help her during her crisis, when Faizan dies and she has a child with multiple birth defects. At the end of the novel, the mother is remorseful and wants to reconnect with her daughter, but Arissa now has the strength to remain unaffected by her mother's request. She forgives her mother, stating, 'You need to let me go. We can't mend the past and I don't think it's fair for us to repair something that has such a low probability for survival. I free you of all obligations toward me' (223). Arissa reflects: 'Abu had accepted that fact and moved on. I never did [...] Not until I met another mother [her mother-in-law] who nurtured my wounded soul and allowed me to forgive myself. Forgive Ami. Forgive the world' (15).

In *Saffron Dreams* as in *Arabian Jazz*, another character assumes the mother's role: Fatima in *Arabian Jazz* and Ma in *Saffron Dreams*. Arissa's parents-in-law have come from Pakistan to be with her after Faisan's death. Her mother-in-law, although she is herself bereaved, nonetheless helps Arissa to overcome her grief 'Ma came in each morning with a cup of steaming tea and helped me sit up, forcing me to face the new day [...] She would draw the curtain and sit next to me and encourage me to talk' (75). Arissa's mother-in-law talked to heal' (76), and when Arissa gives birth, Ma cares for Arissa as well as for her grandson:

Ma tended to me like she did to Raian; we were injured and wounded birds under her care [...] Ma rushed around, getting things done for us, often forgetting to eat her own meals, panicking at every call we received from the doctor, dreading every appointment we went to [...] Even then, like a battery-operated toy, she ran around fixing all the postpartum essential food for me that helped in speedy recovery and lactation.' (169–70)

Arissa describes Ma as follows: ‘she carved her space in the lives of others, giving more than she ever received’ (76). Her parents-in-law decide to remain with Arissa until she is healed and has recovered, to an extent at least, from the loss of her husband: ‘the unconfirmed but stable promise of selfless parents, a product of a culture a continent away. They would leave once I healed and created a new life for myself that didn’t have their son in it’ (77).

Saffron Dreams is narrated in the first person by the protagonist, Arissa, who tells her own story in retrospect. Yet her story is not told as a chronological narrative. The novel follows Arissa in her journey from traumatized daughter abandoned by her mother to wife and then widow and single mother to a child with special needs, and, finally, to her identity as a self-sufficient woman. A caring mother, she is also an editor and (ghost) writer, completing her husband’s novel as a memorial to him and as a kind of writing cure for her. As Arissa states:

My journey spans half a decade, from the biggest loss of my life to where I am now. It is a tale of grief and happiness, of control and losing control, of barriers and openings, of prejudices and acceptance, of holding on and letting go. It is about turning my heart inside out, mending it, and putting it right back in as it is about looking at life from the perspective of someone trapped in time. Finally, it’s about filling shoes bigger than mine—and filling two with only one leg to stand on. This is the leg that over and over again will weaken with the weight it’s expected to carry, falter, but eventually mend and march over the terrains of time. (6)

At the end of the novel, Arissa affirms that she is grateful to be the mother of a disabled child who can only communicate via signs. Raian manages to convey to Arissa the message that ‘You’re shining, Mama’ (232). Arissa reflects: ‘Signs make the world livable, I thought as I pulled him close. He might not be a product of someone’s saffron dreams but he was definitely the answer to mine’ (232). She describes how her disabled son is her source of

comfort and balance when her world seems to fall apart: ‘We shifted roles as he found his equilibrium and I fell apart. I was grateful for his presence as he became my coach, my teacher. When I cried, he hugged and comforted me in his heroic but silent effort’ (215).

Mona in The Promised Land

Like Abdullah’s, Gish Jen’s themes are immigration, assimilation, and the competing claims of individual and family or ethnic cultural identity. Jen’s novel *Mona in the Promised Land*, published in 1996, is the story of young Chinese American girl, Mona Chang. The novel is a sequel to Jen’s *Typical American* (1991), which is ‘structured as a series of short story-like episodes’ (See “Super Summary”), and is narrated in the third person. The younger of Ralph and Helen Chang’s two daughters, Mona grows up between New York City’s Chinatown and the Jewish neighbourhood of Scarshill in the late 1960s. Jen’s novel is a female *bildungsroman*, a form that, ‘recounting the early emotional development and moral education of its protagonist’ (Millard, *Coming of Age 2*), is appropriate for Jen’s exploration of Mona’s growing sense of individuality and her increasing awareness of her ethnicity. As Martin Japtok suggests, there is an important relationship between coming-of-age and ethnicity. In his book *Growing Up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction*, Japtok focuses on texts ‘that tell coming-of-age stories because in such texts, the protagonist’s growing awareness of his/her ethnicity and its social significance, as reflected in the text, can reveal much about the shape and importance a work gives ethnicity because it focuses on the relations of a protagonist with the wider environment’ (21).

Jen’s novel centres on Mona’s religious affiliation with Jewish Americans, the aim of which, for her, is to harmonize two different worlds—her Chinese culture and her American

environment—so that she may situate herself as an individual in American society. However, she knows little about China, as her parents are attempting to assimilate into American society, and are eager to assume an American identity. Paradoxically, the parents also want their daughters be representative of values that identify them as Chinese. Ralph and Helen, who strive to become WASPs, consider themselves as ‘the New Jews, after all, a model minority and Great American Success’ (3). The financial success of their pancake restaurant makes them feel that ‘they belong in the promised land’ (3). However, Mona and her older sister, Callie, develop an ‘ethnic awareness’ (3) that causes them to contradict their parents’ views. The sisters believe in the ideas of Martínez and Nez, who state that ‘No “model minority” myth protects Asian and Asian-Americans from hate crimes, police brutality, immigrant-bashing, stereotyping, and everyday racist prejudice’ (10). Mona’s goal throughout the novel is to convince her parents of their insecure minority status and advise them of how they can lead a better life by aligning themselves with another minority—the Jews—without relinquishing their Chinese traditions. Michele Byers notes that ‘The novel demonstrates the way questions about Jewish whiteness have shifted; here Jews are articulated as an assimilated, affluent, suburbanized majority, which makes them desirable for other minority groups to emulate’ (107).

Aspects of Jen’s own experience are reflected in this autobiographical novel. According to Laura Marcus, ‘Autobiography offer[s] a private occasion for attempting to resolve the problematics of identity: contradictions between the view that identity exists through time (Locke) and the idea that its existence is uncertain (Hume), are displayed and mediated through self-reflective writing’ (16). Through Mona, Jen conveys her own resistance to being, or being made to be, a representative of Chinese values:

It’s particularly the concern of a writer [to ask], “What is my rightful territory? Do I accept limitations placed on me by the mainstream? Do I accept my assigned

subjects?” The answer is “I do not.” It’s time to think again about ethnic lit. What is it about? What does it presume to speak on? It doesn’t need to be representative to be of value. (“American As Apple Pie”)

Mona expresses her unwillingness to be the representative of her parents’ values: ‘Jews believe in the here and now; Catholics believe in heaven; the Chinese believe in the next generation.’ ‘She doesn’t want to be their everything anymore’ (231).

Like Mona and Callie, Jen is the daughter of immigrants who was born on Long Island and grew up in Scarsdale, New York. Mona and Callie’s parents’ insistence on their daughters learning English and trying to assimilate is comparable to the actions of Jen’s own parents. The story of Ralph coming from China to America to study and then being unable to return to his home country because of political events is very similar to what happened to Jen’s father. According to Jen’s interview with C-SPAN, ‘During the Second World War, a second front was opened against the Japanese in the Shanghai Harbour, so they needed hydraulic engineers to help with this effort.’ Her father was one of the Chinese chosen to go to the US to study engineering. Once they arrived in the US after a long journey, the war ended. After completing his PhD, Jen’s father wanted to return to China; however, ‘in 1949, the Communists took over [...] and the US government struck a deal with the Nationalists in China to keep the Chinese students here [...] because they feared all the scientists would go back and help the Communists’ (“In Depth”).

From Jen’s prequel, *Typical American*, we know that Ralph Chang, Mona’s father, comes to America to study and is unable to return to China due to the political events of 1948, the year in which the Communists came to power. Consequently, he remains in America against his will, and finds it difficult to accept that he is to spend the rest of his life there. After marrying Helen, he becomes more settled, and even feels comfortable as they cooperate to protect their Chinese heritage. In *Mona in the Promised Land*, Ralph is

portrayed as accustomed to life in America, and he has his own, successful, restaurant business. Ralph works hard to facilitate his daughters' adaptation to American society. Similarly, when Helen first arrives in America, she struggles to adjust, preferring to isolate herself with the exception of regular visits to Chinatown. After marrying Ralph, her views change: she begins to accept and like the American lifestyle, even desiring to integrate into US society. However, her adaptation is limited in its success. Begona Simal Gonzalez indicates that 'Helen belongs to those women who adjust in the name of survival or what Sau-ling Wong terms "Necessity"' (231). Helen raises her two daughters in a typically American fashion, the family assimilating into US society but without relinquishing its Chinese identity.

Mona's journey towards the 'third space' begins with her questioning received ideas about cultural identity and national belonging, thereby affecting her identity construction. Bhabha refers to this journey to the 'third space' as an 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications' that 'opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (*Location 4*). Through meeting her Japanese friend, Sherman Matsumoto, Mona learns more about national difference and historical fact. She begins a relationship with Sherman because her school friend, Barbara, informs her that if she wants to be popular at school, she has to 'have big boobs,' use her mother's 'Lord and Taylor charge card, and [have] a boyfriend' (16). Mona's relationship with Sherman ends, however, because she disagrees with his view that the purity of cultural identity can be maintained by creating boundaries between the individual and the host country. Sherman defines himself as Japanese and appreciates his Japanese identity. Conversely, Mona declares that she is American because she is American-born. She believes that cultures cannot coexist without contamination. In her conversation with Sherman, she assures him that 'Everybody who's born here is American' (14). However, she hides the alienation that she experiences

among Americans. If she feels that she is American, there should be no need to prove her Americanness by adopting all aspects of American culture. In fact, during Mona's long journey in search of her identity, she is seeking recognition as 'American' from White American society.

The conflict between Sherman and Mona is heightened when he tells her, 'Atomic bomb dropped on only one people,' 'The Japanese do not forget' (14), expressing his aversion to both Americans and to the Chinese. The irony is clear, as the name Sherman is associated with American military power: General Sherman gave his name to the Sherman tank. Mona's mother later tells her that 'World War II was in China too [...]. She knows the Japanese were on the wrong side, because they bombed Pearl Harbor' (15). In this regard, Kenneth Millard suggests that 'Contemporary coming-of-age novels are novels about knowledge of American history, and that knowledge itself becomes a significant part of the protagonist's coming of age' (10). Such knowledge initially confuses Mona's sense of identity. Sherman leaves America, thereby preserving his Japanese identity from Americanization. He leaves Mona troubled, caught between Chinese and American cultures and unable to choose between the identity that her parents have designated for her—American by assimilation, despite the persistence of racism—and the new hybrid identity that she wishes to adopt. She believes that this new identity will harmonize her with the multicultural society of the 1960s, in which 'the blushing dawn of ethnic awareness' has begun (*Mona* 3).

Mona's struggle to find herself, which is typical of adolescence, is resolved when she finally decides to convert to Judaism. On turning fifteen, she befriends two Jewish people, Seth Mandel and Barbara Gugelstein. Mona is a teenager who is susceptible to her environment. As Gonzalez suggests, 'Mona is socialized and "Americanized" in a special way: she wants to become Jewish, like most of her friends' (231). The people in the area in

which her family lived before moving to Scarshill rejected them as a Chinese minority. When they first move to Scarshill, a majority Jewish community, we are told that ‘Mona’s getting popular for a new girl’ (5). As a minority in the US, it seems Jewish Americans are more open and accepting of others. Mona’s friends at school are eager to learn more about this newcomer and her Chinese traditions, and she feels at home among her Jewish classmates. Accordingly, she begins to engage in fruitful discussions with the local Jewish religious leader, Rabbi Horowitz, which convince her of the value of Judaism. Rabbi Horowitz is careful and rational in his dealings with Mona, because of her youth and consequent incompetence to make a decision like converting to Judaism. He thinks that she is influenced by her Jewish friends:

When it comes to a sixteen-year-old choosing her own faith, what he professes to hear is mainly the reaction of other people. That of her parents, for example. ‘Is she sure she doesn’t want to see a school counsellor? [...] Also,’ he says—and by the way he clears his throat, Mona can tell that he is coming up on his real point—‘I have to wonder, excuse me, how serious is this wish.’ ‘You mean, whether this isn’t my just wanting to be like my friends?’ ‘Like your friends, and also, an important factor at your time of life, unlike your parents.’ (33–34)

Mona’s inquisitive nature finds an outlet in Judaism: as she says to the rabbi, ‘I like it that you tell everyone to ask, ask, instead of just obey, obey’ (34). As an authority figure, the rabbi has an influence on Mona, who is drawn to his fluent expression of philosophical ideas: ‘It’s not so easy to get rid of your old self. On the other hand, nothing stands still. All growth involves change, all change involves loss’ (268). He tells Mona that ‘The more Jewish you become, the more Chinese you’ll be’ (190), a comment that leads Mona to question whether she ‘remembers all too well who she is,’ and, if so, does it ‘make her more Jewish?’ (32). Gonzalez suggests that ‘Mona’s conversion is not so outrageous: in becoming Jewish, she is

reaching out for Chinese features she had not realised before' (229). In becoming Jewish, Mona experiences the birth of her individual self, which has been suppressed by the pedagogical identification imposed by her parents in their desire that the family assimilate into the American mainstream.

Helen's attitude towards her daughter changes when she discovers that Mona has converted to Judaism. From Helen's assimilationist perspective, Mona is adopting a pluralist attitude towards their ethnicity. Conversely, Helen believes that 'parents should be like bamboo, bend in the wind. Not stand there stiff, like a telephone pole' (49). She also believes that immigrant parents should allow their children to adapt to multicultural US society and develop a sense of being bicultural. She indicates that it is normal for children to be influenced by a new cultural environment and that parents who attempt to maintain the purity of their children's cultural identity make it 'too difficult for the children' (49). She claims that she is 'Westernized' in regard to how she deals with her daughters. Despite her appreciation of their Chinese cultural heritage, she raises her daughters without forcing them to learn Chinese. Mona's reaction shows her refusal to accept her mother's contradictory attitudes:

'You are the one who brought us up to speak English. You said you would bend like bamboo instead of acting like you were planted by Bell Telephone. You said we weren't pure Chinese anymore, the parents had to accept we would be something else.' Helen replies: 'American, not Jewish.' Further, Mona argues that Jewish is American. 'American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish.' (49)

Torn between two desires, Helen is confused: she wants her daughters to adapt and become fully American, yet she constantly instructs them in Chinese principles and behaviour. Thus, the girls are left unable to decide which path they should follow. Later, when the two sisters

have become Americanized, as Helen hoped, she is unhappy, and refuses to acknowledge that their ethnicity means that they are perceived as a minority.

Mona explains this to Rabbi Horowitz and criticizes her parents' thinking: 'Ralph thought they should live in their own little world, whereas Helen thought they should belong to society. Even she never intended that they should be a minority, though, and especially an outspoken one' (52). She continues:

'First of all, they don't like the word minority,' Mona says. 'They say they were never a minority when they were in China, why should they be a minority here.'

'But there are few of them, and many of everyone else.' [Rabbi]

'That's what I said. They said they're just as good as anybody, why should they ask for help?' (52)

Rabbi understands that Mona's parents 'want to be Wasps' (53). Furthermore, Mona affirms that in seeking to assimilate into white American society, Ralph and Helen even want to share in White cultural dominance, ignoring their own minority status. They seem unaware that White Americans understate other cultural influences because they fear that people of colour, including immigrants, might have a deleterious impact on American culture and identity. Yen Le Espiritu suggests that 'Yellow Perilism' depicts

Asia and Asian American as economic and cultural threats to mainstream United States—supplies white Americans with a united identity and provides ideological justification for U.S. isolationist policy toward Asia, increasing restrictions against Asian (and Latino) immigration, and the invisible institutional racism and visible violence against Asians in the United States. (90)

However, Ralph and Helen assimilate White American prejudice towards black people. They want to limit their contact with African Americans because ‘they don’t want to turn into blacks’ (118). This is in contrast with the Ramouds in *Arabian Jazz*, who are viewed by the White community as an ethnic Arab family that is associated with African Americans. Matussem, who finds jazz music cathartic, deliberately aligns himself with African Americans. However, Helen fights that alignment with all her might. One day, a woman visits the family restaurant with a petition for a clinic she wants to establish. The woman calls Helen, Ralph and Mona ‘you people,’ which outrages Helen:

‘We own this restaurant,’ Helen said in reply. ‘We live in Scarshill. You should see our tax bracket.’ And she very nicely showed the lady out. She didn’t slam the door, that would have been rude. However, she let it clap shut by itself on its nice stiff spring, and later, at home, she said, ‘Can you believe that woman? What is she talking about? [...] She want to lump us with black people! [...] “You people! You people!” What people is she talking about, that’s what I want to know. Is she talk like that to her friends? [...] She is talking to us as if we are black! She is talking to us as if we are Negroes! [...] If that lady can talk how she wants, I can talk how I want too. And make no mistake. We are not Negroes. You hear me? Why should we work so hard—so people can talk to us about birth control for free?’ (119)

Jen re-emphasizes this idea in a C-SPAN interview:

It would be very hard for me then to identify as Asian-American, but it’s true just in a gentle kind of way, like the Jewish Americans we were kind of a middle minority. I always saw us, we were not, we might have identified as Whites going up but it quickly became apparent we were not White, but we were the minority that was not African-American.’ (“In Depth”)

Helen attempts to ignore cultural difference but encounters obstacles in the form of her own facial features and skin colour. She fails to obtain a new identity and so is unable to establish a sense of belonging. As Helen is lost between two worlds—American and Chinese—her confusion grows when her daughter, Callie, surprises her by calling herself Kailan in order to align herself with their Chinese cultural heritage. Callie rejects the identity that is being imposed on her by her parents and hegemonic society, and so she redefines what it means to be Chinese and American. She represents empowerment, the mobility of the individual, and agency in negotiating liminality, thereby indicating that an individual is able to achieve a hybrid identity that combines Western and Eastern cultures:

She [Callie] says she's proud to be Asian American, that's why she's using her Chinese name. (Her original name, she calls it.) But what in the world is an Asian American? That's what Ralph and Helen want to know. And how can she lump herself together with the Japanese? 'The Japanese *Americans*,' insists Callie/Kailan. 'After what they did during the war!' complain Ralph and Helen [...] Better to turn Jewish than Asian American, that's their opinion these days. (301–02)

Jen clarifies the term 'Asian American' in an interview with Julie Shiroishi:

Today, of course, we regard it with a kind of inevitability that we are Asian Americans, and yet that's not at all apparent to the immigrant generation because it's not something that comes down to us straight from our heritage [...] from Confucianism or something [...] Asian American is actually something you learn to be in this country and it is actually a species of assimilation. ("American As Apple Pie")

Callie's behaviour in connecting herself to an Asian and specifically to a Chinese cultural heritage, like Mona's conversion to Judaism, is an expression of dissatisfaction with her

parents' attitude—particularly their resentment towards blacks and their racist standpoint vis-à-vis African Americans. The parents align themselves more closely with Jews, calling themselves 'New Jews,' because they view in American Jews a model for their own aspirations. As Gonzalez states, 'There is a notable historical parallelism between the Jewish and Chinese people [...] In the United States, the Chinese are called the "New Jews" because they seem to be living proof of the American dream' (229). This is in contrast with the parents' attitudes towards black Americans: they employ black people in their restaurant, but fear that White Americans will classify them as people of colour as a result of their association with black people. Yuan Shu states that the notion of 'Asian values' defines 'the material success of Asian Americans in American culture and society since the 1980s'; however, 'these values have equally been deployed to suggest the inability of Asian Americans to embrace the American Dream.' This means that the Asian American minority will continue to be the 'perpetual foreigner' (93) in the US. Despite the Changs' successful assimilation, they continue to be referred to as foreigners; their economic success does not provide an impenetrable shield against racial identification.

As an expression of her aversion to her parents' racist attitude towards black people, Callie decides to reconcile herself with her Chinese American identity. She chooses to immerse herself in her Chinese heritage: she studies Chinese history, learns Mandarin at Harvard, and wears 'Chinese padded jackets' and even 'cloth shoes!' (301). Although her parents preserved their Chinese traditions at home, Callie's behaviour becomes so 'Chinese' 'that Ralph and Helen think there is something wrong with her' (301). Her behaviour creates a chasm between Callie and her parents, who consider it disloyalty to them rather than evidence of their daughter's appreciation of their heritage. Andrew Furman states that 'if the flight from ethnicity forms a rift that divides the generations in the early Jewish American novels, it is the countervailing rejection of an assimilated mainstream identity that currently

divides the second generation, represented by Mona and Callie Chang, from their immigrant parents' (214). Ralph and Helen are not convinced by the 'Asian American' identification and refuse to adopt it themselves. They are likewise suspicious of multiculturalism, favouring assimilation and raising their daughters accordingly. Bhabha indicates that 'colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable "Other", as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (*Location* 122). The parents are striving to prove that they belong in America. Their attitude suggests that the US is not a racist country but the promised land—a place of opportunities which is willing to accept minorities if they seek assimilation. Callie and Mona contradict their parents' beliefs, which they know are not rooted in fact.

The second generation of Asian Americans, represented by Mona and Callie, feels at home in America, albeit conscious that they are an ethnic minority, like the Jewish and the African American communities. As David Brauner explains,

Mona's generation feels both more at home in the US and, paradoxically, more keenly aware of their status as 'ethnics,' having more in common with other 'Asian-Americans' or even with Jewish and African-Americans, than with the WASPS whom their parents had identified as the 'typical Americans'. (118)

Mona asserts that 'We are a minority like it or not, and if you want to know how to be a minority, there's nobody better at it than the Jews' (53). She further justifies her preference for Judaism by claiming that, as a convert, she can ask questions and need not accept things as they are. Xiao-Huang Yin explains why the Jews' experience in America appeals to Chinese American writers: it is because the 'Jews have altered the rules of Americanization and given it new meaning. It no longer equates with assimilation into WASP culture; rather, it means integration into a diversified society while maintaining one's own roots' (193).

In converting to Judaism, Mona is expressing her search for moral values and social justice. Mona thinks that 'American means being whatever you want' (49); however, the

African American Alfred, who works at the family's pancake restaurant, proves her belief to be false, as Alfred is unable to change his ethnicity. Mona gives him an economic incentive as she encourages him to turn to Jewishness: 'So you can have a big house and a four-bay garage and a gardener too,' to which Alfred replies, 'We're never going to have no big house or no big garage, either, We're never going to be Jewish, see [...] *We be black*' (137).

Alfred's statement reflects Fanon's argument, that the black man must 'be black,' particularly in relation 'to the white man' (89–90). Mona nonetheless thinks that Alfred should understand more about Judaism. She explains as follows:

'The whole key to Judaism is to ask, ask, instead of just obey, obey,' Mona says.

'That's what I learned. Also you've got to know your holidays. You've got to know all the ritual, so you know who you are and don't spend your time trying to be Wasp and acting like you don't have anything to complain about. You've got to realize you're a minority.'

'Man, but we're asking, all right,' says Alfred. 'We're asking and asking, but there ain't nobody answering. And nobody is calling us Wasp, man, and nobody is forgetting we're a minority [...] We're black, see. We're *Negroes*.' (137)

Mona's experience with Alfred proves that the American racial system does not grant the same rights to every minority—for example, the right to identification and self-definition—a point also made by Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah*, when she addresses non-American blacks through her blog: 'in America, You Are Black' (220).

In *Where We Live Now: Immigration and Race in the United States*, John Iceland posits three theories pertaining to immigrants' integration into society: assimilation, ethnic disadvantage, and segmented assimilation. 'Assimilation refers to the decline of ethnic distinctions between groups [...] through the adoption of mainstream attitudes and culture, and through educational and work experience' (23). This type of integration works well with

people from European origins because they look like Americans. Ethnic disadvantage contrasts with assimilation; it means that adaptation to the dominant language and culture does not often mean assimilation (27), which is the case for most first generation immigrants to the US, who think they have succeeded in their assimilation yet are still regarded as minorities. Segmented assimilation is more closely related to contemporary immigrants; it is similar to ethnic disadvantage, but here successful assimilation depends on the age and social class of the immigrant (29). Mona chooses to assimilate at first, as her parents raised her to be American. She grows up appreciating American culture and values, thus embracing her American identity—‘I’m American’—and she asserts that ‘Everybody who’s born here is American’ (14). Anyone can become American, she believes: ‘You only have to learn some rules and speeches’ (14). She later learns that, to be called American, it is not sufficient to be born in America, to learn the language, and to adapt to the culture. She realizes that her family’s Chinese ethnicity is a disadvantage. According to her facial features, which indicate her origins, she is assigned to a certain ethnic category. This is what keeps Mona between two worlds during her childhood: American by birth, her facial features and skin tone designate her as Chinese. Her ethnic identity is emphasized by her peers and teachers, who identify individuals according to their origins and skin colour. Mona’s White school friend, Danielle, points out that ‘Mona’s *Chinese*’ (5). Moreover, Miss Feeble, Mona’s teacher, begins ‘to ignore her hand up in the air. Now, Mona, you have to give someone else a chance to talk’ (27), indicating racist treatment.

Miss Feeble also repeatedly attempts to remind Mona of her origins. She asks Mona ‘if she is really Chinese,’ and Mona’s first answer is ‘Of course I’m Chinese.’ However, she immediately retracts her answer, stating instead that ‘I’m Chinese American.’ ‘And your parents?’ continues Miss Feeble [...] ‘They’re Chinese too?’ ‘Of course,’ Mona says. ‘They’re immigrants.’ Naturally, she knows as she says this that her parents would never use

this word to refer to themselves, as they think ‘immigrants’ means people who attempt to bring live chickens on buses and do not own real suitcases (27). In addition, the people whom Mona encounters are curious about her. They ask her about Chinese-related subjects, ‘whether she has been back, and whether she speaks the language [...] Also whether Mona misses China even though she’s never been there’ (182). The implication is that Americans do not differentiate between Asians and Asian Americans.

Parrillo sums up the White mainstream view of Asians during the period 1871–1920 as follows: ‘Despite Asian American differences in nationality, language, and culture, to most Americans they all looked alike, they all were alike, and they all were unassimilable and undesired. Not surprisingly, fear, resentment, antagonism and violence soon marked Asian-White relations’ (104). This view was still prevalent in the 1990s: according to Parrillo, ‘many Americans view Asian Americans as a single cultural entity because they are of the same race. In fact, they are quite different from each other in language, primary religious beliefs, and cultural attributes’ (123).

Mona realizes that because of her family’s status as a minority, they will never be able to fully assimilate into WASP America, and will never achieve a higher status in American society, but will, as Le Espiritu says, ‘continue to face white racism in the political, economic, and social arenas as well as white resentment and violence for being ‘too successful’ (109). Consequently, Mona decides to align herself with the Jewish community. When the family moves to the Jewish suburb of Scarshill, Mona identifies it as ‘a liberal place, not like their old town, where the Whitman Road Gang used to throw crab-apple mash at Callie and Mona, and tell them it would make their eyes stick shut. Here they’re like permanent exchange students’ (6). Accordingly, Mona, being American-born, exercises her right to be whatever she wants to be. She states, ‘I *could* become Jewish, if I wanted to. I’d just have to switch, that’s all’ (14). As an immigrant, Mona embodies and occupies Bhabha’s

‘third space’, an empowering position that offers her different possibilities from which to choose. Being in this space means not being constrained by either culture—Chinese or American. Thus, Mona is able to choose the identity she wishes for herself.

Switching identity is a form of identification. However, this process depends primarily on the community with which one chooses to be identified and whether it will accept an outsider. Maalouf states that ‘What determines a person’s affiliation to a given group is essentially the influence of others: the influence of those about him—relatives, fellow-countrymen, co-religionists—who try to make him one of them; together with the influence of those on the other side, who do their best to exclude him’ (104–05). To analyze the phenomenon of identity switching, it is helpful to refer to David Hollinger’s assessment of a post-ethnic perspective towards the term ‘affiliation’: ‘A post ethnic perspective favours voluntary over involuntary affiliations, balances an appreciation for communities of descent with a determination to make room for new communities, and promotes solidarities of wide scope that incorporate people with different ethnic and racial backgrounds’ (3). Hollinger then makes a distinction between the terms ‘identity’ and ‘affiliation’, stating that identity is psychological rather than social and therefore expresses its interest in the degree to which social groups are important in the individual’s life. Identity is also implicated with ‘fixity and givenness’, whereas affiliation is more flexible, is performative, and has a prominent interest in ‘communities of consent’ (6–7). From Hollinger’s analysis, it may be inferred that Mona’s actions reflect religious affiliation as much as if not more than a switch in identity.

The novel as a whole explores Mona’s search for a stable cultural identity. Contrarily, through Jewishness, Mona is able to reach and realize the ‘Chineseness’ in herself. She realizes that she cannot forget that she is Chinese, because ‘Out in the world of other people,’ she ‘has people like Miss Feeble to keep the subject shiny’ (32). At the synagogue, she learns about Jewishness, its rituals, its implications for justice, and its concern with memory: ‘what

it means to be Jewish [...] mostly seems to be about remembering that you are' (32). All of this brings her closer to her Chinese origins: 'now that she is Jewish, she feels more of a Chinese than ever' (66).

Although the step of religious affiliation is not easy for Mona, she finds that Jewish Americans embrace her, and she views Judaism as more liberal than Christianity. Formerly, for the sake of being among the majority of the Americans who have converted to Christianity, their parents had made Mona and Callie embrace Christianity. However, Mona realizes that Christianity does not make her immune to American racism and discrimination. She speaks to Rabbi Horowitz, explaining her interest in Judaism: 'I like it that people is supposed to be their own rabbi, and do their business directly with G-d [...] In the Catholic church, you know, you're always keeping to your place and talking to God through helpers' (34). When it comes to Jewishness, Mona is eager to practise the rituals related to the religion, mikvah:

It's not so easy to get her hair to submerge; Mona is called upon to employ her best sinking skills. But finally, success. Through a sheet, three witnesses listen solemnly to the dunk. She chants her Shema Israel. She burns her special four-stranded candle. Her three witnesses sign neatly her nice frameable certificate. And in this way, she becomes Mona-also-known-as-Ruth, a more or less genuine Catholic Chinese Jew. Maybe there are people who do not accept her, as Rabbi Horowitz has warned. Also it is tricky to be a solo Jew with no family. (44)

Mona enthusiastically attends other events at the synagogue, and is troubled only by her inability to tell her family.

Mona does not intend to inform her parents about her religious conversion, as she knows they will disagree with her decision. Her sister, Callie, has left home to study at Harvard, and this makes it more difficult for Mona to continue with her conversion, as she

has now become her parents' sole focus. Accordingly, Mona contemplates abandoning her conversion because it is difficult for her to persist in her Jewish faith at home: 'It seems against the spirit of New Year's—who resolves to strive less?—but so what' (43). Then, 'Helen finds out, it is from Saint Callie at Practically Harvard.' 'Callie told us some surprise.' 'She said you weren't going to tell us. She said you were going to keep it a secret. She said you did it behind our back' (44). Helen is disappointed in her daughter. On the point of tears, she asks, 'How can you be Jewish? Chinese people don't do such things' (45). Offended by her mother's words, Mona replies, 'I guess I must not be Chinese, then' (46). The conflict between Mona and her mother begins here and ends with Mona leaving the family home:

'That's enough Jewish,' she says. 'Forget about services. Not funny anymore. You know where all the trouble started? All the trouble started from you become Jewish.'

'Mom,' Mona says. 'It's a free country. I can go to temple if I want. In fact, if I wanted to, I could go to a mosque' [...] 'Forget about free country,' she says. 'What do you mean? This is America. I can remember what I want, I can be what I want, I can—'

'You want to be something, you can leave this house, don't come back,' says Helen. (248–49)

Helen, who is closely connected to her Chinese heritage, cannot accept that her daughter is embracing a new identity. She regards Mona as disloyal to her origins and ancestors and informs her that if she insists on becoming Jewish, she will be banished from the house. This is normal behaviour on the part of any parent from the first generation of immigrants who are attached to their origins and want to maintain their heritage. In keeping with the post-ethnic perspective, Hollinger advises that 'Individuals should be allowed to affiliate or disaffiliate with their own communities of descent to an extent that they choose, while affiliating with whatever nondescent communities are available and appealing to them' (116).

Mona's dispute with her mother is challenging for her. Although she has the choice of obeying her parents and thereby allaying their anger, she does not do so in the belief that she must follow her own convictions. She occupies the 'third space' in place of the 'binary division through which spheres of social experiences are often spatially opposed' (*Location* 10). In this space, Mona creates a new mode of identification as she combines two identities, and makes a hybrid out of Chineseness and Jewishness, that of "Catholic Chinese Jew," which enhances her interaction with American society. At this stage, Mona realizes that being American means having the right to do and believe as one chooses: 'Perhaps this is why Mona allied herself with the Jews, with their booming belief in doing right, with their calling and their crying out. *Justice!*' (254). She abides by her decision, despite all the challenges, one of the hardest being that posed by her parents. Her goal is to prove to them that they can have a better life in a multicultural society by affiliating with other groups, which does not mean that they have to abandon their Chinese origins. As Hollinger suggests, 'A postethnic perspective denies neither history nor biology' (119).

For Bhabha, hybridity is the result of an identification process; it is understood as a 'recombination of elements that are rooted in different traditions and that are creatively combined in the interstitial space between cultures' (*Location* 38). Mona achieves this at the end of the novel when she marries the Chinese-Jewish American Seth Mandel. Mona's interracial marriage seems like a celebration of the change in her life. The wedding represents, in one sense, racial group mixing through marriage to enable cohabitation. Jonathan Brennan suggests that the term 'mixed race' 'serves as a metaphor for cultural hybridity' (9). Mona thinks that she should change her last name to suit her new hybrid identity. She wants to change it to Changowitz, adding a Jewish suffix to a Chinese name. She is happy that she can 'change her name if she wanted to; and she thinks how at one point in her life that was what mattered more than anything' (303), referring to the change in her

identity. Io is the name of their daughter, ‘the pink-prune child’ who is the hybrid product of this biracial marriage.

In the end, Mona and her mother do reconcile, and the family eventually reunites after a two-year separation. However, the ethno-racial conflict that they experience in America does not seem to have been resolved. Mona defines herself using negative expressions: ‘not Wasp, and not black, and not as Jewish as Jewish can be; and not from Chinatown, either.’ She is like ‘a sore thumb, sticking out by’ herself (231). She further states, ‘I’m never at home’ (231). Bhabha refers to this sense of disorientation as a disturbance of direction in the ‘beyond,’ which is ‘an exploratory, restless movement [...] here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, [and] back and forth’ (*Location* 1). For immigrants, the journey of identification never ends, as they are caught ‘in-between the designations of identity’ (*Location* 4). Nonetheless, Mona identifies herself more closely with America than her parents, who have become disillusioned with the American Dream. Eventually, Mona succeeds in retaining both her new community and her family. She demonstrates that her decision to affiliate with the Jews is not a result of passing teenage rebellion but, rather, that the Jewish community offers an appropriate cultural environment for her sense of ethical values and social justice.

In occupying a hybrid space, Arissa, Mona, and Callie undermine the fixed cultural power of Whites’ relations with Muslims and non-whites. The hierarchical binaries between these groups are collapsed by the undermined group’s adoption of a ‘third space’ in which there is an imaginative blurring of boundaries. These characters are willing ‘to descend into that alien territory’ that ‘may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*’ (*Location* 38).

Chapter Three: *The Ruins of Us* and *The Expatriates*: Identity and the Sense of Home in American Expatriate Women's Narratives

This chapter considers women's expatriate literature as a form of migrant literature.

Expatriation is a longstanding facet of American literature—from Henry James through the 'Lost Generation' of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, to African American authors such as James Baldwin and Richard Wright, to the present. David Peck notes that 'The issue of expatriation has defined American literature. Many American writers have lived abroad at one time or another—usually, although not exclusively, in England and France—and the effects of those years of expatriation are incalculable on the development of American literature' (2). Little recent critical attention, however, has been paid to contemporary expatriate literature, written by and about American women, with particular references to women's experience as expatriates in the East.

The purpose of this chapter is to compare, in the form of migrant women's narratives, questions of identity faced by American women expatriates in the East with those faced by immigrant women in the US. This chapter asks whether expatriate American women in the East face the same struggles as immigrant women in America. How do Eastern cultures treat American women expatriates? How does this treatment affect their identities and their strategies of adjustment to the host environment? The answers to these questions allow us to develop an understanding of the effect of the host culture's treatment of expatriate American women on their sense of belonging and home.

In "The Many Faces of Expatriate Identity", Byron G. Adams and Fons J. R. van de Vijver argue that 'it is important to recognize how expatriates may be different from other immigrants such as economic migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, especially as this

would influence their acculturation process' (323). They highlight three differences between immigrants and expatriates. The first essential difference is the reason for leaving one's home country. This could be voluntary '(moving of one's own volition in search of better work, education, and/or lifestyle) or forced (moving due to the economic or political contexts threatening one's safety or livelihood)' (Adams and van de Vijver 323). Most expatriates, according to the recent definition of the term, leave their countries on voluntary and temporary bases, while the majority of immigrants are compelled to leave, and leave permanently. The second important difference between expatriates and immigrants is that the acculturation process is voluntary for expatriates, insofar as they are not

considered a 'minority' in the common sense of the word [...] They may be classified as a powerful minority, typically having access to social (e.g., schools), economic (e.g., credit facilities), and public (e.g., healthcare) services that are less (or not at all) available to the general population in the host society. Expatriates typically belong to the upper-middle class strata of the host society. (Adams and van de Vijver 323-24)

Adams and van de Vijver describe the third difference as the freedom of expatriates in their dealings with the host community:

compared to permanent settlers, expatriates often have much more freedom in dealing with the host society, which allows them more leeway to adjust and negotiate their identities [...] The primary reason is that for permanent settlers, the choice to integrate or assimilate is influenced by the receiving culture's national policy and ideological paradigm concerning immigrants. Where a multiculturalism ideology promotes integration, societies that are more focused on maintaining their homogeneity require assimilation. Therefore, the livelihood, success, and even survival of immigrants are dependent on their ability to integrate and even assimilate into their new society. As they experience more pressure to acculturate compared to

expatriates, they often choose integration as a deliberate effort to combine the culture of their home with their host country. Expatriates, on the other hand, would not face such pressure owing to them having rank, power, and privilege within the subsidiary and the host society. Therefore they are usually less inclined to adjust to the culture of the new country as their stay is temporary, thereby reducing the likelihood that they will make massive investments in building up a majority group identity. (324)

This chapter discusses two novels — *The Ruins of Us* by Keija Parssinen and *The Expatriates* by Janice Y. K. Lee — and the conditions of expatriates in Saudi Arabia and China, respectively, which are analysed here in the context of comparative expatriate female identity, where the focus is on the representation of women's identity, ways of adaptation, and sense of belonging and home. The two novels have common themes, despite being set in different cultures, such as men's infidelity, female identity, family relationships, and gender role conflict arising from cultural difference. Characters in both novels enjoy a luxurious lifestyle in their respective expatriate communities; however, their female protagonists also struggle with the loss of autonomy, as wives cannot work, and so have nothing to do: they have household staff and hired help for taking care of the children is common, bringing about conflict in their gender roles and changes in their life routines.

Reasons for expatriation are different in the two novels. Rosalie, in *The Ruins of Us*, emigrates to Saudi Arabia as the wife of a Saudi man, while Hilary and Margaret, in *The Expatriates*, join their American husbands in their expatriation mission in China and become expatriate housewives there. Mercy, the third female character in *The Expatriates*, who is Korean American, emigrates to find steady work of a kind that she has failed to obtain in America.

Rosalie is able to assimilate into Saudi Arabian society and navigate cultural difference because she was born in the country, was raised there for twelve years, and feels that Saudi Arabia is her home. However, her identity is shattered when she discovers that, after twenty-five years of marriage, her husband has taken a second wife. She then adopts a hybrid identity: she reverts to American or Western values, and starts to question her sense of belonging in Saudi Arabia. The practice of polygamy, which is illegal in the US, is one of the major cultural differences between the West and the East. The issue of polygamy, which embodies the American expatriate woman's struggle with cultural difference, is also explored in *The Expatriates*, where a minor character, Tammy, is shocked when she discovers that her husband had married a Chinese woman two years earlier. The effect on both characters, Rosalie and Tammy, is feelings of loss, alienation, and emotional instability. Unlike her mother, Mariam, Rosalie's daughter, cannot adjust to Saudi society's strict cultural traditions. She attempts to reform Saudi society by occupying a 'third space' when she starts her blog and tries to make her voice heard.

Mercy's depression increases in Hong Kong, undermining her already fragile sense of identity. She finds temporary relief in her relationship with Hilary's husband, and becomes pregnant. At the end of the novel, Mercy assumes her new role as a mother, which gives her a new sense of self. Margaret's primary role in China is as a wife and mother, after she delays resigning from her job in America. Her maternal identity is shattered, however, following the abduction of her infant son. In her struggle with anguish, she finds solace in a secret apartment, a temporary third space, where she gains a new sense of identity and learns that her real home is with her family — her husband and their two other children. Hilary seeks to fulfil her maternal desire, trying to conceive for ten years to rescue her marriage, which starts to fall apart during their expatriation. Left by her husband, she creates a virtual 'third space' and starts to live her life 'online', seeking to escape her existential reality. However, she

realises then that moving back home with Julian, her adopted child, and being close to her mother, will mean a new life for her. Analysis of these novels draws principally on Young Yun Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory, Adams and van de Vijver's perspective on expatriate identity, and Bhabha's theory of 'third space', also provide theoretical frameworks for analysing these novels.

Kim defines cross-cultural adaptation as 'the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment' (*Becoming Intercultural* 31). Kim explains that cross-cultural adaptation is interactive and fundamentally communicative: 'communication lies at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation [...] Both the quantity and the quality of strangers' communication activities in a new environment are crucial to the success of their adaptation' (*Becoming Intercultural* 72). The goal is to achieve 'an overall "fit" between the individual and the environment to maximize the individual's social life chances' in acquiring knowledge about the host culture and succeeding in meeting its demands (*Becoming Intercultural* 31).

Kim's theory addresses two basic questions. The first concerns the essential nature of the adaptation process which individual settlers undergo over time. Kim addresses this question in the form of a process model that presents a three-pronged psychological movement which she refers to as the 'stress-adaptation-growth dynamic'—'psychic movement in the forward and upward direction of increased chances of success in meeting the demands of the host environment [...] The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic plays out not in a smooth, linear progression, but in a cyclic and continual "draw-back-to-leap" representation of the present articulation of the interrelationships among stress, adaptation, and growth' (*Becoming Intercultural* 56-57). Kim further explains the meaning of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic by stating that people have a natural tendency to resist evolution

when they find themselves in new environments that attempt to destroy their old culture and its habits. The difficulty they experience in coping with disequilibrium results in a defensive response, and stress. The individual's initial response to stress and disequilibrium, in most cases, comprises selective attention, self-deception, denial, avoidance, withdrawal, hostility, cynicism and compulsively altruistic behaviour. However, this response is usually temporary, and people strive to overcome their predicament and develop new ways of understanding the new culture and its habits. Subtle growth then follows dynamic stress-adaptation disequilibrium, as individuals 'work out new ways of handling problems, owing to the creative forces of self-reflexivity of human mentation' (*Becoming Intercultural* 55-56).

The second question centres on why some migrants adapt more quickly than others: 'why do some strangers attain higher levels of adaptation than do others?' (*Becoming Intercultural* 71). To address this second question, Kim structures her theory according to six dimensions. The core dimension is personal communication or *host communication competence* (dimension 1), which is the overall capacity of the stranger to communicate appropriately and effectively in accordance with the host communication system. This dimension serves as the instrument that helps and enhances the individual's process of adaptation (*Becoming Intercultural* 73). *Host social communication* (dimension 2) is linked to host communication competence, in which strangers participate in interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host environment. *Ethnic social communication* (dimension 3) is interpersonal and mass communication with the stranger's co-ethnics. The stranger's personal and social (host and ethnic) communication is determined by the *host environment* (dimension 4)—the extent of receptivity in the host community and the strength of the stranger's ethnic group. *Predisposition* (dimension 5) represents the individual's preparedness for living in a new environment as well as their personal traits of openness, positivity, strength and their ethnic group's distance from the native population. These

elements of predisposition have a significant impact on their personal and social communication. Together, the first five dimensions lead to the level of *intercultural transformation* (dimension 6). Kim then advances three facets of intercultural transformation resulting from the cross-cultural adaptation: functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity. The level reached in intercultural transformation interprets the level of all the other dimensions. From these six dimensions, Kim identifies 21 theorems presented as statements to describe the positive and negative connection of the different constructs of the six dimensions. I will apply a number of these 21 theorems in analysing the novels considered in this chapter.

The Ruins of Us

The author of *The Ruins of Us*, Keija Parssinen, was born and lived in Saudi Arabia for twelve years as a third-generation expatriate. As Bharati Mukherjee explains, ‘Expatriates have different motives for leaving their home countries’, including ‘aesthetic and intellectual affinity, a better job, a more interesting life or greater freedom’ (71). In the case of Parssinen, her family left the US for Saudi Arabia when her father was offered a job by the Aramco corporation. Parssinen lived in one of the Aramco compounds for twelve years, a significant part of her childhood. The visas of expatriate children expire on leaving Saudi Arabia, so they are unable to return: the break with the country in which she had been raised was a source of distress for Parssinen, who speaks of it in an interview with Ben East, saying that ‘Myself and my mother both experienced this overwhelming nostalgia for the place when we left. I really felt that my home was taken away from me as a 12-year-old’ (‘Keija Parssinen’s Novel’). In *The Ruins of Us*, Parssinen reconnects imaginatively with Saudi Arabia and grapples with her nostalgia for her childhood there.

The novel explores a variety of themes: expatriation, radical religious belief, cross-cultural marriage, polygamy, betrayal, cultural conflict, and cultural identity. Analysis of the novel in this thesis focuses on identity issues which result from cultural conflict. Parssinen uses a third-person narrator to tell the story of a cross-cultural family whose experience threatens to break it apart. The novel's primary protagonist is Rosalie, an American woman who has left the United States and moved to Saudi Arabia for love: love of the country in which she was raised, and love for her Saudi husband, Abdullah. Rosalie grows accustomed to her role as wife and mother of two children, Faisal and Mariam, in a culture that differs profoundly from that of her home country. According to Saudi Arabia's cultural traditions that demand 'the exclusion of women from the public sphere, [...], the control of their bodies, and their secondary status in the public realm in general' (Al-Rasheed 113), Rosalie is obliged to follow the country's dress code of wearing a headscarf and abaya (long black gown), and she is not allowed to drive a car. Several reasons are listed for banning women in Saudi Arabia from driving, including 'the loss of women's modesty' and 'rebellion against their families' (Al-Rasheed 130).

Despite these stark cultural differences, Rosalie loves her adopted country: the desert, the people, and the language. 'She loved so much about the harsh, relentless place where she'd spent most of her life. There was beauty in the people's insistence on survival. She dreamed in Arabic' (*The Ruins of Us* 25). Here, predisposition, the fifth dimension of Kim's theory, is applicable to Rosalie. She is well prepared to adapt to cultural difference and the strict traditions of Saudi Arabia because of her love for the country of her childhood and for her husband, and, in addition, because of her openness, strong personality and positivity, qualities which comport with Kim's Theorem 13: 'The greater the preparedness for change, the greater the host communication competence' (*Becoming Intercultural* 91).

Hannah Skahill points out that ‘Expatriates illustrate how other places and cultures may prove more fruitful than American culture’ (4). Among the Al-Baylanis, her husband’s people, Rosalie feels that she has discovered the true meaning of family, and, for this reason, she considers Saudi Arabia her true home. As Madan Sarup states, ‘Home is often associated with pleasant memories, intimate situations, a place of warmth and protective security among parents, brothers and sisters, loved people’ (90), and this is Rosalie’s feeling, not for her own parents and siblings, but for the Al-Baylanis:

And tucked within the sprawling Baylani family, with their rituals and gatherings and new babies and noise, she had felt more connected to their family than she ever had in the States with her parents. She loved the long Thursday afternoons spent in her sisters-in-law’s sitting rooms, where they drank sweet coffee and tea, shared gossip, and marvelled at all the beautiful children. When Faisal and Mariam were born, the family was genuinely delighted, and although they remained somewhat formal with Rosalie, at least they were with her, which was more than could be said of her parents, who were so intent on making their point that they’d died while still proving it. (*The Ruins of Us* 25-26)

This passage supports Kim’s Theorem 14, that ‘The greater the preparedness for change, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication’ (*Becoming Intercultural* 91).

Rosalie is born in Saudi Arabia but her family moves back to Texas when she is thirteen. Rosalie finds it difficult to start a new life there, due to her nostalgia for the Saudi Arabia which she has come to consider her home:

Rosalie was thirteen when she [...] left for good. And so in Texas, Rosalie began her slow fixation on the peninsula, singling it out on the maps in her high school textbooks, touching its outline tentatively, wondering how it was doing, that faraway

country where she was born which did not want her back. Though she would never stop loving it. (232)

Rosalie's experience as an expatriate reflects that of the author:

But there is a trouble peculiar to expatriate children who fall in love with Saudi Arabia. Their visas expire when they leave, and they quickly discover that the place they have loved so long does not want them back [...] With no possibility of return, these boys and girls, at first melancholy with their loss, soon create in memory the perfect homeland, a suitable object for all the yearning sadness in their quiet American lives. (231-32)

When Rosalie meets Abdullah at the University of Texas at Austin, she is immediately drawn to him by the link his nationality represents to the country she considers her homeland. They fall in love, and Abdullah challenges his own cultural traditions by marrying Rosalie. She, in turn, 'had given up everything—family, religion, homeland—to marry' Abdullah (54). This situation relates to Kim's Theorem 3: 'The greater the host communication competence, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity)' (*Becoming Intercultural* 90). By functional fitness, Kim means that individuals are capable of 'carrying out everyday-life activities smoothly' and feel 'comfortable in a particular environment' (*Becoming Intercultural* 185-86). Functional fitness is linked to high host communication competence, and psychological health is linked to functional fitness. Strangers become psychologically healthy when they are able to perceive the world and themselves correctly; a dynamic fit then occurs between the inside and the outside realities of the strangers. As a result, an intercultural identity emerges, by which Kim means the development of individuation and the universalization of identity (*Becoming Intercultural* 183-199). Individuation and universalization lead individuals towards intercultural transformation, through which cultural differences may be embraced.

Rosalie is informed, through first-hand experience, about the host culture; she knows its social patterns and traditions. She works effectively to attain an intercultural identity. On first returning to Saudi Arabia, she seeks to fit in, ‘eager to please [Abdullah’s] family and friends’ (153). However, assimilation into Saudi culture proves more difficult than she had anticipated. When she converts to Islam, her US family abandons her and stop speaking to her until she gives birth to Faisal, their first grandchild, nine years after her return to Saudi Arabia with Abdullah. She nonetheless maintains her psychological health and an equilibrium between her inside and outside worlds. During this period of estrangement from her own family, Abdullah’s family treats her more kindly:

Abdul Latif [Abdullah’s father] had never made it hard for her, exactly, but neither he nor Abdullah’s sisters and brothers had gone out of their way to help Rosalie find her way in the beginning. He still recalled Rose coming home from the Biltagi Brothers’ market in tears. It was back before she’d become fluent in Arabic. She’d been looking for dried oregano for a pasta sauce she wanted to make, and when she couldn’t find it on her own, she asked her sister-in-law, Nadia, to help her ask the store clerk in Arabic. But Nadia had pretended she didn’t understand what Rose was asking, though Nadia’s English was flawless. (168)

Dimension (4) of Kim’s theory, which concerns the host environment, demonstrates that the extent of the host environment receptivity is applicable here. Initially, Abdullah’s relatives are unhappy that he has married a Western woman, because, according to Saudi traditions, contact with Westerners raises complicated questions, threatening Saudi convictions and beliefs. In general, Saudi society does not accept marriage with other nationalities, even Arabic nationalities such as Egyptian and Syrian. This aversion is not due to ethnic difference but because Saudi people cherish their traditions. They believe that mixed marriages may not succeed because of cultural difference or because of the fear that one partner may influence

the other to change their religion or abandon their traditions. In “Saudi Identity: Negotiating between Tradition and Modernity”, Mai Yamani states that many Saudi people ‘link tradition and their sense of belonging to religion’ (136) and that ‘traditions’ give them ‘a sense of security and a sense of identity’ (135). She also highlights the importance of maintaining the authentic identity of the Saudi family: ‘local identity has to be maintained to give coherence to both the individual and society in the midst of changing circumstances’ (135). She also states that ‘for many, modernity brings Western values that threaten Saudi traditions,’ and notes that some ‘struggle [with] the introduction of new practices and social innovations, largely located within the family and political arenas’ (137). Despite this, Rosalie succeeds in her attempt to fit in largely because of her love for the country and its people and rituals. Ilaria Boncori states that ‘making a positive impression on host country nationals can reduce expatriates’ stress and anxiety, [...] and lead to a greater overall sense of well-being’ (104).

Just as Rosalie is proud of her husband’s accomplishments, both in his education and in his business, she also comes to take pride in her own sense of accomplishment at having overcome the many difficulties of assimilating into a foreign culture. She adapts to the challenges of expatriation and tries to maintain equilibrium in the host culture by using different forms of communication. She learns to speak Arabic fluently, converts to Islam, and accepts Saudi culture, with all its gendered constraints. As Skahill tells us, ‘people acclimate and create a cultural hybrid, purposefully adopting certain aspects of the new culture of which he or she is now a part’ (6). Intercultural communication, according to Kim’s theory, brings about the process of acculturation which is ‘the acquisition of the new cultural patterns and practices in wide-ranging areas including the learning of a new language’ (“Finding a “home”” 5). The process of deculturation occurs as a companion to the process of acculturation. By deculturation Kim means that ‘unlearning of some of the old cultural elements occurs, at least in the sense that new responses are adopted in situations that

previously would have evoked old ones [...] some of their old cultural habits will be replaced by new ones through the experiences of acculturation and deculturation' ("Finding a "home"")

5). Parssinen tells us that

Rosalie was always down on the floor or out in the grass, playing with the kids.

They'd never had a nanny, though she'd consented to a housekeeper and a cook. He'd [Abdullah] loved that casual, hands-on American way she'd mothered their children.

Over the years though, as her clothing got fine, she preferred to watch from the patio, a tall glass of iced tea in her hand. And maybe that was her right, as a mother—to one day refuse to get down in the dirt with her kids, to feel as if she had done the hard work and could now sit back. Or maybe it was the country changing her, since mothers in her social circle just didn't behave that way for the most part. But he missed the rambunctiousness, the energy. The years of money and ease had made her more refined and to him, less recognizable. (*The Ruins of Us* 146-47)

John W. Berry defines four acculturation strategies in terms of two major issues:

'cultural maintenance (to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics considered to be important, and their maintenance strived for); and contact and participation (to what extent should they become involved in other cultural groups, or remain primarily among themselves)' (9). These four acculturation strategies are assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. Berry suggests that 'when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the Assimilation strategy is defined' (9). Thus, Rosalie does not maintain her cultural identity but seeks assimilation.

Kim presents ten axioms to describe how the six dimensions of her structural model operate: Axiom one tells that 'Cross-cultural adaptation involves both acculturation and deculturation, an eventual possible outcome of which is assimilation' (*Becoming*

Intercultural 90). One of the hardest assimilation challenges for Rosalie in *The Ruins of Us* is wearing the headscarf:

Rosalie set her handbag in the dirt so she could rewrap the scarf around her head. The absence of pins forced her to tuck the fabric's long edge close to her chin, making her look like a tourist who had never learned to properly veil herself. She was tempted to let it blow away altogether. Her red hair was shining and straight for once, begging to be looked at - a result of the olive oil she had started to mix with her conditioner, the trick Lamees had recommended when Rosalie had complained about the winter's dulling effects on her hair. (Parssinen 1)

By practicing veiling, Rosalie is the antithesis of Arissa, in Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*, who removes her veil in order to assimilate the dominant culture. As stated in the previous chapter, Gaspard and Khosrokhavar posit three meanings of the veil. The first meaning, the 'veil of the immigrant,' identifies Arissa. The second meaning, the 'autonomous veil,' represents Rosalie, and is the veil chosen freely by women to represent their Islamic identity (47). The authors indicate that this type of veiling is often adopted by women who are most "integrated" into the host society. The veil is an essential aspect of Saudi society, religion, and tradition. It is imposed on Rosalie; however, she knows this before she arrives and does not mind. She wears the veil by choice and by her own consent. The third meaning given for the veil, which is relevant to Rosalie's daughter, Mariam, is the 'veil of the adolescent' that is imposed by parents as a sign of modesty and as a controlling strategy of their daughters' sexuality. This meaning of the veil is also a sign of freedom, as it allows Muslim girls to 'go out' (37). The veil, in this case, protects a girl from male harassment. Rosalie does not protest against the veil, as she believes 'the only way for a non-Saudi woman to be fully happy in Saudi Arabia was if she came to surrender to the culture and religion' (147); her daughter, however, does not believe this. Mariam discards her veil in

public and changes it up by wearing brightly coloured headscarves instead of the normative black colour of the hijab.

The hijab is one of the most contentious subjects in contemporary discourse on Muslim women's conditions and rights. Muddassir Quamar notes that the practice of veiling among Saudi women

is either taken largely as a predominantly accepted social norm, or as an imposed practice [...] the veil remains an important issue for Saudi women; even if it is not imposed by the state. Left to their own choice, many women would prefer wearing it as protective attire, while others would discard it as something that limits their freedom. It would largely depend on a number of other variables such as family, education, and economic independence. (317)

This view of the veil as 'protective attire' among Muslim women, and Saudi women in particular, indicates the very different perception these women have of themselves and of the veil from the perception of Muslim women in the West. The West regards the veil as an imposed practice and a sign of women's subjugation, while many Muslim women challenge the stereotype according to which they are obedient and submissive to men and regard veiling as a religious duty that also ensures their protection and respect. Jacquelyn Hoza cites Saudi writer Nura al-Saad, who

is strictly against Western terms such as feminism and universal women's rights due to the West's need to define freedom, while, in her view, "Islam has freed women before the West comes with its conventions." This sentiment is reflected by other Saudi women writers to a lesser extent, but nonetheless shows how Saudi women are proud of their Saudi and Islamic heritages and want their movements toward equity to reflect that. (4-5)

On the other hand, many Saudi women do view the veil as an imposed social practice

They do not question Islam nor Saudi culture, but they do question readings thereof.

There are many Saudi women who are proud of their Muslim roots, traditional family culture. One Saudi woman said, we “need to keep our identity... I’m a Muslim woman and a Saudi woman even if I’m wearing jeans.” Many Western feminists may fail to appreciate this position as they tend to link religion and traditional family values to patriarchy. (Hoza 9)

After twenty-five years, Rosalie has finally overcome the many challenges of assimilation, including those related to culture, tradition, religion, and Abdullah’s family, only to have her hard-earned sense of belonging shattered by the discovery that Abdullah has taken a second wife two years previously. Under Islamic Law, a man has the legal right to marry up to four wives, a practice frequently observed in Saudi Arabia. However, it comes as a shock to Rosalie that Abdullah would adopt such a practice, since ‘No one of his generation in the family had taken a second wife; the family considered itself beyond such things’ (49). Furthermore, Rosalie trusts in Abdullah’s fidelity, and she is confident in his love for her: indeed, Rosalie thinks that

while her college friends were getting divorced and remarried, she believed she was genuinely happy with her husband and with her life in Saudi Arabia. He was the man she’d thought he was when they got married—charming, a little possessive, smart, ambitious, and confident. She’d surprised herself by how well she fit into his life in the kingdom. So well that it became their life. (26)

We learn that Abdullah’s decision to take a second wife has little to do with love. He explains to his American friend Dan Coleman that his real reason for taking a second wife is, in fact, Rosalie’s complete assimilation into Saudi culture. Abdullah tells Dan that had he wanted a Saudi wife, he would have married one. Dan responds, ‘Wasn’t that the idea, though? That after a while, she’d adapt?’ Abdullah explains: ‘If you’re a Saudi man and you

marry an American woman, the last thing you want is for her to become a Saudi wife.

Otherwise, why would you go through all the trouble with the family?’ (65-66). Abdullah recalls the Rosalie he misses. He thinks Rosalie’s independent American spirit has been lost:

The Rosalie he had married was gone. The adventurer, the gypsy-souled livewire searching for a home in the world. That woman in her wildness was gone, [...] Where was that half-feral girl, the one who’d smelled of cigarettes and bourbon, who wore torn black tunics and dirty moccasins, the one who did her homework by the light of the liquor display at Lazy Lion? The girl whom he had wanted so desperately to bring into his life despite all the living forces working against him because she was so different from any iteration of woman he’d known—she’d gone missing somewhere.

(408)

Abdullah misses the Rosalie he met and fell in love with in America, but Rosalie has changed in the context of a country that forbids women to engage in activities like smoking in public and driving.

Abdullah, however, fails to acknowledge that he has encouraged the very assimilation that he now finds distasteful in his American wife. Abdullah says: ‘But over the years, she became less and less like Rosalie. She threw away that jacket years ago; she has her clothes made in Paris now. She uses the word “summer” as a verb. She started to like the money a little too much’ (67). Abdullah has played a role in his wife’s acclimation to a luxurious lifestyle; over the years, he has bought her expensive gifts to make up for his long absences from home for work. The phenomenon on display in Rosalie’s character is described by David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken in *Third Culture Kids* as ‘cross-cultural enrichment versus ignorance of the home culture’ and ‘adaptability versus lack of true cultural balance’ (95-100). Because Rosalie has ‘a sense of ownership and interest’ in Saudi culture, she has reached a high degree of adaptability to that culture. This, and her love for Abdullah, have

enabled her to avoid a clash between her own native culture and that of her adopted country.

According to Kim,

Over time, through extensive and prolonged experiences of new cultural learning and adaptation, individuals may undergo some of the deeper-level changes in the realm of aesthetic and emotional sensibilities of experiencing life's pleasure, joy, and beauty, of moral and ethical values about what is right and wrong in one's public and private conduct, and even the very notion of self in relation to culture. ("Finding a "home"")

5)

From Abdullah's perspective, though, Rosalie has failed to strike a balance between her own American culture and the Saudi culture they inhabit together. She has become, instead, an entirely Saudi woman.

The rage Rosalie feels in the wake of learning of Abdullah's secret marriage reawakens an assertiveness that is a crucial aspect of her American identity. Parssinen depicts Rosalie in her rage: 'Her voice was filled with cruelty and contempt, which surprised her. She had never spoken to her husband in that tone before' (17). Rosalie yells at her husband Abdullah, 'You've ruined us' (19). She expresses her anger with Abdullah by speaking to him severely, and in a loud voice, and she refuses to sleep with him. She begins seeing Dan secretly, planning an escape from her marriage, seeking a place to start her life over. Thus, Rosalie adopts a hybrid identity, a 'third space' where cultural differences 'contingently' and 'conflictually' touch (*Location* 37). In so doing, she is regaining aspects of her American identity and occupying a 'third space' in which she can express her indignation about aspects of Saudi cultural traditions. She also voices disobedience to her husband in a culture that forbids such behaviour in the belief that a woman should show docility to her husband, at least in public. Abdullah declares 'Even while she'd become more of a Saudi wife than he'd ever thought possible, he knows that her spirit wasn't dead' (143).

Notwithstanding her anger, Rosalie struggles with her love for Abdullah as well as with the pain of his betrayal. She cannot conceive of her life without him. She hates the right given to men to take multiple wives, and she begins to feel an estrangement from the country she has come to think of as her home. Pollock and Reken's concept of the 'three-dimensional view of the world versus a painful view of reality' (93) is on display in Rosalie's experience, in that she has lived in vastly different cultures. Her experience is like 'an internal 3-D panoramic picture show' (93). Yet Rosalie is now suspended between her American and Saudi identities. She cannot simply leave Abdullah, because she has transformed herself to fit in with Saudi Arabia's culture. She cannot go back to America, which has become foreign to her: she has not driven for years, and with no work experience or professional training, has no guarantee of finding employment there. In addition, asking for a divorce raises the risk of losing her children. Dan advises her to escape with the children, but Rosalie responds: 'They've lived here all their lives. They're Saudi. I couldn't take away their home. Mariam wants to stay and change things' (215).

Rosalie's deep love for Saudi Arabia prevents her from admitting that she has made the wrong decision in marrying Abdullah: 'She did not want her time in Saudi Arabia to end with that fear. It did not represent the country, or her life there. She needed to know that Saudi Arabia was what she had been searching for those years in Texas' (445). Rosalie thinks to herself that 'This couldn't be the life she had planned for herself when she left Texas for the Kingdom, hoping for adulation and homecoming. She'd grown up on the State Oil compound [...] and possessed that displaced expatriate child's longing—more like an illness, [...] for a home that no longer existed' (73). When she calls her brother in Texas to tell him about Abdullah's second wife, he says, 'I'm sorry, little sister. I'm so sorry. Come home' (24). Rosalie's response reveals the conflict she feels:

Home, she'd echoed. But I am home. I've been in this place for more than twenty-five years. My children, my friends are here [...] She had returned to reclaim the place that had been taken from her with the swift motion of the consular officer's letter opener, which he used to remove each family member's visa when they left. Of course, there was also the matter of her love for Abdullah. Both reasons for returning seemed insubstantial now. (24-25)

Islamic law dictates that if Rosalie leaves Abdullah, she will lose her children because custody will go to their father, but she will also lose the luxurious life in Saudi Arabia to which she has become accustomed. 'But I came here with both eyes open. I grew up here; I knew what it was like. But I wanted my home back. I wanted it back so badly' (214). Eventually, she makes up her mind not to leave, and chooses to stay with her family, declaring, 'I have nothing without them' (358).

Parssenin, in her interview with East, describes how the adjustment to a different culture through a long expatriation process is a radical experience that impacts upon one's identity: 'Actually, I think there is a change in her [Rosalie], She's never been forced to figure out who she is and what she wants before because she's given herself over to her husband and his culture. But there's a sense that she is, at 47, finally doing the hard work of defining who she is' ("Keija Parssinen's Novel"). The clash of cultures creates a clash of identities for Rosalie. She is 'stuck between worlds without a strong footing in either one' (*The Ruins of Us* 15). Rosalie cannot be categorized as purely Saudi merely because she has lived there, or because she has adopted Saudi culture and wears the veil. Neither can she be considered American simply because her father is American, or because she is white and has light hair. She is both American and Saudi. At the end of the novel, Rosalie considers the possibility of starting over in a new place in which she can feel free, and where she will not be torn between competing nationalities and languages:

A new place is what she is after [...] She knows there is an island where she can catch slick, muscled fish that glitter more brightly than all the jewels of Gold City. She knows there is a place where she can sit too long in the sun and shed the layer of skin that clings to her now. She will find the place, lose herself, lose memory. The children will visit her there, in this place beyond language, beyond nation [...]. (507)

While Rosalie is struggling with her competing identities, her son Faisal, at sixteen years of age, is confronting his own bi-cultural identity issues. In his confusion, he joins a religious group that promotes an anti-American ideology that also threatens the Al-Saud, the ruling family. This group claims to represent the true nature of Islam, while in reality it bases its ideology on a radical (mis)interpretation of that religion. Faisal attends secret meetings of this group, led by the radical sheikh, Ibrahim. Most of the Sheikh's followers are young men who are taken in by his rhetoric. Faisal finds comfort in their company and begins to distance himself from his American identity, embracing his Saudi one instead. The hatred he begins to feel for his Americanness leads Faisal to involve himself in matters that prove destructive, not just for him, but for his family as well. In trying to develop an identity based on Islamic values and principles, Faisal distances himself from his family. Reading the Quran 'made him feel purposeful, part of something grand. Yes, the Koran and the Sheikh spoke to his heart and he believed, but he was also glad of the companionship: Majid's respect, the Sheikh's large, calloused hand placed just so on Faisal's thin shoulder' (279). Boncori indicates that 'Social identities are acquired through process of identification and used to make sense of the environment and how the individual relates to it; they are forms of affiliations with groups that are also charged with emotions and meanings' (156). His friendship with Majid and his position in the Sheikh's group make Faisal feel important. The companionship he finds with the young men who follow the Sheikh makes him feel that he is a man of principle:

Frequently, he would fast the day after hearing the sheikh speak, not out of piety but because he could not fill himself up any further. His body felt like a conveyance for power, for will, not just a bony, tendoned mass waiting to be rested and fed. On the days with the sheikh, he barely noticed his body. (288)

While this is going on, Abdullah is either busy with work or in the house of his second wife; Rosalie is preoccupied with her husband's infidelity and her own identity struggles. Thus, Faisal and Mariam are left to fend for themselves. Faisal comes to feel that Majid, Sheikh Ibrahim, and his brothers in the Koranic study group are his family (131-32). He does not like his father's attitude toward religion. Abdullah does not go to pray at the mosque, and he drinks alcohol, which is one of the seven vices in Islam. Faisal asks, 'Ya Allah, how much longer did he have to wait for his father to find his way back to the path? It was feeling lonelier and lonelier there without him' (102). In his need to feel close to his father, Faisal asks Abdullah to go with him to the mosque: 'Come to mosque with me tomorrow, then, Baba. Let's pray together' (181), and yet he fails to find a sympathetic ear in his father.

With respect to his mother, Faisal does not feel the same need for closeness. Towards Rosalie, he feels only rage. Faisal is mocked by some of his friends at school for his mother's American heritage: they 'called him *Amreeki*, how much he hated it when Fat Ali shouted it out across the school courtyard' (274). Studying abroad in Switzerland, Faisal has been treated harshly on account of his Arab Muslim identity, and so, on returning to Saudi Arabia, he has determined to embrace the Arab Muslim side of his heritage 'with an appropriative zealotry that surprised even him. He worked hard to forget his other, American, half, for it seemed, in this new world order, that there was no room for line-straddling or commingling' (123). In *The Cambridge Dictionary* 'straddling' means 'to sit or stand with your legs on either side of something' or 'to combine different styles or subjects,' while 'commingling'

means 'to mix' (Vale et. al.). Parssinen's word choice suggests that Faisal has reached the conclusion that embracing his two separate identities simultaneously is hurting him, and that he must discard one of them.

Faisal concludes that the American side of his identity contradicts his religious beliefs, and that it must be jettisoned: he is certain the fault lies in America's relentless openness, its insistence that people may commingle and intermarry and have children of all colours.

In America, it seemed that there was no sense of tribe, no respect for blood and tradition. People ran around falling in love with all types of people and ruining lives in the process. But no one ever seemed to consider the consequences that the children, the products of these marriages, faced. (291)

Faisal's feelings about his American identity are closely tied to his feelings about his mother. He blames her for the small size of their family, which he views as a distinctly American feature. He longs for more siblings, especially brothers, to fill the silence in the house he shares with his parents and sister: 'It was unnatural, and he felt the silence in their house to be God's rebuke. No wonder Abdullah had married again' (274-75).

Faisal is a product of a bicultural marriage and faces issues concerning his adolescent identity within two different cultures. Erik Erikson describes identity crises in adolescence as follows:

Identity is a unique product, which now meets a crisis to be solved only in new identifications with age mates and with leader figures outside of the family. The search for a new and yet reliable identity can perhaps be seen in the persistent adolescent endeavour to define, over define, and redefine themselves and each other in often ruthless comparison [...] Where the resulting self-definition, for personal or for collective reasons, becomes too difficult, a sense of role confusion results: the

young person counterpoints rather than synthesizes his sexual, ethnic, occupational, and typological alternatives and is often driven to decide definitely and totally for one side or the other. (87)

The crisis of identity in adolescence is exacerbated by being bicultural. Faisal receives conflicting messages from his parents, his grandfather, his friends at school and his religious group. He feels that there is a distance between him and his parents and that his home and family is not a cohesive whole.

In an attempt to ease his inner turmoil, Faisal takes up swimming. He spends nearly every day in the pool, contemplating his life and his family. John Clare and Ali Zarbafi in *Social Dreaming in the 21st Century: The World We are Losing* remark that 'Freud notes that dreams of being in water often evoke inter-uterine fantasies, memories of the womb' (100). The pool may be a substitute for the mother Faisal has disavowed. Faisal concludes 'that he no longer knew these people who called themselves his parents' (101). Although he still needs his parents, and wants a closer relationship with his father, in particular, Faisal also wants his parents to change:

He needed Abdullah, even Rosalie, but he needed them to be a certain way. Namely to be good, responsible parents who weren't always off doing anything and everything they pleased. It had been so long since he actually felt like either parent had looked at him and taken the time to see him for who he was. And wasn't that a parent's only real job? (114)

Faisal has felt distance opening up between himself and his parents as they have been caught up in personal affairs that seem trivial to him in comparison with the responsibility of taking care of their children. In the absence of parental guidance and support, Faisal begins to identify increasingly with his deceased grandfather, Abdu Latif. Latif is a source of pride for Faisal, who thinks of his grandfather as a man who managed to blend his faith successfully

with life in the modern world, ‘a balance that Faisal sought in his own life’ (138). Abdu Latif comes to serve as a contrast with Abdullah, who appears to Faisal to have been distracted from his religious devotion by the temptations of modern life. Faisal keeps a photo of Abdu Latif in his pocket to remind him of his origins, and of his identity as an Arab Muslim (101). He discusses this side of his identity with his younger sister Mariam, explaining to her that he wishes to leave behind the American side of his identity, which he has come to view as a source of disgrace:

‘I stopped wanting to be something that I wasn’t.’

‘A geek?’

‘No. An American. You’ll learn someday. The way they shove their culture down our throats. They’re bullies, that’s all.’

‘So you think they should all read the Koran and Ibn Khuldun and work to understand us, but we should ignore their culture?’

‘No, not at all. They just shouldn’t bother and leave us alone.’

‘You’re jealous of them.’ She arched her thick black brows.

‘Jealous?’ He sighed. ‘Pathetic people want to be something that they’re not. But I wouldn’t be surprised if you ran off to New York one day.’

‘At least I wouldn’t have to wear a garbage bag to school.’

‘See? They’ve already made you ashamed of your culture. You should be proud of it. You know, it’s possible to have modernity and faith.’

‘No, it’s people like you and your stupid friends and the religious police that make me ashamed. And I’m not going to leave. I’ll go to college, but then I’ll come back. I don’t want to be American. I just want to be myself, which is impossible here. That’s why I started my blog. I’m going to make a change for myself.’ (276-77)

It is clear from this conversation that Mariam does not share Faisal's desire to shed the American half of their identity. Mariam thinks of her brother as a geek because of his religious commitment. She claims she does not want to be American, yet she does want all the advantages she thinks an American life can grant her, such as going to college there and obtaining a driver's license. She takes a different approach to her dual identity from Faisal, who is no longer interested in finding a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of American culture. Thus, Faisal accuses his sister of feeling ashamed of her Saudi identity when she calls her abaya 'a garbage bag.'

While Faisal wrestles with the competing sides of his identity, the Saudi ruling family has been made aware of Sheikh Ibrahim's secret religious group. The Sheikh is arrested, and Faisal makes up his mind that now is the time for change. He needs to break his silence and prove himself. He and his friend Majid hatch a plan to save Sheikh Ibrahim and at the same time take revenge on Dan, Abdullah's American friend, whom Faisal sees as one of the causes of his family's ruination. Faisal thinks this plan will allow him to prove that he is 'the kind of man who stood up for what he believed in' (377). Majid encourages Faisal to break with his family, saying, 'So for today, you're not al-Baylani, OK? You're some poor son of a whore with nothing left to lose' (376). Due to Faisal and Majid's radical thinking, affected by Sheikh Ibrahim, they chose the wrong way to save him, arresting innocent people, Dan and Rosalie. On the strength of his own convictions, along with his friend's encouragement, Faisal repudiates his family: 'Before God, I declare that I am no longer al-Baylani. I am not your boy; I am not your son. You were leaving anyway. I'll be Ibn Muhammad, and that's it' (385). Thus, instead of saving the Sheikh, Faisal and Majid ruin their own lives. Faisal kills Majid and is forced to leave the country.

For Rosalie's part, the revelation of Abdullah's secret marriage blinds her to her children. Abdullah's attention is divided between Rosalie and Israa, his second wife, and he

forgets that his children need his care. When Rosalie tries to talk to him about Faisal, Abdullah puts his son's unusual behaviour down to his youth:

I feel my own son is a stranger. He's hard. There's so much anger in him, and I have no idea where it's coming from [...] but what can we do? We can't bar him from studying the Koran; I wouldn't dare do that. He's young. He's just trying to learn to be a man. (185-86)

To himself, though, Abdullah acknowledges that Faisal's behaviour strikes him as strange, thinking to himself that 'Most of his schoolmates had graduated and gone on to study in America or in one of Saudi Arabia's improved universities. Yet Faisal wanted to stay right there in Al Dawoun, rooted to this old familiar ground. Odd boy' (170). Neither Abdullah nor Rosalie notices that their children are feeling lost and displaced, that they are struggling to find their way and need their parents' attention and guidance.

Abdullah has been told about the radical Sheikh Ibrahim by Prince Abdul Aziz, and he learns that Faisal has joined his group. Now Abdullah understands Faisal's odd behaviour, and begins to worry that his children may present a threat to the Saudi ruling family. Abdullah wonders, 'What did Faisal gain from Sheikh Ibrahim besides false brothers who would turn him in to the authorities?' (331). He knows that he must confront Faisal about his involvement with Sheikh Ibrahim's group and convince him to leave the country. He knows that doing so will be difficult, and that even if he succeeds, he still cannot be sure that Faisal will not act upon the extremist views he has developed:

He had no idea how he would convince his son to leave his home, his friends, his religious community [...] What did he know about the man his boy was becoming? Was he the type to disappear into the desert, the mountains, all for his beliefs? In twenty years, would Faisal be one of the bearded men known by a historically significant nom du guerre, speaking to his loyal men by electronic address, a leader

within the vast and mythic network of extremists Abdullah only read about in the newspapers?’ (332-33)

Faisal is eventually forced by the command of the ruling family to leave Saudi Arabia to attend college in the United States. He ‘felt his home stripped away like the thinnest raiment. He had never imagined it could be taken from him so easily’ (496).

In contrast, Mariam, the daughter, is drawn to the West. She starts a blog, *Confessions of a Saudi Teen*, which she uses to express her disapproval of many Saudi institutions. Although she attracts only 400 followers, her blog nonetheless threatens the stability of the country, in the view of the royal family, which fears that teenage girls may be seduced by her words and see the strict regulation of their lives as oppressive. Mariam’s blog acts as a ‘third space’ — like that of Ifemelu’s in *Americanah* — used to empower her in defying Saudi cultural traditions. The blog is, in Bhabha’s phrase, a ‘process of hybridity’ which ‘gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation’ (211). Her blog is Mariam’s way of engaging in communication with the host society. She interacts with others through presenting her own views about the culture of the place in which she lives. She rejects Saudi culture in favour of American customs. She wants to live in Saudi Arabia but apply to it American cultural norms and ways of living. Her desire results in a conflict ‘between the need for acculturation and the resistance to deculturation’ and ‘between the existing conditions inside [her] and the demands of the external environment’ (Kim, *Becoming Intercultural* 55). Defensive responses—manifested as denial, hostility, and cynicism—are activated in Mariam to resist the changes that might result in the loss of her attachment to American culture.

Women in Saudi Arabia strive to voice their opinions and play a role equal to that of men in the public sphere. The Internet and social media platforms therein have become a female space in a patriarchal society in which women discuss their rights, and the restrictions

imposed upon them. Hoza states that ‘Although this must be true of many women, numerous online discussions reveal also that religion and traditional culture continue to be a source of empowerment for many others’ (6). She cites Annamaria Szilagyi’s study, which ‘affirmed that Saudi women continue to try to “fulfil the cultural expectations of the conservative Saudi Arabian society” while also being “eager to take an active role in their education and career choices”’ (6).

Mariam uses a nickname for her blog, like many Saudi women who want to voice their opinion about women’s rights in Saudi Arabia to bring about reforms in their culture and society. It is because of their strong ties to family that Saudi women hide their identities, using nicknames or only their first names to ensure anonymity, freedom of expression, and to avoid causing their families embarrassment. Guta and Karolak state that

the collectivism of Saudi society is reflected in the belief that a woman represents not only herself but the whole family as well as the extended family. Actions of an individual will thus impact the perception of one’s family in society and, if considered inappropriate, they will bring dishonor to all family members, especially male relatives, as a group. (119-120)

They add that ‘Losing honor in society leads to rejection equal almost to a loss of one’s own existence’ (120). As a consequence, women bloggers in Saudi Arabia often avoid using their own names, especially if they are criticising social norms or calling for legal reform.

Abdullah thinks that his daughter’s blog is an indication that she has become a revolutionary: ‘Letters from school were sent to Mariam’s family regarding her behaviour ‘removing her veil on the playground, skipping class to read smuggled books in the library, passing out EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN NOW bumper stickers to her classmates’ (141). Mariam, like many Saudi women who do not like the black abaya and ‘express their

agency by breaking dress code rules while still observing and respecting religious laws' (Hoza 8), makes her own abayas in shades of deep blue, eggplant and dark red, and she wears these to school. She is living the 'lives of those who dare to mix while differing' (Lavie and Swedenburg 16).

Heidi Ellise Collins states that 'adaptation or adjustment does not necessarily imply a positive adaptation as an outcome, but may involve resistance, attempts to change the environment, or attempts to move away from it' (29). The arc of Mariam's character offers hope in the midst of the desperate events of the novel. The development of her character suggests that positive change is possible. She uses her blog to save her mother and brother from death, when she posts an enquiry as to their whereabouts after Faisal has unintentionally taken Rosalie and Dan, his father's American friend, hostage in order to free the radical Islamic leader, Sheikh Ibrahim. She also becomes a defender of women's rights by writing her blog and distributing political stickers to her classmates.

Zeynep Aycan identifies key factors contributing to expatriates' adjustment, one of which is intellectual competencies that 'involve goal analyses through analytical thinking, diagnostic information generation to assess the situation, planning for alternative courses of action and self-reflection for strengthening self-efficacy belief' (440). Although Mariam remains split between two worlds, she has an opportunity to create positive change for women in Saudi Arabia. At the novel's conclusion, rather than shedding one side of her dual identity completely, as her brother has done, Mariam may be seen to be 'blending in' while 'defining the differences' (Pollock and Reken, 100). She has managed to balance the American and the Saudi sides of her identity.

The novel, although it ends in a reconciliation of sorts, does not offer explicit solutions to the challenges faced by Rosalie, Faisal, and Mariam. Rosalie's problems may be understood as psychological, as much as cultural, in that a Saudi woman might respond to her

husband's infidelity in much the same way as Rosalie. By contrast, the challenges faced by Faisal and Mariam are clearly the difficulties posed by dual identities. They are Saudi, but their chance of a bright future in Saudi Arabia is limited and the American aspects of their identity cannot simply be ignored. Even though both are native Saudis, like their father, Faisal and Mariam struggle to find their own identities in ways that more closely resemble the experience of their expatriate mother. Their dual American-Saudi identity means that Faisal and Mariam grow up as expatriates within their native country.

The Expatriates

Janice Y. K. Lee was born to Korean immigrants in Hong Kong. She moved to the US when she was fifteen, and subsequently graduated from Harvard. She moved back to Hong Kong in 2005 with her husband and her four children but now lives in New York. *The Expatriates* (2016), Lee's second novel, narrates the story of three expatriate American women in Hong Kong in the present day, exploring the themes of expatriate life, motherhood, family and identity. Moving back and forth between Hong Kong and New York may explain Lee's feeling that she is an outsider and may explain, too, her interest in the subject of expatriation. In an interview with Alison Singh Gee, Lee reveals the reason for writing about the expatriate experience in her novel:

I always say I'm not a local, not an expat, but I floated among these worlds [...] I do think expatriates are an interesting subject because you can explore how one changes when put in different surroundings. Do you grow? Do you metamorphose into something completely different? Or do you become even more what you were originally? ("3 Expat Women")

Lee also expresses the unpleasant feeling of living between two worlds when asked what she felt was the worst part about being an expatriate:

I don't know if it is the worse, but I always felt like my "real life" was on hold. I never thought I was going to live in Hong Kong forever so I always felt like I was waiting for real life to resume. That's not a great way to spend 10 years of your life.

("3 Expat Women")

The experience of being an expatriate is life changing, bringing challenges that have a profound effect on personality development and the (re)definition of identity.

In another interview with Christeene AlCosiba, Lee discusses the differences between expatriates and immigrants:

When you immigrate to another country, you do so with the idea of staying for good. The thing about expats is they intend to go home at some point. That very fact is embedded in everything, and is the crucial difference. The pull of home is strong, but the expat can leave. One of the most loaded questions you can ask someone in this circumstance is 'Where are you from? And how long do you plan to stay?'

("Preview")

The Expatriates is about the life of American expatriates in Hong Kong and is narrated from the perspective of three women, whose lives become intertwined in unanticipated ways. Maggie Pouncey notes that 'Lee uses a shifting third-person narration that allies itself first with one character, then another.' She adds that 'Moving between these intersecting characters offers relief from the suffocation of Margaret's grief' ("The Expatriates"). The three women spend their lives waiting and in expectation, trying to find ways to fulfil themselves and to achieve psychological stability. Each of the three has her own trauma and sorrow, in addition to that brought about by being an expatriate. Margaret, who is the mother of three children, loses one of them and suffers as she tries to make life normal for her surviving children. Hilary, who struggles with fertility issues, longs for a child and thinks of adoption. Mercy, a Korean-American but without a sense of belonging to either

nationality, is a recent graduate who cannot find regular work, which impacts on her sense of self and her psychological health. Transitioning between cultures is associated in this novel with traumatic events; in turn, personal trauma impacts on adaptation to the host environment.

Mercy Cho decides to move from Queens, New York, to Hong Kong to escape poverty—her father is a dry cleaner—and to find direction in her life. Her sense of inadequacy is triggered by her friends, wealthy, clever and ambitious Colombia University students who enjoy a lifestyle she cannot afford. To escape the class and racial divisions of America, Mercy moves to Hong Kong, on the advice of a college friend, Philena. However, her experience there is unlucky too. She moves from one temporary job to another, until she meets Margaret Reade, at the birthday party of a Korean girl who married an American. Margaret offers her work as a babysitter, but Mercy brings tragedy to the Reade family. The family is on a trip to Korea for the school fall break, when G, the youngest of the Reade children, disappears while being watched by Mercy in a play area in front of their hotel, while Margaret uses the bathroom inside a Starbucks. At the police station being questioned about G's kidnapping, Mercy thinks to herself: 'she couldn't speak Korean—a useless girl. She was a disgrace to her country, and a careless girl who brought disaster to those around her' (143).

Consequently, Mercy returns to Hong Kong and shuts herself in her apartment to contemplate her bad luck: 'She sits at home, eats almost nothing, looks at her dwindling bank account online, and wonders when she's supposed to start her life again, when she is allowed' (30). She starts to dream of

a higher authority—one that sees all the injustices meted out to her, that sees all the good things she tries to do, no matter if they don't work out or no one notices—and

that she will be found to be correct: Everyone will see that she has suffered more, been given less. How unfair, they will say. There will, finally, be justice. (120-21)

Kim provides an insight into Mercy's personality in her description of individuals 'who lack adaptive changes [and who] have been found to experience a sense of cultural dislocation, a sense of being left out, commonly manifested in social psychological distress symptoms such as dissatisfaction with life in general and a bitter attitude of being helpless victims of the changing cultural reality' ("Finding a 'Home'" 7).

Despite her loss, her unchanged financial situation, and her responsibility for a disastrous incident, Mercy chooses to stay in Hong Kong. In an "Interview with Janice Y. K. Lee, Author of *The Expatriates*", Kelly Sarabyn and Lee discuss Mercy's decision.

Sarabyn: Why do you think she [Mercy] chose not to return to America? Do you think Mercy's multiple identities—American, Korean, working class, Ivy League graduate, and Hong Kong resident—contributed to her inability to happily settle down? Like Mercy, you have a multicultural background—did your multiple cultural identities ever give you a sense of being unmoored?

Lee: I think that when you're young, you yearn to explore, both the world and yourself. By staying in Hong Kong, Mercy is doing something different from the life she had back home. She was more defined back home and, away, she can define herself on her own terms. I feel like that's something many expatriates experience, the discovery that you can reinvent yourself in many ways. With Mercy's multiple identities, I feel like she probably felt very at home in Hong Kong, where most of the people in her circle were similar to her, with many different ways to define themselves. I myself have trouble telling people where I'm 'from' as that has so many layers and meanings, but as I've grown older, I've appreciated that I have many

different perspectives which have helped me to see things from many different angles.
 (“Interview with Janice”)

After a period of time, Mercy meets David, Hilary’s husband, at a hotel lobby bar. ‘She notices the ring on his finger [...] It makes her feel grown up, this possibility of a married man, an opening into a world she has never contemplated before’ (117). When he leaves, ‘she sits at the bar, with a lovely fizzy feeling in her stomach. Maybe this man is the way out, maybe this is the sparkly path to the future’ (119). When she is with David, ‘she’s okay! She’s funny and charming and not a nightmare. She feels as if she is juggling all of this, her new selves, and waiting for it all to fall apart’ (202). However, ‘she always liked the wrong men’ (116). Their relationship continues until David learns that Mercy is pregnant, after which he stops seeing her, although he gives her enough money to cover the expenses of the hospital visits and birth.

Adams and van de Vijver conceptualize expatriate identity by associating acculturation with a tridimensional model of identity (personal identity, relational identity and social identity). Expatriate identity is developed when combining aspects from these three dimensions of identity: ‘During the acculturation process, it is important that expatriates maintain a strong sense of personal identity. This is due to the sense of continuity and coherence that personal identity provides expatriates. Throughout the acculturation process, they still need to have a sense that they are themselves’ (326-27). Mercy does not have a clear and strong sense of who she is, which is why she fails to construct a social and relational identity. She moves from one place to another and frequently becomes involved in disruptive relationships with others. We see this in her relationship with Margaret, when she seems careless in her childcare duties. Moreover, she begins a relationship with a married man and becomes pregnant by him, this at the same time that she begins a relationship with a Chinese friend from Colombia, Charlie Leung.

Later, with her mother's help and guidance, Mercy becomes more emotionally resilient. She understands that she has not been singled out as unlucky. As her mother says to her: 'That woman has responsibility too, Mercy. She chose you to help her, and these things can happen. It is not all your fault. You can live your life. You are allowed' (387). With her mother's presence and help, 'she does not feel alone anymore' (388). After she gives birth to her child, Mercy affirms that 'I am a mother' and 'acknowledges her new self [and] tries to get used to it' (412). She wonders: 'Is this how new lives are born? [...] Is this how you make a new start? Not just her baby, not just her daughter. A new life for everyone, for herself maybe' (417).

Margaret Reade, in contrast, questions her maternal identity after losing her child. She follows her husband, Clarke, to Hong Kong after she puts her job as a landscape architect on hold in California. She struggles in her new life as a wife and mother after her toddler, G, is abducted in Seoul. Lee describes Margaret's situation: 'she is a woman who has two children. Not three [and she] wonders how to begin living with that fact as a base' (43).

Jerry L. Sittser and Gerald Lawson Sittser explain that 'for those who have endured irreversible loss, phantom pains of their former identity may linger for a long time' (73). Margaret's maternal identity is assailed by the loss of her child. In order to cope, she needs to create a new sense of self by acknowledging her loss. Paige Toller explains the change in identity experienced by bereaved parents:

This radical change in identity means that parents must also find new ways of being and interacting with the world around them. Mourning one's identity and relearning their place in the world are both daunting tasks as parents are hesitant to relinquish their parental role, fearing that doing so means their child will be forgotten or overlooked. (307)

Margaret has been unable to overcome her grief and live a normal life because she believes that her recovery would mean that she is betraying her son:

This used to be one of her favourite moments in life, leaving clean, fed, contented children behind as she and her husband went out to enjoy each other, but now nothing is easy, nothing is pleasurable. She can't let it be—it would feel like betrayal. How can she be sitting in an air-conditioned restaurant in a comfortable chair enjoying a grilled fish and a glass of wine, or on a beach chair with a good book, while G might be starving or worse in some barn in rural Korea? How can she let herself? (126)

If her child had died, she would have been able to cope more easily, because death at least brings closure, albeit that, as Dennis Klass notes, 'parental bereavement is a permanent condition. It is not something to be gotten over, for it is an enduring change in the self' (13). In *When the Bough Breaks*, Judith Bernstein notes 'that parents do not "return to normal" after losing a child. Rather, the ordeal, like the earthquake, changes the terrain in our lives in subtle but substantial ways' (70).

Margaret thinks of her marital relationship:

They are still always careful around each other. She wonders when that will end, if ever. They've both read the literature—the majority of marriages break up after the death of a child or something like what's happened to them. It's too painful. But they have the other kids, and the memory of what it used to be like. Maybe that is enough. (125)

Bernstein observes that bereaved parents are unable to find pleasure in anything, which is what happens to Margaret:

Many of the parents found that life lost meaning following the death of their child. One of the vital tasks of grief-work is to come to a point where life again takes on

meaning. Parents who fail to find meaningful outlets remain stuck. Parents who seek and find meaningful pursuits heal themselves more quickly. (75)

However, Clarke, her husband, is a good man, as described by Margaret:

This whole thing has affected him in a way that is so vastly different from the way it has affected her that it has almost destroyed their marriage. They have taken turns comforting each other, but he has been the one to keep the family together, to try to make it whole, to encourage her to move forward. (274)

In an attempt to find solace, she begins a secret life in a rented apartment, where she finds that solitude is the only way to help her keep balance. Her doctor has suggested she make friends, but Margaret doubts the effectiveness of the advice:

Friends. What an odd concept. She had them before, of course, but in her old life in California and through her children [...] The truth is that once you have three kids and a husband, you don't really need friends. She didn't, at least. They were a perfect unit, a self-sufficient ecosystem, like those green plants in glass spheres that produce oxygen and water and feed themselves forever in a perfect balance of waste and sustenance. Until fate came down with a giant, destructive swipe and shattered it forever. (312-13)

Having children affects the successful adjustment of expatriates, as indicated by Margaret Shaffer and David Harrison. They state that women with young children experience better adjustment due to their children's dependence on them, which helps them to maintain their social identity (250). Margaret eventually draws on her two other children to find the courage to live again: 'I am living my life. Mostly because of Daisy and Philip' (378). Their need for her means that, gradually, she regains her maternal identity: 'You go through the motions of life until, slowly, they start to resemble a life' (169). Margaret begins to live her life again:

‘one day you wake up and your life seems normal. You start to forget the bad times. You shift into your new self’ (67).

Hilary Starr is 38 years old and has been trying to conceive for ten years. She is a wealthy woman, married to David Starr; they live as expatriates in Hong Kong. In order to fulfil her maternal desire, she starts a trial mother-son relationship, very mannered, with Julian, an orphaned mixed-race child from a local group home whom she considers adopting. Hilary is told that the little boy likes the piano, so she seizes the opportunity to bring him home for weekly piano lessons.

Hilary seems at peace in her social relationships: having lunches with other expatriate women and volunteering at the library. Yet she wants to reignite her relationship with her husband: ‘Those moments are there in her past, glimmering like small flames in the far, far dark of her memories. Maybe she has to go back to go forward to get there again’ (97). Karoliina Puruskainen refers to ‘stability zones’ for expatriates such as ‘engaging in favourite pastimes, which serve as “way out” for the expatriate when the host culture becomes overly stressful’ (37). In addition, Kim suggests that ‘others may seek to regress to an earlier state of existence in the familiar “old” culture, a state in which there is no feeling of isolation, no feeling of separation’ (‘Finding a “Home”’ 5).

In an interview with Sarabyn, Lee explains why Hilary does not seek medical intervention for her infertility: ‘I think for Hilary, it was mostly stasis! She couldn’t move ahead because so many things weren’t working the way they should: her marriage, her life, her environment’ (‘Interview with Janice’). Lee adds that she has made Hilary a wealthy character—‘having family money, and therefore not needing to rely on her husband or a job’—in order to make her independent (‘Interview with Janice’). In the novel, Lee tells us that

It's partly the money in her family [...] it's always been enough to know she doesn't have to work. After she got married, it wasn't as if she felt passionate about her job in PR, so it seemed natural to quit, to be able to travel with David on his business trips and wait for the family to start to form. Except it hadn't. And then David was gone too. And now she's trying to find who she is in the midst of all that she is not. (*The Expatriates* 370)

David's midlife crisis increases her inclination to adopt Julian. David takes to Hong Kong 'the wrong way': he travels a lot, works late and has an affair with a girl he met at a bar—Mercy—who becomes pregnant:

This is the Hong Kong curse that expat housewives talk about in hushed voices: the man who takes to Hong Kong the wrong way. He moves from egalitarian society, where he's supposed to take out the trash every day and help with the dinner dishes, to a place where women cater to his every desire – a secretary who anticipates his needs before he does, a servant in the house who brings him his espresso just the way he likes it and irons his boxers and socks—and the local population is not as sassy with the comebacks as where he came from, so, of course, he then looks for that in every corner of his life. (130)

Hilary, throughout the eight years that she has lived in Hong Kong, has seen the marriages of at least ten women break up. It is, she thinks, 'A ghostly procession of marital destruction' (132). Tammy, the 'five-year veteran of Hong Kong, when the newly arrived Hilary first met her' (133), is one of those women. Married to Garth, she is the mother of two children. After two years as an expatriate in Hong Kong, she discovers that her husband has another family in Shenzhen. Garth's other wife, Lily, is a young Chinese former club hostess: she and Garth have two children. As Lee comments, 'Apparently—this had entered into expatriate lore' (135). Tammy, in her rage, exclaims to herself, 'Hadn't she followed him

here to this godforsaken place where you couldn't get a proper iced coffee to save your life? Hadn't she never complained about all the travel he had to do, all the work, [...] And hadn't she kept herself up, looking good,' (135). Tammy's and her children's lives are ruined:

Tammy had a nervous breakdown [...] and she dropped out of sight for a few weeks [...] The kids were in high school and middle school, [...] Melissa, a tenth grader, started going out to bars in Wan Chai, and when people ran into her, she was with older men and reeked of smoke and worse. Mark's grades went off a cliff and never recovered. Collateral damage, the housewives said. (137)

Lee further explains that Tammy's shattered feelings and sense of loss, like Rosalie's in *The Ruins of Us*, are the result of her husband's infidelity:

When everything you thought was yours was taken away, and the foundation of your life shifted so you have to start from zero, you might find out who you really are. You might come up against that dark, immovable wall of truth. And that is probably the most frightening thought of all. (138–139)

Family expatriation, in some cases, does not succeed and ends in separation or divorce.

Where wives may decide to leave Hong Kong, husbands stay for work and send money home to their families: 'This sometimes works and sometimes doesn't: The wife comes back to Hong Kong, or there is a divorce' (*The Expatriates* 289). Sterle, et al. explain that

expatriate marriages end in divorce because of two main reasons; either there has been a core issue in the marriage before expatriation (e.g., alcoholism), or one or both spouses are negatively influenced by expatriate culture to such an extent that it induces polarization behavior that is counter to how they would behave in their own culture (e.g., infidelity). ("Expatriate Family Adjustment" 4)

Hilary and David's relationship founders after six years of living abroad. It has 'cooled into politeness and well wishes', and Hilary thinks that 'Perhaps a baby, a pregnancy, will save them from this gradual decline' (83). Hilary asks herself:

How is it that life is so fragile? It's not just life itself, and mortality; it's more how a perfectly conventional-seeming life can collapse in a few short weeks. Several months ago, Hilary felt she was leading a normal life, and while she isn't really mourning the loss of what was, after all, an imperfect life, there is still grief for the person she once thought she was. She feels vulnerable, a newborn trying to fashion a new life in the wake of all that has happened. She is moving toward the future but uncertainly, and without grace, she feels. (244-45)

In her grief and depression, she thinks of Julian: 'She wants to see Julian. She is a better person when she's with him [...] He gets her out of herself' (246). She takes Julian to the American Club for a snack. She sits with him and for the first time she dares to look at his eyes: "'Eat your chocolate cake, sweetie," she says, heart beating fast, fast, faster. Is this what it means to feel alive?' (299).

In her interview with Lee, Gee suggests that Lee's stories 'capture women creating secret lives in order to escape the existence they are trapped in' ("3 Expat Women"). In *The Expatriates*, both Margaret and Hilary have created spaces for themselves in the attempt to find peace and comfort. Kim states that 'some people may attempt to avoid or minimize the anticipated or actual "pain" of disequilibrium by [...] avoidance, and withdrawal, [...] toward the new or changed external reality' ("Finding a "Home"" 5). Margaret's 'need to leave her house, her family, is growing' (41). Some days 'she wakes up and feels as if she cannot breathe, cannot possibly go through all the motions' (42). So she rents a secret apartment in Happy Valley and begins to visit it in her free hours during the day. It is a 'space of her own, just for her, where nothing from her real life need encroach' (42). For Margaret, the secret

apartment represents a negative ‘third space’ that differs from Bhabha’s ‘third space’ in being private, not a public. In Bhabha’s ‘third space’ ‘The contour of difference is agonistic, shifting, [and] splitting,’ but Margaret’s version of a third space is more akin to ‘Freud’s description of the system of consciousness which occupies a position in space lying on the borderline between outside and inside, a surface of protection, reception, and projection’ (Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders” 152).

In her ‘third space,’ Margaret does not interact with anyone except herself, as she attempts to reconcile herself to her maternal identity, now, as the mother of two — not three — children. In this space, the individual may attain a transformative sense of self, gain a new understanding of identity, and reevaluate his or her relations with others:

She opens the door to her sanctuary, walks in. She sits down on her bed, but all the sounds of the living around her are too distracting. It is no longer her place. And, she realizes, it never really has been. It was just borrowed, a place she used in the off hours, while the real residents were gone. She is an interloper [...] She used to wonder whether she was a good person. She used to wonder whether bad things happened to good people more or less or if it was just random. And she used to look at people on the street and wonder what they were hiding or suffering from, or if they were the rarest of things: happy. She used to do all these things until she had to stop because her head was starting to ache. (400)

However, at the end of the novel, Margaret realizes that ‘she does not belong here, alone in an apartment building surrounded by strangers. She should go home, she realizes. She should go home to her family’ (400). Thus, Margaret’s ‘third space’ is temporary, unlike the adopted ‘third space’ in the women’s narratives set in America. The ‘third space’ is occupied by Margaret as she attempts to regain a balanced identity. By means of this space, Margaret achieves psychological stability and a new sense of home.

Hilary, too, becomes less social, 'living her life more and more online [...]. Maybe she will migrate her life to a virtual world, where she will exist only as finger taps on a keyboard, a ghostly being made up of pithy comments and occasional snapshots' (242). Unlike Margaret, Hilary creates her 'third space' online, occupying a virtual space which is both public and private. However, Hilary's 'third space' differs from Ifemelu's and Mariam's online third spaces in that it does not defy social attitudes but acts as a shelter that provides her with temporary relief from the painful reality of her own experience. She turns on her computer and watches 'over the message boards as if the answer to her life were there. The problem is, she doesn't know what the question is' (224). She spends most of her time online, browsing and posting in expatriate forum websites. She creates a fake nickname and becomes a different person. In her virtual space, Hilary is younger and living happily with her husband: HappyGal is 27, originally from Oregon but lives in California, and, most importantly, she is blonde: 'Hilary has always wanted to be blond' (174). 'She and her husband live in the Mid-Levels. It's like a smaller, scaled-down version of Hilary. Someone she might have been, in a different life, or maybe even this one, if she had made some different decisions' (174).

Hilary expects that Julian will be living with her soon, despite Hong Kong's strict rules for adoption, so she deletes the forum websites from her computer, and, for the first time, considers returning to America:

She hasn't thought about it before, always assuming she would be here, with David, as he signed contract after contract [...] She was fine, not missing home, not minding where she was. But now, assuming that she gets Julian and she and David are done, there isn't much to keep her here. She would like to be closed to her mother [...] she remembers that when she first moved here, a woman who had been in Hong Kong for six years had confided plaintively: 'I feel like my real life is on pause. It's nice here,

and I like all the help and the vacations, but I'm ready now. I'm ready to resume my real life, and now all I feel like I'm doing is waiting.' So if she moves back home, she'll start her life again, her new life with Julian [...] They can have a fresh start, together, as they begin their new life as a family. This seems right, that they'll both start anew. (406-407)

Kim cites Cohen words that 'The purpose of life is to maintain life, adaptation is life.' She also quotes White's statement that 'The introduction of new experiences, particularly those that are most drastic and disorienting, challenges this basic life force, helping individuals maintain themselves.' Kim's conclusion is that 'The degree of self-organization a given person achieves reflects the quality of his or her adaptive behaviour' (*Becoming Intercultural* 35-36).

In Lee's novel, American expatriates in Hong Kong make the minimum adjustment required to survive in a new culture. They maintain their personal and social identities because of the strength of their ethnic group. Kim notes in "Theory Reflections: Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory" that 'very little adaptive change may take place in strangers whose ethnic community offers an almost complete insulation from having to face the host cultural challenges' (1). As a result, 'each individual has a degree of freedom or control, based on his or her predispositions, pre-existing needs and interests' ("Finding a 'Home'" 5), to go through the process of acculturation.

A basic assumption of Kim's theory is that the 'adaptation of an individual to a given cultural environment occurs in and through communication' (*Becoming Intercultural* 36). As Sun Kyong Lee states,

In Kim's (2001) model of cross-cultural adaptation, ethnic group strength is one of the environmental factors influencing sojourners' communication processes, which ultimately influences their intercultural transformation. The construct of ethnic group

strength has three aspects: ethnic prestige (i.e. relative social status of the ethnic group), institutional completeness (i.e. community development of the ethnic group), and identity politics (i.e. strength of ethnic identification). When an ethnic group has a relatively high status in a host society, the community is well developed, and members of the community have strong ethnic identification, that ethnic group has a high level of vitality (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977), and it is likely that the member's cross-cultural adaptation is delayed or shows different patterns than the other cases (Inglis & Gudykunst, 1982; Kim, 2001). (4-5)

Kim indicates negative associations between ethnic group strength and host interpersonal and mass communication. That the American expatriates in Lee's novel have less time to engage in activities with host society members than in interaction with their ethnic group network—exchanging information, help and support—confirms two of Kim's theorems: 'the greater the ethnic group strength, the lesser the host communication competence' (theorem 10) and 'the greater the ethnic group strength, the lesser the host interpersonal and mass communication' (theorem 11) (*Becoming Intercultural* 90). Yet, Kim also states that 'the greater the ethnic group strength, the greater the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication' (theorem 12) (90). Adams and van de Vijver describe the difference between expatriates and immigrants in the following way:

Where expatriates experience the cultural distance as too large, or communication barriers as insurmountable, they close themselves off from the host society, keeping interactions with host nationals to a minimum. They would separate themselves from individuals whom they may perceive to be too different from them (i.e., those with different languages, cultures, and religions) and seek out those who are similar to them, and in a similar situation (viz. other expatriates). This often leads to the

formation of expatriate enclaves, where they remain segregated and feel comfortable to maintain their own identity and culture. (328)

The American expatriates in Lee's novel maintain their ethnic activities: they have the American community club for their activities, trips and dinner parties, and they are more directly influenced by contact with their ethnic group than with the host society:

They live in a particularly homogeneous enclave of expatdom, Repulse Bay, where half the people they see are white, and more than that are not locals, be they Chinese American or Japanese or Filipino. In this particular corner of Hong Kong, newly arrived Americans bump into one another at the supermarket and talk of their sea containers, arriving soon with their belongings, how to find a travel agent, how to get a driver's license. (84-85)

Due to their strong ethnic interpersonal communication and social status, Western expatriates need not attain host language competence. Sun Kyong Lee notes that immigrants 'spend more time and energy for exchanging resources with their ethnic community members, they may not have enough time and opportunity to learn and master host languages' (7). When she first arrives, Margaret goes to a supermarket to buy corn syrup, which she has difficulty obtaining, since she does not speak the local language. She asks for assistance but the first store clerk she encounters is unable or unwilling to help. Margaret becomes frustrated: "Find the corn syrup," she had said over and over again, implacable in her consumer's right to do this to a store employee. (wasn't that his job, finding products for customers?) She had raised her voice as if this would make him understand her better' (33). Shaffer and Harrison note in their interview study that one of the factors that influence spouse adjustment is host-country language fluency: 'In fact, all spouses who had a positive international experience had earlier acquired at least a basic repertoire in the host-country language; none of those who had a negative experience attempted to learn it' (241). None of

the three female protagonists of *The Expatriates* speak Chinese and neither do they intend to learn the language, perhaps because they are aware that their stay in the host culture is only temporary, although they do have to adjust to a new vocabulary: “‘lifts’ instead of ‘elevators,’ ‘flats’ instead of ‘apartments’—vestiges of the British colony Hong Kong used to be’ (84). Their contact with members of the host culture is limited, because their main contact is with their co-ethnics—Americans. Moreover, because of their personal problems, the three women prefer to isolate themselves in order to meditate on their misfortunes.

Margaret has a negative experience with the Korean language when she is in Seoul.

Margaret’s father is half-Korean, but she does not speak the language. At the police station, after G is kidnapped, she fills out forms with a woman who speaks some English: ‘The added layer of not knowing how to speak or write the language she saw all around her made her feel as if she couldn’t breathe, that she couldn’t move freely in this world’ (74). Later, she tries to read forums about missing children in Korea, but is prevented by the language barrier:

She regretted not learning Korean, regretted that the most important parts of the Internet were off-limits to her. Koreans were the most plugged-in society in the world, and they had many, many more forums like the ones she read in English about missing children. They were the relevant ones, but she was stuck reading about missing children in Maryland or California when her child was missing on another continent. (166)

Due to the Americans’ high level of ethnic group strength, the host environment welcomes them, and treats them very well. Their perceived prestigious social status, moreover, entails subservience on the part of the locals: ‘Is it any wonder, [Margaret] thinks, that expats become like spoiled rich children, coddled and made to feel as if their every whim should be gratified? [...] The locals are the feudal servants, running to obey every whim’ (184). Hilary describes the living conditions of Americans in China: ‘Instead of a

housekeeper, the province of only the rich in America, everyone in her new world had a live-in domestic helper from the Philippines or Indonesia, who took care of all the housework and babysitting for the astounding sum of US\$500 a month' (84). The American expatriates 'arrive and realize they can have someone else vacuum and make the beds and the lunch boxes and do the laundry' (331). The Americans in any case believe that they are better than the locals. 'It is there, in their actions. The way they loudly demand ice in their drinks or for the AC to be turned up or down or for "Diet Coke, *not* Coke Zero," as if everyone thought such a distinction was crucial' (33).

According to Kim's Axiom 8, extensive and prolonged participation in ethnic social (interpersonal and mass) communication activities deters, and is deterred by, intercultural transformation (*Becoming Intercultural* 90). The expatriates in the novel maintain their American identities through their strong ethnic communication, meaning that their intercultural transformation is slight: 'Americans found themselves calling only other Americans and doing Super Bowl breakfasts (due to the time difference) and Thanksgivings at the club with other families. You found yourself somehow more American than ever' (*The Expatriates* 86). As Kim's theory suggests, communication is the main means of adaptation for the expatriate. It promotes the expatriate's psychological health in the host country. The Americans in Hong Kong rely on one another to endure the challenges of expatriation: 'Newcomers all radiate the same desperation: to make friends, put down tenuous roots, survive in this new environment' (*The Expatriates* 206). The tough business environment makes life still more challenging for the Americans. Clarke notes this at his birthday party when he thanks his American friends for being a source of help and support:

But the thing that has made our move here doable is the people [...] They often say that in expat life, your friends become your family. Because you don't have mothers

and fathers and siblings nearby to count on, you grow close to the people around you.

So many of you have come to our aid in so many ways. (341-42)

Back in America, expatriates find it difficult to readjust to their old life. Boncori states that ‘a future change in roles and status upon repatriation can often create a problematic discrepancy between past and present identity’ (158). According to the novel, ‘This insularity will seem shocking for the first year back, when re-entry is difficult, when you miss the ease of Hong Kong’ (*The Expatriates* 291). At a farewell party, Hilary imagines that the woman who is leaving foresees, for a moment, her future life in America:

when she’s looking back into the past: Washing dishes [...], sudsy hands gripping greasy dishes, a woman will summon up a startling picture of herself, a moment in Hong Kong when she was walking across the lobby of the Mandarin Hotel in a fitted sheath and expensive stiletto-heeled shoes, the kind she has no use for anymore, on her way to meet a friend for lunch, or walking through the streets with her toddler on her hip while her helper, her servant, trailed behind, carrying the diaper bag and various other accoutrements of daily life she hadn’t had to bother herself with. What a life it was! What a life they had all had! While many of them had complained the whole time they were stationed in Hong Kong, it is only after they leave, when they are ensconced in their old lives with no change visible for decades ahead, that they will appreciate the wonder of what they had experienced. (291-92)

In conclusion, the three female American protagonists in *The Expatriates* feel isolated due to personal tragedy, and find themselves displaced far from family and friends, without jobs, and not speaking the local language. The novel highlights their identity development and change. The narrative also highlights the profound impact of family, specifically the impact children have on women’s identity. Margaret survives because of the two children

who need her, while Hilary and Mercy find themselves assuming new roles and changing their value systems upon becoming mothers.

Unlike the American women of *The Expatriates*, Rosalie in *The Ruins of Us* has attained a high degree of assimilation into Saudi culture, not least in her keen interest in and longstanding sense of belonging to that culture. In contrast, the American women of *The Expatriates* maintain American prejudice and a sense of superiority over the ethnic other, restricting their contact to other Americans in their expatriate community. As a result, they become more American than before. The essential difference between immigrants to the US and American expatriates to the east is that Americans do not have to struggle with overt racism, thus they are free to choose to what extent they want to integrate in the host society. Adams and van de Vijver contrast this with the experiences of immigrants to the United States:

Compared to other immigrant workers, expatriates may have more choices to make regarding their own acculturation, which would inform their identity construction and negotiation. These features set them apart from other immigrant groups. Due to their often high status within the subsidiary and host society, the purpose of their expatriation, and the cultural distance they experience, expatriates are often in the position to be rather selective in the degree to which they are willing to adjust to the new culture and maintain their original culture. More specifically, they may be selective of their cross-cultural engagement in their private and public life domains, and may do best if they develop a multicultural expatriate identity which allows them to integrate (and combine the cultures of origin and destination). (326)

In contrast to the female immigrants to America considered in the previous chapters, Rosalie considers Saudi Arabia her true home. In adapting to Saudi cultural conventions, she avoids a clash between American and Saudi Arabian cultures, in contrast to Jemorah,

Ifemelu, Arissa, and Mona, who all struggle with racism and discrimination in US society and so are unable to attain a sense of belonging there. In comparison with Jemora and Ifemelu, who are in constant negotiation with the idea of going home, Rosalie believes that Saudi Arabia is her real home and so feels unable to return to her home country, which has become foreign to her. Mercy, on the other hand, chooses to stay in Hong Kong because she likes the fact that here she is able to define herself on her own terms, whereas in the US she is defined by others. In stark contrast, Hilary feels that nothing is left for her in Hong Kong after the break-up of her marriage, and she decides to go back to the US. Finally, Margaret realises that 'home' is wherever her husband and children are.

In summary, the first chapter of this thesis examined the characters of female immigrants to the US who struggle with White racism and, as consequence, decide or desire to return to their country of origin. The second chapter concerned female immigrant characters who likewise struggle with racism and discrimination but for whom the idea of going home is unthinkable, with the result that these women develop individual identities and create a place for themselves in the host society. In the first and second chapters, hybridity is adopted by characters in order to avoid the clash of cultures, and a 'third space' is constructed as a defensive mechanism against racism and White superiority. In the third chapter, Rosalie adopts a strategy of assimilation into the country she regards as home. She succeeds in her assimilation to the point that she becomes a 'Saudi wife', but regains aspects of her American identity when her husband takes a second wife. Mariam, in contrast, adopts a Westernized approach and attempts to make revolutionary changes for women in the country. She constructs a 'third space' as a mechanism for defying Saudi cultural traditions. Finally, the American women expatriates in China enjoy the advantages of their ethnic strength by

maintaining their American identities. Versions of a 'third space' are nonetheless adopted temporarily by Margaret and Hilary at key stages of their adaptation to their new conditions.

Conclusion

This thesis contributes to current scholarship on female-authored US immigrant literature in its comparison of the issues with which female immigrants struggle (racism, ethnic and religious discrimination) and the experience of female American expatriates in the East (cultural difference in Saudi Arabia and China). The struggles they face affect the identity of the female protagonists in all the novels in question. My research connects immigrant and expatriate women's narratives, under the rubric of Bhabha's 'third space,' in an expansion of the transnational remit of American literature and of American studies.

This thesis is a study of American narratives written by women who, like their female protagonists, are immigrants or expatriates. All the novels considered here are 'stories of dislocation, of a kind of restlessness hand-in-hand with loneliness, all stories in which a character must grapple with that most essential question: "how do I live?" Or, to be more precise, "how do I live here?"' (Castellani, "On the Universal Urgency of Immigrant Literature"). As Castellani observes, humans have 'an innate instinct to survive. And from this instinct, great stories are born' ("Universal Urgency").

Alienation, estrangement, and feelings of otherness are common among immigrants and may result in rejection by the host community for racial and ethnic reasons or because of cultural difference, or tension between the traditions of the home and host cultures which prove difficult for the immigrant to resolve. Iain Chambers in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* states that 'Cut off from the homelands of tradition, experiencing a constantly challenged identity, the stranger is perpetually required to make [himself] at home in an interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present' (6). In seeking to integrate, it is important for the immigrant woman's feeling of equilibrium and contentment that she does not lose her sense of individual identity, albeit that her identity is often reformulated in the new context of the host culture.

Immigrants' writings often dramatize issues of estrangement, loss, and exile as a way to overcome and find solutions to the issues. Castellani states that the immigrant narrative falls into one or—in most cases, both—of those archetypes: a character leaves behind a place—a life, really: a home, a language, a personhood—to embark on a personal quest; or a character enters an unfamiliar country, where they are a stranger to most, and finds they must navigate its codes and culture in order to survive. (“Universal Urgency”)

Castellani references Parul Seghal's statement in *The New York Times*: “‘Aren't the themes of immigrant literature—estrangement, homelessness, fractured identities—the stuff of all modern literature, if not life?’” (“Universal Urgency”). Interest in immigrant literature is heightened today because of the global rise of economic and other forms of migration and immigration, and yet in an American literary context, new immigrant and expatriate narratives have received little critical attention.

As my thesis is largely, although not exclusively, focused on Arab and Muslim characters, it is appropriate that this thesis should conclude with a comparison of the actual conditions of immigrant and expatriate women in America and Saudi Arabia with orientalist stereotypes. In the US, the story of discrimination and racism toward immigrants continues today. American typically means White, with those who are not White perceived as others and even urged to “‘go back” to the countries they came from, a well-worn racist trope that dates back centuries’ (Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “After Trump Accuses”). This attitude is expressed in Donald Trump's recent racist attacks on Democratic Congresswomen whom he accuses of hating the United States, including Representatives Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, and Ayanna S. Pressley of Massachusetts, all of them women of colour and/or Arab and Muslim-American. Trump targeted these women, as Ocasio-Cortez states, because of their race and their religious

origins. Trump tweeted, ‘If you hate our country, or if you are not happy here, you can leave!’ (@realDonaldTrump). As Davis states, ‘Mr. Trump appeared to have particular contempt for Ms. Omar,’ Muslim Somalian, ‘who came to the country as a child and wears a hijab’ (“After Trump Accuses”). He condemns her for her alleged hatred of Israel and sympathy with Al Qaeda. When the four congresswomen gave a news conference in response to Trump’s attack, he replied on Twitter with reference not only to the four women but to their nations of origin, with the exception of Ilhan Omar, who was born in the United States:

So interesting to see “Progressive” Democrat Congresswomen, who originally came from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe, the worst, most corrupt and inept anywhere in the world (if they even have a functioning government at all) now loudly and viciously telling the people of the United States, the greatest and most powerful Nation on earth, how our government is to be run.

Why don’t they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came. (@realDonaldTrump)

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi tweeted back, condemning Trump: ‘When @realDonaldTrump tells four American Congresswomen to go back to their countries, he reaffirms his plan to “Make America Great Again” has always been about making America white again’ (@SpeakerPelosi).

In a multicultural society like that of the US, Parillo insists, ‘Instead of a hierarchy of power headed by a privileged group, greater cross-cultural understanding and interconnected viewpoints are necessary’ (151). In his racist attack, Trump ignores the importance of immigrants to the United States. Parrillo explains that

If a nation’s strength lies in its people, then the strength of the United States clearly lies in the diversity of its people. Immigrants from all over the world have come here, and in one way or another, each group has played some role in the nation’s evolution

into its present superpower status [...] Viewed as a threat, each has proven to be an asset. (158)

Instead of embracing immigrants, who, ‘In forsaking their ancestral lands, [...] pay us the highest compliment’ and who ‘They come to join us, not to keep separate from us’ (Parrillo 161-62), ‘Trump’s racist comments’, as noted by Representative Tom Malinowski of New Jersey, have ‘legitimized increased fear and hatred of new Americans and people of color’ (quoted in Davis).

Although the election of a black man as president of the United States proved a quantum leap in American history, and despite Obama’s campaign slogans of “Hope” and “Change,” and his “color-blind” policies, White prejudice and racial discrimination in America persist, suggesting that a “post-racial America” may be merely an illusion. Parrillo advises that ‘Only when we break down the remaining racial barriers, eliminate institutional discrimination, and open up paths free of obstacles to a good education and job opportunities for everyone will racial integration improve [...] Multiculturalism is not the enemy; systemic racism is’ (163). The contemporary US immigrant women narratives discussed in this thesis dramatize these issues and their consequences for immigrants of colour to the United States.

Turning from the West to the East, and to the Saudi Arabia of today, we find that the country’s social traditions and laws are changing. Since King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz took charge of the Kingdom and authorized his son Mohammed bin Salman to handle state administration, Saudi Arabia has undergone radical changes. Crown Prince Mohammed repealed old laws and set many new ones in all areas of the state, particularly regarding women’s rights. In his campaign of modernising the country, he ended gender segregation and male domination over women; women have begun to be viewed as equal partners to men. He granted women the right to drive and to have passports issued and to travel without a male

guardian's permission. Furthermore, on 23 February 2019, he appointed the Kingdom's first female ambassador to the United States, a sign of the country's new modern policies.

One of Prince Mohammed's main missions has been to "destroy extremism," to restore Saudi culture against its appropriation by radical Islam to a 'moderate, balanced Islam that is open to the world and to all religions and all traditions and peoples' (quoted in Thomas L. Friedman, "Saudi Arabia's Arab Spring, At Last"). Friedman states that Prince Mohammed 'has not only curbed the authority of the once feared Saudi religious police to berate a woman for not covering every inch of her skin, he has also let women drive' ("Saudi Arabia's Arab Spring"). In his meeting with Prince Mohammed, Friedman was instructed as follows:

"Do not write that we are 'reinterpreting' Islam — we are 'restoring' Islam to its origins — and our biggest tools are the Prophet's practices and [daily life in] Saudi Arabia before 1979." At the time of the Prophet Muhammad, he argued, there were musical theaters, there was mixing between men and women, there was respect for Christians and Jews in Arabia. "The first commercial judge in Medina was a woman!" So if the Prophet embraced all of this, M.B.S. asked, "Do you mean the Prophet was not a Muslim?" ("Saudi Arabia's Arab Spring")

Changes in Saudi regulations have come to define the country's spring. However, a change on a societal level, impacting on Saudi women's lifestyles, had begun more than a decade earlier. Madawi Al-Rasheed notes that, 'Since 9/11, educated women have been called upon to serve the state's economic, social, and ideological needs,' represented in allowing women's 'greater participation in the public sphere' and 'greater visibility both locally and internationally' (134-35). Women, thus, have achieved their demands and succeeded in challenging the norms that govern gender segregation, veiling, and appearance

in the public sphere. Women are now occupying positions of status in Parliament and in the ministries. Muddassir Quamar writes that, for Saudi women, there are

few new developments such as their nomination in the Majlis al-Shura (the nominated consultative body) in 2013 (Saudi women take seats in Shura Council, 2013), and their participation in the December 2015 municipal elections in which 20 women were elected in various municipal councils across the kingdom (Saudi Voters Elect 20 Women Candidates for the First Time, 2015). (323)

Moreover, Saudi women have started to travel abroad on their own, frequently for study. The dress code in the country for women, which is a black abaya, veil (covering the hair), and niqab (covering the face), have been replaced by colourful abayas and abandonment of the niqab; furthermore, the discarding of the veil by some women, particularly expatriate women, is now accepted. Individual choices are respected in twenty-first century Saudi Arabia.

These recent changes in Saudi Arabia, and the extension of women's rights, may encourage, increase, and attract Western expatriates, particularly women. As Michael Joyce remarks, 'A move to Saudi Arabia has long been considered challenging for many female expatriates, deterred by the Kingdom's hardline restriction of women's rights. But Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's rapid modernizations - seen in the ultra-conservative country as welcome and unwarranted in equal measures - could change perceptions' ("Saudi Arabia is Changing Rapidly"). Indeed, changing attitudes in Saudi Arabia encouraged Belgium to assign Dominique Mineur as its ambassador: she will be the world's first female ambassador to Saudi Arabia. In addition, on 30 July 2019, the guardianship law was revoked by Prince Mohammed and extended to foreign women who marry Saudis, including their children.

Fiction by expatriates predicts the positive changes now underway in the country. A scene in *City of Veils* (2010) by Zoe Ferraris, for example, represents aspirations of modernity in Saudi Arabia. Osama is a Saudi man who adopts modern views about female social roles. He wants his wife to work; he also ‘wanted to be able to tell his friends that his wife did something important, that they were a modern couple and perfectly successful’ (303). The working women in Ferraris’s trilogy, for example, Katya Hijazi, exemplify the Saudi woman who takes advantage of liberal social changes and who participates in promoting women’s rights, challenging the old patriarchal culture which had imposed restrictions on their social status, including their jobs and the relationships between men and women. Katia, for example, works as a forensic scientist in a gender-mixed workplace. Nuha refuses to wear a niqab or burqa, insisting that ‘one didn’t need to wear a burqa in Jeddah’ (201-02).

In Ferraris’s *Kingdom of Strangers* (2012), Dr. Charlie Becker is an American female detective who is called upon to help Saudi policemen in solving a crime. Dr. Becker is contrasted with Mariam, the female American figure in *City of Veils*, who respects the Kingdom’s dress code. Dr. Becker ‘wasn’t even wearing a head scarf, and her long auburn hair had a springy quality that made it seem alive whenever she moved her head’ (35). Ferraris anticipates the Saudi future in presenting Dr. Becker as an unveiled American woman in Saudi Arabia who breaks Saudi dress conventions and rules of gender segregation in the public sphere and who works in a male environment. In her fiction, Ferraris represents revolutionary Saudi females who confront patriarchal conventions and break Saudi and orientalist stereotypes of Arab women as obedient and passive. Fictional depictions of women achieving agency and empowerment pre-empt and reflect actual improvements in Saudi society in terms of women’s rights. Keija Parssinen, likewise, anticipates change, for example in her comments on a common misconception, ‘this idea that [Saudi] women are

slaves. Rather, they are becoming more and more educated and increasingly capable and ready to fight their own battles,' she adds 'I think the world is going to start seeing some interesting transformations within the country' (Case, "Reading Room").

Parssinen has spoken of her affectionate memories of Saudi Arabia as an American expatriate in the 1980s, a time of far greater conservatism. She speaks of her "Aramco Brats" friends as well as herself, who grew up on the Aramco oil compounds in the Kingdom's Eastern Province, as repatriated expatriates who still feel a strong connection to the country:

We consider Saudi Arabia to be home, even though we can't speak Arabic, aren't Muslims, and have no blood connection to the peninsula's tribes. We are not, and can never be, citizens of the country. Still, we spent our formative years swimming in the Arabian Gulf and camping in Saudi deserts. ("The US-Saudi Story")

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