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U N A C C U S T O M E D N A R R A T I V E S :

Crossing Gender Barriers in the Fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri

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Memory is a thread that

connects home and abroad.

In loving memory of my

grandmother, Aurora Nery, who

will always live in my memories.

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A B S T R A C T

As a contemporary Indian-American writer, Jhumpa Lahiri often focuses, both in her novel, *The Namesake* (2003), and in her collections of short stories, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), on the representation of the lives of diasporic subjects living in the United States of America. This thesis investigates how her works portray male and female characters and the impact the diaspora space has on these subjects and their relationships. It shows how the gender barriers in Lahiri's fiction are more fluid as it represents both men and women as having different, but still significant, concerns about their roles in the new space, in which cultural diversity is an element that triggers the identity reconfiguration of the subjects. In particular, this work emphasizes the importance of the diaspora space on the identity formation of the characters. Therefore, I analyze the male and female characters in order to see how their cultural attachment to the Indian culture changes from one generation to the other. I also focus on the consequences of the shifts in time and space on gender roles in order to understand how the new roles are reconfigured in the new space, for both men and women. As Lahiri's fiction often shifts the narrative perspective, voicing the concerns of both the male and female characters, it is possible to observe the same episode from different view points. Thus, the configuration of gender roles for both male and female characters become an intertwined, continuous process. Although there are some characteristics that can be attributed to the different generations of characters, an analysis of these narratives show that they reject stereotypical representations of male or female characters, and even approximate both generations through the theme of loss and belonging.

R E S U M O

Jhumpa Lahiri, escritora americana de origem Indiana, frequentemente aborda, tanto em seu romance, *The Namesake* (2003), como em seus livros de contos, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), sujeitos diaspóricos Indianos que residem nos Estados Unidos da América. Esta dissertação investiga como as personagens femininas e masculinas são representadas, assim como o impacto do espaço diaspórico nesses sujeitos e nas relações construídas por eles. Mostra ainda como as barreiras de gênero na obra dessa escritora contemporânea são mais fluídas, pois indicam uma aproximação na representação das personagens femininas e masculinas, que revelam diferentes, mas significantes preocupações com relação a seus papéis de gênero no novo espaço, no qual a diversidade cultural é um elemento importante que favorece a reconfiguração da identidade desses sujeitos. Em particular, este trabalho enfatiza a importância do espaço diaspórico no processo de formação da identidade das personagens. Assim, analiso as personagens femininas e masculinas com o intuito de investigar como o vínculo cultural muda de uma geração para a outra. Também enfoco as consequências do espaço nos papéis de gênero para entender como esses são reconfigurados para as personagens femininas e masculinas. Assim, a configuração dos papéis de gênero de personagens femininas e masculinas é entrelaçada, configurando-se como um processo interligado. Embora haja características atribuídas às distintas gerações, uma análise da obra dessa escritora revela uma preocupação com representações não estereotipadas de personagens femininas e masculinas, e até mesmo aproxima diferentes gerações, unindo-as em torno do tema da perda e do pertencimento.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces

Between stars – on stars where no human race is.

I have in me so much nearer home

To scare myself with my own desert places.

Robert Frost (269)

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INTRODUCTION

"Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into an unaccustomed earth."

Nathaniel Hawthorne (15)

Jhumpa Lahiri is the daughter of Bengali immigrants who was born in London in 1967 and raised in Rhode Island, US. As a child, Lahiri traveled many times to India in order to visit relatives, where she sometimes spent months at a time. This childhood in transit is responsible for a feeling of displacement that Lahiri explains in an interview: "No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile in whichever country I travel to, that's why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile" (Lahiri, "A Home"). Although Lahiri's works cannot be considered autobiographical, her life is a frequent source of inspiration as most of her characters live in exile and are either Indian immigrants, like her parents, or belong to a second generation of immigrants, like herself. Lahiri claims that almost all her "characters are translators, insofar as they must make sense of the foreign in order to survive, "but that her attempt to write stories which are set in India is not an act of translation, but a way she found to "create and illuminate a non-existing [world]" ("My Intimate" 120). However, although she affirms that her writing is not a form of translation, she claims, instead, that she translates herself through writing when she paraphrases

Descartes's famous quotation, stating “I translate, therefore I am” (“My Intimate” 120).

Lahiri has published three works so far: *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, and *Unaccustomed Earth*. Her first book of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, was published in 1999, and won several important awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in 2000. The stories are set either in India or in the United States, and the characters are mainly Indians, or belong to a second generation of Indian immigrants born in the United States. The short stories focus on the diasporic movement of first generations, but the perspective of those who stay behind is also portrayed. The stories are not only about human condition, but also about the way place and culture affect human relations.

Lahiri's novel, *The Namesake*, was published in 2003 and was made into a movie three years later. The story focuses on different characters, but it is told mainly from the point of view of Gogol, the son of Indian immigrants. While his parents try to keep the Indian tradition in the family, Gogol tries hard to adapt to his new environment and to be accepted by his American[1] friends. Gogol's name, which is neither Indian nor American but Russian, serves to describe the construction of the identity of a second generation of Indian immigrants born in the United States. It is partly the strangeness of his name, and the feeling of dislocation that it enforces on him that compels him to deal with his condition of a subject who lives between two cultures. Besides, as the story covers forty years of the Gangulis in the United States, it is also possible to observe the impact of the diaspora space on different generations over time.

Unaccustomed Earth, published in 2008, is also a collection of short stories in which the last three stories are ingenuously interconnected. In this work, the stories are set not only in the United States and India, but also in Thailand, Rome and France. The plots deal with the

1 Although I acknowledge the problems in the use of the term “American,” as it may refer to all countries in the Americas, and not only to the United States, the term will often be used in this thesis as it is the word used both by Lahiri and the characters in her fiction to describe the place where her characters dwell.

same themes that permeate the other works, such as ethnicity and human relations, as well as the life in transit. It is mainly by discussing issues involving the so-called hyphenated and hybrid subjects that Lahiri's stories bring to light the idea of displacement, of not belonging.

Her characters live between two cultures: they are Indian-Americans. The hyphen placed in between the two affiliations emblematically signals their allegiance to more than one culture as part of their identities. It is an evidence that they do not completely belong to any of the two cultures. Julie MacGonegal explains the meaning of the hyphen in relation to somebody's national affiliation by arguing that it expresses a "profound sense of displacement – of not quite belonging to a plurality of places at once – intrinsic to the hybrid condition" (177-78). The notions of hybridism and displacement pervade the stories and the lives of the characters whose existence is marked by uneasiness because they live in a place and in a culture that contrast with the culture they are brought up in. This uneasiness the characters feel can be translated by the word "unaccustomed," which is not only a term that appears in the title of her last collection of short stories, but it is also an adjective used several times in her three works. It is possible to say that "unaccustomed" is a word that connects not only the three works, but also the characters who seem to be bound to live their lives unaccustomed to both the place and the culture they are inserted in. The idea that this life in transit may also carry positive connotations is underlined by Nathaniel Hawthorne's quotation which opens *Unaccustomed Earth* as an epigraph and also this introduction. It indicates that being born in another culture may also bring desirable changes in the lives of those who set foot in an unaccustomed place: "My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into an unaccustomed earth" (15).

Unlike many male characters in narratives of Asian diaspora written by women (Dhingra 137), Lahiri's cannot be classified as oppressive figures, since they struggle almost

in the same manner as the female characters do to deal with their feelings of being hyphenated subjects who live in-between worlds. As a consequence, the male characters in her narratives often distance themselves from the stereotypical representation of Indian male characters.

In the present work I discuss the representation of male and female characters in Lahiri's work in an attempt to show how it redefines the borders between genders in the diasporic context, voicing not only women's, but also men's concerns, and evoking, as Lavina Dhingra argues, new definitions of masculinity (135-36). Besides, I also want to show how her fiction also approximates both generation of immigrants through non-stereotypical representations.

The criterion for the choice of stories to be analyzed in this thesis was that each one had to focus on two different types of characters, that is, from two different generations in the same family, or present both male and female character's perspectives. Having this criterion in mind, besides the novel *The Namesake*, the stories "A Temporary Matter" and "This Blessed House" from *Interpreter of Maladies*, and "Unaccustomed Earth", "Hell-Heaven" and "Hema and Kaushik" from *Unaccustomed Earth* were chosen for analysis as these works highlight the interaction between male and female characters as well as between first and second generation of immigrants. According to Rubén Rumbaut, what is commonly accepted as belonging to the first generation are "persons born and socialized in another country who immigrate as adults" (1165), while the second generation "refers to the U.S.-born and U.S.-socialized children of foreign-born parents, although under this rubric immigration scholars also often … lump together foreign born persons, who immigrated as children" (1165). In this research, I will consider the first generation those characters that are born in India, who have migrated to the United States during adult life and who were entirely raised in the Indian

culture, whereas the second generation characters refer to the children of the first generation immigrants who are born in the US or who move to the US as young children and are raised in a culture different from their parents' birthplace.

The characters chosen for analysis are compared according to the following criteria: first, the attachment to the Indian culture, that is, the relation they maintain with the customs, food, language, and clothes, for instance. Second, the elements from the host culture that they have internalized in their lives, and thus the conflicts of the characters who live between two cultures.

Hence, in the first chapter of this work, I situate Lahiri's work in the field of postcolonial and diaspora studies. I discuss the representation of the colonial subject, as well as how the concept of hybridism helps to shape the definition of postcolonial subjectivity. Besides, I also discuss the term diaspora and the importance of space for the construction of identity for diasporic subjects. Here Avtar Brah's concept of the diaspora space, which is central to this thesis, is also examined. In the last part of this chapter, I discuss gender theories which are enlightening to analyze the male and female characters of Lahiri's work.

In the second chapter, I discuss the female characters of first and second generation in order to analyze their attachment to the Indian culture as well as the negotiation of gender roles in the diaspora space. In doing so, I try to show the importance of space as well as of the time spent in the diasporic space for women's agency.

The comparison of male characters of first and second generation is the focus of the third chapter, in which I discuss the impact of the renegotiation of gender roles on the male characters. Therefore, I analyze the male characters, comparing the two generations of immigrants, but I also discuss how these male characters are affected by the women's agency acquired in the diaspora space.

In my final considerations, I compare both generations of immigrants as well as the male and female characters, showing how Lahiri dismantles the representation of her characters through non-stereotyped portrayals, and how she approximates them as her stories focus on the humane, and not only on immigrants cultural clashes, as well as how the characters are also connected by the theme of loss. Finally, I state the importance of space for the reconfiguration of gender roles as well as the impact of the time spent in this space for the diasporic subjects.

This work has attempted to shed light on how an important contemporary woman writer shows different concerns regarding gender relations, moving away from dichotomous positions. Although there are male characters who can be seen as oppressors, it is also possible to observe that some of them also feel oppressed by the gender roles imposed by their culture. As Lahiri is one of the best known Indian-American writers in contemporary literature, it is important to investigate how both male and female characters are represented in her work, as well as how these characters' representations have developed in the three works she has written so far.

CHAPTER ONE

Postcolonialism, Diaspora, and Gender Relations

> "Texts or representations have to be seen as fundamental to the creation of history and culture."
> Ania Loomba (39)

> "[The map] was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness."
> Joseph Conrad (22)

Before beginning a discussion of Jhumpa Lahiri's work, it is paramount to situate the historical context of postcolonialism and diaspora in which it is irrevocably inserted.

Postcolonialism, a term that has been broadly used in recent years, often refers to the political and historical outcomes of the rupture of the metropolises and their once colonized areas in the second half of the twentieth century. According to Ania Loomba, the term reflects not only the strife between colonies and metropolises, but also the consequences of such process (16). The term is debatable as, for some critics, the prefix "post" might indicate both the end of a period, and the end of the domination some countries had over others. Thus, when referring to India as a postcolonial country, for instance, the prefix "post" would indicate that the influence the British Empire had over India was really over after its independence, which it is not what actually happened. Even nowadays, it is not possible to

state how independent countries are as “[t]he new global order does not depend upon direct rule” (Loomba 12). Along these lines, Robert Young also claims that the end of colonialism was not immediately followed by great changes in the domination of one country over another: “despite decolonization, the major world powers did not change substantially during the course of the 20th century. For the most part, the same (ex-) imperial countries continue to dominate those countries that they formerly ruled as colonies” (*Postcolonialism: A Very* 3).

Acknowledging Young's argument and the discussion over the term, this work follows Ann Brooks's definition when she states that the prefix “post” “implies a process of ongoing transformation and change” (1). Therefore, it does not necessarily need to indicate the end of a period, but the transformation process which started with the official withdrawal of the colonizers. Besides all controversy the term may arise, it is meaningful to describe the results of the end of the direct rule of the colonizers, that is, the political, economic, and cultural changes that have, according to Henry Schwarz, “profoundly reshaped the production of academic knowledge as much as they have reshaped the world power (1).

Robert Young also argues for the necessity of a postcolonial agenda as he states that some of the past problems caused by colonialism still have reflections in our present world (“Postcolonialism Remains” 20). Also, according to him,

> The postcolonial has always been concerned with interrogating the interrelated histories of violence, domination, inequality, and injustice, with addressing the fact that, and the reasons why, millions of people in the world still live without things that most of those in the West take for granted. (20)

Therefore he claims that some of the objectives of postcolonialism are still unaccomplished and because of that this period cannot be considered to be over.

Lahiri's works are, then, contextualized in the field of Postcolonial Studies, a term

which is used to designate "the academic study in the West of the cultures and contexts of decolonization" (Schwarz 6). Thus, postcolonial literature is seen as a result of this historic moment, and it has as one of its main aims to promote the visibility of identities of the groups which were not so well represented before in literature. Postcolonial literature also addresses the ways that literary texts respond to the attempts to preserve the memories of the minorities which had no voice before. Schwarz argues about the importance of the field asserting that:

> Postcolonial studies work to make this relation of unequal power more visible, with the goal of ending it. Postcolonial studies in this sense is the radical philosophy that interrogates both the past history and ongoing legacies of European colonialism in order to undo them. (4)

The same argument is presented by Young as he states that "postcolonial remains operate in a dialectic of invisibility and visibility" ("Postcolonialism Remains" 23). Elleke Boehmer in turn contends that the postcolonial is often associated with "metropolitan, diasporic, migrant, and minority spaces" and "postcolonial literature itself is now widely perceived as a reflection of that globalized world, or as a part of that cross-planet re-figuration" (246-47). Thus, postcolonial literature may be seen as a product of a historical moment and represents the consequences of such important changes in the global order, and also in the literary field.

Accordingly, it is this legacy mentioned by Schwarz as well as the space the postcolonial subject is located into that this work investigates. Considered an Indo-American writer, Lahiri is aware of the historical moment into which she is inserted. It may be argued that her books are written in the context of postcolonial literature and, more specifically, in the context of contemporary diaspora studies. The majority of the characters represented in her novels are Indian immigrants or descendents of these immigrants who travel from the

once colonized India to the United States, a political and economic center, searching for better life opportunities. In this new space the characters inhabit, they live the conflicts that Avtar Brah describes as inherent of diasporic subjects; they question and reconfigure their cultural and gender traditions in the new space (190).

As a contemporary writer, Lahiri voices the conflicts of those who have traveled across continents and represents the lives of immigrants who have to deal with the outcomes of the cultural clashes they have to face throughout their lives in their new home.

1.1. From a Colonial Silent "Other" to a Hybrid Subject

> "Hybridity thus makes difference into sameness, but
> in a way that makes the same no longer the same,
> the different no longer simply different."
> Robert Young (*Colonial* 24-25)

> "A Boundary is not that at which something stops
> but, as the Greeks recognize, the boundary is that
> from which something begins its presencing."
> Martin Heidegger (154)

The colonial subject was first defined in opposition to the white European subject. A series of stereotypes were created which defined the colonized subject in opposition to the European colonizer, and a dichotomous representation, based on essentialist characteristics was devised for political and economic reasons.

Accordingly, it is this dichotomy that Edward Said discusses in his groundbreaking *Orientalism* when he states that the image of the Eastern subject was constructed in order to justify the political domination of the Orient. Said emphasizes that the dichotomies established were mere representations and, because they expressed the view of the colonizer, they were not "natural depictions of the Orient" (21). As a result, Said argues that the Westerns which were writing about the Orient were often "speaking in its behalf" (20), implying that the Orient could not speak for itself: "[t]he exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would" (21).

Along the same lines, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also discusses the idea that the representation of the oriental subjects by Western intellectuals also serves the economic interests of the West (*Pode o Subalterno* 20). Besides, one of Spivak's most important arguments is that the represented subject, which she calls the subaltern, is a silenced and silent one (*Pode o Subalterno* 54), and he/she is subjected to representation as he/she does not have a voice, and even when this subject has a voice he/she cannot be heard. Consequently, the idea of the Orient is constructed from outside and, as Rey Chow states, the image of the subject is often "equated with a kind of 'lack' in a pejorative sense" (48). Hence, the representation is made not only in opposition to the European subject, but with a focus on negative characteristics, such as violence and irrationality in relation to the superiority of the colonizer.

In addition, Irvin Schick emphasizes how the representation of the other is constructed in relation to the space this colonial subject inhabits. For him, "the essence of spatial myths is difference – or to be more specific, geographically structured difference. They embody beliefs that revolve around imagined contrasts, between the 'here' and the 'there" (7).

Therefore, space is crucial for the arbitrary construction of the other, as this construction is established not only in relation to space, but because of the space in which the subject is located. Schick discusses the way that the stereotypes between “us” and “them” is also a construction of alterity (21), that is, the creation of real and imagined characteristics of a group is devised in relation to the space this group of subjects inhabit:

> The construction of identity, therefore, is contingent upon the positing of a negative identity, an “other” as the repository of opposites. Acknowledged qualities, whether real or imagined, are centered and taken as the norm; simultaneously, rejected qualities, whether real or imagined, are marginalized and exoticized. (Schick 22)

Whereas the literary production before the half of the twentieth century had problematic representations of the colonial subject, the discussion first presented by Said found fertile ground and, in the years following the process of decolonization, an increase in the production of intellectuals coming from the colonized areas was observed.

As a result, the new postcolonial voices have contributed to change hegemonic discourses through the process of writing, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin assert that: “it is through an appropriation of the power invested in writing that this discourse can take hold of the marginality imposed on it and make hybridity and syncreticity the source of literary and cultural redefinition” (77). Then, the subject who occupies the position of marginality, which Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define as “the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privilege centre, an 'Othering' directed by the imperial authority” (102), is able to redefine his/her representation as “Other” by embodying the condition of a hybrid subject.

The term hybridity, in turn, derives from biology and botany, meaning the mixture between two different species. Robert Young explains that hybridity was used in the

nineteenth century to describe a physiological phenomenon, while in the twentieth century it has been often used to refer to a cultural experience (*Colonial* 5). Besides, as Young points out, when we consider the origin of the term, it is necessary to clarify that it was at first mistakenly used, as it presupposed the existence of different races/species in the first place (9). Thus, when the term was first used, as Joel Kuortti observes, there was an implicit assumption that Europeans and the colonized subjects belonged to supposedly different races, as it is possible to assert from the quotation below:

> The hybrid is commonly thought to be a cross between two different species (botanical or animal), but owing to colonialist ideologies of race emphasizing the alleged purity of the white colonizers the terms were understood in a negative manner. (4)

Conversely, the term has been used in recent years with an inclusive meaning, that is, "to denote the syncretism and plurality of racialized identities" (Phoenix and Owen 75), contrary to a previous negative connotation that emphasized dichotomous relations in colonial times. It is important to bear in mind that although this prior concept of hybridity focused more on a racial notion of mixing, the contemporary use of the term concentrates more on its positive aspects: "[t]he positive feature of hybridity is that it invariably acknowledges that identity is constructed through a negotiation of difference, and that the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure" (Papastergiadis 170). Thus, the definition of hybridity encloses not only the notion of difference, but also that of construction of identitary affiliations. Hybrid subjects are the ones that although they adopt cultural characteristics of the place they live in, they are still often culturally connected to their homeland.

Lahiri's characters, mainly the ones born in the United States, are a fine representation

of the concept, as most of them are raised by Indian parents who try to maintain the Indian culture at home, but live outside the private space surrounded by a different culture. In *The Namesake*, for instance, it is possible to observe this blending of cultures when the Gangulis start celebrating holidays in the US: “For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswat” (*The Namesake* 64). Another fine example is Gogol's relationship with Moushumi and their consequent wedding which blends the two cultures. Although his mother acts as a matchmaker since she is the one who suggests that he should call his future wife, the relationship does not follow the Indian tradition because they date for some time before deciding to get married. Thus, it may seem arranged at first, but it is not something imposed like the customary Indian marriage; it is a compromise between Gogol and his wife.

Besides, it is important to highlight that the hybrid subject is often a product of colonialism, that is, a product of the foreign culture that was brought by the colonizer. Consequently, it is Homi Bhabha's definition of hybridity which better helps us understand this concept in the context in which Lahiri's novels are written. He states that,

> Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other “denied” knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rule of recognition. (162)

Although the term hybridity may occasionally have the negative connotation of a split subject who lives divided between two cultures, it symbolizes, according to Bhabha, an assertion of the colonial discourse in the dominant discourse. In this sense, it conveys the idea that the colonized may destabilize the colonizer discourse from within, considering that now

that this subject has a voice, he/she is not subjected to a representation that comes from outside. For this reason, it is possible to assure the importance of writers, such as Lahiri, who write about postcolonial subjects from a perspective other than that of the Western intellectual from the colonial times.

As Bhabha also argues, the space of intersection between cultures is primordial to form the hybrid subject for:

> it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence. And one last time, there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration. (9)

Bhabha's notion of identity construction for the immigrants, as well as Salman Rushdie's concept of "translated men" are also important to understand Lahiri's characters as these notions are related to the ways that the hybrid subject deals with his/her condition. Rushdie states that

> The word "translation" comes etymologically from the Latin for "bearing across." Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It's normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained. (17)

Lahiri's characters are always translating themselves: the first generation characters are often trying to hold on to their tradition. The second generation, in turn, translates themselves in an attempt to reconcile one culture with another. In *The Namesake,* Gogol's decision to change his name, an episode which will be discussed in Chapter Three, shows how his new name, Nikhil, allows him to alternate between Nikhil and Nick according to the place he is. Therefore, his new name fits his process of oscillating between the two ends of

his hybrid, hyphenated identity.

Therefore, an important aspect of all characters represented by Lahiri is that it is possible to observe the fluid process of their identity construction which is favored by the new space. Then, it is the diaspora space which is the triggering element of the transformations that most characters go through.

1.2 Diaspora and the Migrant Space

"Diaspora consciousness lives loss
and hope as a defining tension."
James Clifford ("Diasporas" 256)

"Home is where one dreams of the world."
Irvin Schick (26)

Diaspora is a term that was first used to characterize the movement of the Jewish people from Palestine to other countries. This migration movement was caused by the invasion of old Palestine by the Babylonians and thus forcing the Jewish people to move to other countries. This first movement was according to Steven Vertovec "associated with forced displacement, victimization, alienation, and loss" (2-3), and it is nowadays defined as the old diaspora which, according to Spivak, "were the results of religious oppression and war, of slavery and indenturing trade and conquest" ("Diasporas" 245).

The term new diaspora, as Spivak observes, has been used to define the movements

which started in the second half of the twentieth century because of the political and economic transformations that followed the end of colonialism and the advent of the transnational world. Similarly, Susan Friedman uses the term “new migration” to describe this movement post 1945. She claims that the narratives of the “new migration' show more fluidity of identity, more heterogeneity, more resistance to assimilation, more bilingualism and hybridity” (“The 'New Migration” 10). Although Spivak and Friedman use different terminology, for both critics it is a new phenomenon and the reasons which caused the movements are similar. Besides, it is also important to keep in mind the difference between diaspora and transnationalism as Jana Braziel and Anita Mannur point out:

> We differentiate diaspora from transnationalism, however, in that diaspora refers specifically to the movement – forced or voluntary – of people from one or more nation states to another. Transnationalism speaks to a larger, more impersonal forces – specifically those of globalization and global capitalism. (8)

Therefore, the term transnationalism reflects the fluidity of the global world. On the other hand, diaspora focuses more on the impact that the movement across nations has on the individual. In this research the term diaspora is used in the sense of the new diaspora, and its main characteristics, according to James Clifford, are “a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identification importantly defined by this relationship” (*Routes* 247).

The dispersion, mentioned by Clifford, resulted mainly from political and economic changes in the world after the World War II, and therefore, the movement of its diasporic subjects is usually a result of a desire for economic improvement, a pursuit for higher

education, or a way of escaping from persecution in the country of origin. Besides, when the term refers to the subjects of diaspora, it suggests that they have a double consciousness which, according to Vijay Agnew, arises from the fact that they are divided between the two spaces to which the subject is attached to, that is, his/her host country and the homeland (14). Besides, Agnew relates this double consciousness to the identity of the diasporic subject:

> The consciousness and identity of diasporic individuals may focus on their attachment to the symbols of their ethnicity, and they may continue to feel emotionally invested in the "homeland." Yet such attachments and sentiments are experienced simultaneously with the involvement and participation on the social, economic, cultural, and political allegiances to their homes in the diaspora. (14)

This attachment to the homeland seems to be the case of most of Lahiri's characters, mainly the first generation of immigrants, especially the women, for instance, as they try to continue the Indian tradition wearing their saris, cooking Indian food at home, and teaching their customs to their children. In contrast, they live in a different society which makes them experience difference or to perceive themselves as different. This contrast between cultures can be observed in the story "Hema and Kaushik," from *Unaccustomed Earth,* when Hema, born in the US of Indian parents, talks about her birthdays: "[a]s a child, I had always dreaded my birthdays, when a dozen girls would appear in the house, glimpsing the way we lived" (*Unaccustomed* 237). Thus, since childhood, she was already conscious that although she was born and lived in the United States, the culture she experiences in the private space is a different one. The same can be noticed in another passage when Hema talks about the difficulty of convincing her parents that she should have her own room as she was led to believe it was not normal for her to sleep in her parents' bed:

> My mother considered the idea of a child sleeping alone a cruel American practice … She told me that she had slept in the same bed as her parents until she was married and that was perfectly normal. But I knew that it was not normal, not what my friends at school did, and that they would ridicule me if they knew. (229)

The passage above also exemplifies Judith Butler's concept of subjectivity when she states that the individual needs the "other" in order to acknowledge his or her identity: "[t]rue subjectivities come to flourish only in communities that provide for reciprocal recognition, for we do not come to ourselves through work alone, but through the acknowledging look of the Other to confirm us" (*Subjects of Desire*, 58). Therefore, it is through an awareness which is based on the difference between the two cultures that Hema's identity is constructed.

However, as Smaro Kamboureli points out, the dynamics of identity reconfiguration in diaspora does not revolve only around the cultural differences between the two cultures, that is, the differences between the immigrant's culture and the culture of the country they immigrate to:

> Diaspora, and the cultural difference that it entails, cannot be studied simply in terms of Us and Them, in terms of sovereign positions and minority subjects, it must be examined within the web of complexities that inform ethnic subjectivity and its representation. (43-44)

Therefore, it is possible to observe the intricacy of the subject's identity construction in the diaspora space as this construction cannot be seen only in light of culture dichotomies, or more precisely, in simplistic oppositional difference, or referring to a cultural "purity" as Stuart Hall points out:

> the diaspora experience … is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the

> recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (244)

Consequently, identity construction should be seen as a dynamic and an always unfinished process, and it is possible to notice that the dynamics and fluidity of the construction process seems to be more clearly noted in the diaspora space as the recognition of difference is highlighted in the new country. Besides, as far as Lahiri's fiction is concerned, it is possible to assert that the identities of the diasporic subjects are, in Brah's words, "a combination of the local and the global" (191), and that the two localities, the homeland and the host country are important in the construction of the subjects' identities. Therefore, central to this argument is the debate about where home is for the diasporic subject.

According to Vijay Mishra when Indians mean home, they use the Hindi word *desh* "against which all the other lands are foreign" (2). For the Indians in the diaspora, India is always going to be seen as *desh*. This is true for most first generation characters who always refer to India as home. However, the same cannot be argued in relation to the second generation of characters who do not feel the same attachment. Gogol, who was born in the US and travels to India from time to time, realizes that his relation to India is different from that of his parents: "Gogol never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as American do, as India" (*The Namesake* 118).

Although the desire to return to the homeland is seen as one aspect of the diasporic movement, as noted by Clifford (*Routes* 247), Brah argues that "not all diasporas inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of 'origin'" (189). This wish to establish themselves permanently in the new country seems to happen to the majority of Lahiri's

characters. Although there are constant travels to the home country, the desire for a permanent return is never the narrative focus. Consequently, her characters, mainly those that belong to the first generation of immigrants, are more concerned with maintaining their customs and traditions from the homeland than, in fact, dreaming of the day of return. This fact is explained by James Clifford when he states that the South-Asian diaspora in not so much about establishing "roots in a specific place and a desire to return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations" *(Routes 249*). Accordingly, Amitav Ghosh argues that cultural traces such as language and religion, for instance, are visually absent in Indian diasporic subjects. He states that "the links between India and her diaspora are lived within the imagination" (76), an argument that is reinforced by Rushdie's claim that the India of the diasporic subjects are not actual communities, but imagined and created ones (10).

It is also important to keep in mind that the diasporic subjects usually keep a memory as well as some of the traditions of the place of origin. Nonetheless, the diaspora space, or the new place of location is most often seen as a place of dislocation, as it is explained by Vijay Agnew:

> The individual living in the diaspora experiences a dynamic tension every day between living "here" and remembering "there," between memories of places of origins and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home. (4)

This tension and feeling of not belonging seems, then, intrinsic to the subject of diaspora, and it can be observed in Lahiri's characters as their experiences in the new location are often related to the memories of their homeland, revealing the tension between the memory of a home country and its culture in contrast to the new place of residence.

Salman Rushdie gives an interesting insight on the role of memory as far as the

memory of the home country is concerned. He states:

> [we] are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we also must do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones ...Indias of the mind. (10)

When we consider the memory the subject has in relation to his homeland, it is necessary to acknowledge that his/her memory of the home country may not reflect something real, but that memories may be fictions created by the physical distance. In tune with these arguments, it is possible to observe that some of Lahiri's characters often have a romanticized view of India and that their views represent what Rushdie refers to as an "imaginary homeland," that is, a constructed idea created by their distance of their home country.

Benedict Anderson's concept of imaginary communities also contributes to our understanding of Lahiri's characters as he claims that all communities are imagined, that is, they are constructed by people who consider themselves part of a group without knowing or meeting most people of that group. Anderson states that "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6) and that they are "imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (7). Thus, it is possible to observe that the characters here analyzed are not only part of the community they left in India, but they also try to recreate in the new country an

imagined community. The difference is that the new community they create in the United States, when they choose to befriend people just because they share the same cultural background, is created through the role of memory.

It is also important to point out that in this context of diaspora, women usually play an important role, as they "comprise a growing segment of migrations in all regions and all types of migration" (Brah, 179). The number of women crossing borders may be related to Spivak's claim that most movements are determined by "the increasingly failure of a civil society in developing countries" ("Diasporas" 249). Therefore, the increasing number of women migrating since the second half of the twentieth century may be related, according to Spivak, to the deprivation of civil rights that were not granted to these women in their homeland. In the new country, they often assume roles which were often not common in the patriarchal societies they come from. For instance, they may become financially independent as, according to Brah, "[t]he emergent new international division of labor depends quite crucially upon women workers"(176). Besides, not only do they represent part of the workforce but, as Clifford notes, it is the woman who has the role of mediating the two worlds, of adapting their culture in the host land *(Routes* 259-60). Clifford claims the women experience in the diaspora space are "painful." This pain can be easily noted in some female characters in Lahiri's fiction, as they struggle to mediate between the two cultures and their new roles. However, as it will be discussed in Chapter Three, Lahiri also shows how painful the diasporic experience can be for the male characters.

1.3 Performing Gender

> "What this geopolitical space may be, as a local
> and transnational reality, is being both
> interrogate and reinitiated."
> Bhabha (6)

> "The bridge gathers as a passage that crosses."
> Martin Heidegger (153)

Sexual difference has traditionally been represented by binary opposition, that is, qualities were assigned to men and women because of biological differences. Gender, however, is a social and cultural construct thought in terms of what a certain society determines as being masculine or feminine. More important than that is the discussion brought mainly by feminist critics related to the different rights men and women have because of this supposed difference in sex and gender. Judith Gardiner explains the importance of the feminist movement in the second half of the twentieth century:

> varied theories developed to explain the causes of male dominance, to correct a erroneous assumption about both women and men... These theories charged that cultural ideologies favored men, that social institutions reflected these ideologies and men as a group benefited from the subordination of women as a group. (36)

The issue of difference culminated in the contemporary discussions on "identity politics" which have insisted on a different approach to feminism, questioning the

> predominantly White, middle-class, and heterosexual feminist agenda and

> raised the issue of a differentiated-identity politics, based on the contingent and diversified but no less decisive intersections of gender, class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality. (Krolokke 12-13)

Based on the necessity to deal with difference, contemporary feminist criticism "challenges the notion of 'universal womanhood' and embraces ambiguity, diversity, and multiplicity" (Krolokke 2), and therefore debated the notion that within the same gender category, there were differences in relation to other categories such as sexuality and ethnicity. Therefore, a poor black lesbian woman would have quite different concerns from a middle class heterosexual one.

Critics argue that gender has traditionally been perceived as a given, something fixed and natural. Simone de Beauvoir statement that "[o]ne is not born, but rather, becomes a woman" (249) illustrates, instead, that the construction of gender is a fluid process. Similarly, Judith Butler argues that gender is a representation when she states that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (*Gender Trouble* 179). Before Butler, Gayle Rubin had presented similar arguments when discussing the reasons for the domination of men over women. She says that gender "is a product of the social relations of sexuality" (40). Here again, it is emphasized the argument that gender cannot be seen as something naturally inherited, but that it is dependable of the social environment. Teresa de Lauretis contends that gender is not only a representation, but she focus on gender as a construction. She argues that:

> The sex-gender system, in short, is both a sociocultural construct and semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society. … The construction of gender is both the product and the

process of its representation. (5)

De Lauretis's understanding of gender is interesting because it restates that it is not something natural to the individual, but in fact, socially construed. Accordingly, it is possible to see through an analysis of Lahiri's characters how the renegotiation of gender roles in the diaspora space is affected by the experience of gender representation inherited from the Indian tradition, that is, gender is constructed differently in the Indian and American cultures, and it is precisely the awareness of this difference that allows the characters to examine and renegotiate their gender roles.

Furthermore, Butler introduces the concept of gender performance arguing, as de Lauretis does, against the fixed and dichotomized idea of femininity and masculinity:

> That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (*Gender Trouble* 180)

Butler's argument is innovative as she points out that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are arbitrary and part of a cultural performance and, that a "true gender identity" is not more than a fiction (*Gender Trouble*180). R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt also refuse the idea of a fixed conceptualization of gender and they also argue that the concept of masculinity is, like that of femininity, socially configured: "[m]asculinities are configuration of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" ("Hegemonic" 836). Accordingly, in Lahiri's works it is possible to see how the new space makes the reconfiguration of gender possible

not only for the female characters, but also for the male ones.

Therefore, a discussion about gender, as the one I intend to pursue, should not be focused on dichotomous positions, that is, on an opposition of male/female, but rather on other categories of analysis that take into consideration the complex articulation of gender and other constituents. Friedman advocates the importance of space when talking about contemporary feminism criticism:

> In an increasingly globalized and transnational context, feminism has become ever more acutely attuned to the meanings of borders as markers of positionality and situatedness. From an earlier emphasis on silence and invisibility, feminism has moved to a concern with location – the geopolitics of identity within differing communal spaces of being and becoming. (*Mappings* 3)

Susan Friedman, however, claims for another approach to feminism which she terms "locational feminism" as she calls for the necessity to take space and time into consideration:

> A locational approach to feminism incorporates diverse formations because its positional analysis requires a kind of geopolitical literacy built out of a recognition of how different times and places produce different and changing gender systems as these intersect with other different and changing societal stratifications and movements for social justice. (*Mappings* 5)

Locational feminism can then become an important tool in the study of diasporic subjects because it is precisely the diaspora space which enables the subjects to question and redefine their gender roles.

The importance of the category of space for the subjects of diaspora is also argued by Brah when she states that "diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and

dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes" (181). Besides, as Friedman points out, each different location brings to the foreground a different way of dealing with the many constituents that shape the subjects' identity (*Mappings* 23).

Along these lines, Friedman states that we should consider gender in relation to the space as well as in relation to the multiple constituents of identity, such as class, ethnicity, race, age, religion, and national origin (*Mappings* 72). Hence, gender should not be seen as the sole aspect of the subject identity, but rather, a different constituent of identity can be highlighted because of the space the subject now inhabits. For instance, the female characters living in the same community in India might not be oppressed because of ethnicity or class, but these same constituents of identity might be the source of oppression for them when they move to a different country.

Moreover, the migratory movements have made it possible for women to question their personal identities as "the movement of spatial dislocation becomes often a means of questioning the construct of gender identities" (Almeida, 323). This questioning of gender identities can be clearly observed in Lahiri's novels as the female characters whose stories are set in the United States, most of the time, confront the traditions of their cultural background in their new space, and consequently, renegotiate their gender identities. As Brah explains, "diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individuals and collective memories collide and reconfigure" (193). Thus, it is in the diaspora space that the subjects of diaspora see the possibility of questioning and reconstructing their identities.

Along these lines, Irvin Schick discusses the relation of identity construction and place when he states that "place is a fundamental element in the existence and hence of

identity; the self unfolds in space, and therefore bears the indelible traces of the places it calls its 'here" (23). Consequently, this definition of identity adds to the one of hybridity. As it was discussed in the first part of this chapter, the diasporic subject is usually divided between two places and, taking Schick's statement that the "construction of identity is at the same time the construction of a network of places" (24), it is possible to say that the identity of the diasporic subject is affected by the multiple places he/she is connected with. Besides, Schick also states that space is affected by the subject in the same way that the subject is affected by its location (5). Consequently, the plurality of places and belongings affect the fluid process of identity construction as it is also directly affected by this space.

Accordingly, Lahiri's characters have to be considered in relation to the space they inhabit as their conflicts are a reflection of the contradictions they face because of the new place they live in. Besides, it is also important to keep in mind that in the specific case of female characters, they often question their gender roles in the new space where it is possible for them not only to voice their concerns, but also to go against the patriarchal constrains of the Indian culture. Additionally, as Friedman argues, "identity depends upon a point of reference; as that points moves nomadically, so do the contours of identity, particularly, as they relate to the structures of power" (*Mappings* 22). Thus, the distance from their traditional culture makes it possible for them to question certain gender roles.

The distance from the Indian culture, and the new culture they are in contact in the United Sates will force men to also review some of their gender roles. The changes in the roles performed by women will cause changes in the roles performed by men. Connell and Messerschmidt contend that "[g]ender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity" and that "gender hierarchies are also affected by new configurations of women's

identity and practice" ("Hegemonic" 848).

It is possible to say that traditional masculine roles are also subjected to reconfiguration in the diaspora space as they will be directly affected by women's new roles and practices. Besides, the diaspora space produces different kinds of concerns regarding gender roles for both men and women, and for that reason, these roles have to be thought of considering the space in which these roles clash and reconfigure themselves. Consequently, Lahiri's characters who live in the diaspora space have different concerns from those living in India since they are in a constant renegotiation of their gender roles because of the contact between the two cultures they are surrounded by, the public one which is the US society, and the private one, which is the Indian culture they often cultivate at home.

As a result, the borders between genders have to be contextualized in the new diaspora space. When we think of Lahiri's characters, of Indian immigrants and their second generation born in the United States, it is possible to observe that the bridge that has always existed between male and female characters is repeatedly crossed. In doing so, her work seems to be redefining the way South-Asian male characters are represented in fiction.

Time also plays an important role, as gender issues involving first generation immigrants might be rather different from those which the second generation of immigrants face. This difference may be related to the fact that first generation immigrants often have stronger connections and memories of their homeland than those of second generation. As Brah explains,

> within each generation the experiences of men and women will also be differently shaped by gender relations. The reconfigurations of these social relations will not be a matter of direct superimposition of patriarchal forms deriving from the country of emigration over those that obtain in the country to

> which migration has occurred. Rather, both elements will undergo transformations as they articulate in and through specific policies, institutions and modes of signification. (190)

For this reason, the differences between first and second generation are central to this research as the dislocation in space and time seems to promote the proximity of male and female characters. The proximity of male and female characters observed in Lahiri's fiction differs from the way most South Asian writers portray their characters, which is by giving voice to female characters to show the consequences of the dislocation movement and their struggles with the gender roles they have been assigned (Zare 99-100). The male perspective is chosen to narrate several of the stories and the novel, *The Namesake,* is written largely from the point of view of a male character. Besides, in *Unaccustomed Earth*, for instance, the same story is told, partly from the point of view of a woman, Hema, and partly from the point of view of a man, Kaushik. By voicing also the concerns of her male characters, Lahiri's distances the representation of her characters from a dichotomous perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

Interpreters of Culture

"Diasporic experiences are always gendered."

James Clifford (*Routes* 258)

In this chapter I compare and contrast the female characters of first and second generation of immigrants in Lahiri's works.

Here it is important to consider, as Sneja Gunew argues, that it is mostly the woman who is responsible for passing on the customs and traditions to their children (33). This fact can be observed in Lahiri's works; the women are the ones who usually stay at home with their children and have the responsibility to teach the language, the values, and their customs. Therefore, it is important to investigate how they maintain their culture in the host country, and if the second generation of women follow the same tradition in relation to their children. However, as it was discussed before, Clifford states that it is also the women who will be responsible for mediating between the two different cultures ("Diasporas" 314). Thus, the women are responsible for both maintaining the home culture and mediating between their culture and the host culture. In view of these arguments, I also want to investigate how this apparently ambiguous situation will affect the first and second generation of women immigrants.

2.1 -Torn Between Two Cultures

"The lived experiences of diasporic
women thus involve painful
difficulty on mediating worlds."
James Clifford ("Diasporas" 314)

Ashima Ganguli, the main female character from *The Namesake*, is Lahiri's best representation of how first generation women suffer to mediate and conciliate between the home and the host country cultures. Born in India, she moved to the US after getting married to Ashoke Ganguli, who was already living in the US, and had gone to India only to find himself a wife.

Because Ashima's and Ashoke's marriage is an arranged one, they only speak to each other after they had actually been married. Their contact before the wedding ceremony happens when Ashoke goes to her house in order to see her so as to decide upon the union. When Ashima arrives, her parents are talking to his parents telling them how gifted their daughter is. Before entering the room, she sees his shoes and is tempted to try them on:

> Ashima, unable to resist a sudden and overwhelming urge, stepped into the shoes at her feet. Lingering sweat from the owner's feet mingled with hers, causing her heart to race; it was the closest thing she had ever experienced to the touch of a man. (Lahiri, *The Namesake* 8)

Felling Ashoke's sweat is the closest she has always been to a man that is not part of her family. This quotation shows the commitment to a tradition, as she is raised to accept an

arranged marriage to someone chosen by her parents and with whom she will only have a closer contact than the one mentioned with his shoes after they are actually married.

After the wedding they move to the United States where her husband has already been living as he is a graduate student in a university in Boston. So, for Ashima she is not only leaving her parents' house with a man she does not really know, but she is also moving to a foreign place. Therefore, her difficulty in adapting to the new country also lies in the fact that she is moving thousands of miles away from her parents, from everything that feels familiar to her in order to construct a family in a place that nothing feels usual to her.

Moving to the new country does not make a difference for her as far as the way she has to behave towards her husband. The home culture and her role as a wife are still unquestionable to her. One example of that is the way she addresses her husband following the Bengali custom:

> When she calls out to Ashoke, she doesn't say his name. Ashima never thinks of her husband's name when she thinks of her husband, even though she knows perfectly well what it is. She had adopted his surname but refuses, for propriety's sake to utter his first. It's not the kind of thing Bengali wives do. Like a kiss or a caress in a Hindi movie, a husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over. (2)

The relationship, the intimacy and the way she should relate to him is still guided by the customs she learned from her home culture. Soon after, Ashima is pregnant and she craves for a specific Indian dish that not only is she unable to buy, but she cannot find the right ingredients to make it. Then, she has to use similar ingredients in order to get a flavor that is close enough to the one she remembers:

> combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a

> bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, then slices of green chili pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix. Ashima has been consuming this concoction throughout her pregnancy, a humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms. (1)

By doing this adapted recipe, Ashima is making a cultural translation as she is using American ingredients to reach a similar flavor of the Indian dish she craves for. The food is the first example of the adaptations Ashima will have to make in the new country. She realizes that she cannot have what she was used to in the past, but she does not want to assimilate the habits of the new country completely. Therefore she translates her home culture in the surrounding alien one, trying to perpetuate her culture so as to bring a feeling of normality to her life.

The pregnancy, however, accentuates her fears and afflictions, and it seems that it is at this time she feels how much the decision to move to another country has affected her life:

> But nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all …. she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare. (5-6)

The absence of her family and the loneliness she feels in the United States makes her feel that "the baby's birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true" (24-25). Later on, Ashima realizes that her pregnancy is a metaphor for her immigrant condition as nothing will ever feel normal to her:

> For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of a lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been

> ordinary life, only to discover that the previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated, more demanding. (49-50)

Ashima's comparison of being a foreigner and being pregnant alludes to Julia Kristeva's statement about pregnancy: "[p]regnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and an other, of nature and consciousness of physiology and speech" (31). Also according to Kristeva, pregnancy is a "fundamental challenge to identity" (31) and therefore is closely related to Ashima's feeling of not belonging to her place of residence that also challenges her identity. Besides, Ashima's comparison of her past, "what had once been ordinary life" (49), to her life in the diaspora, can also be compared to the transformations happening to her own body, and therefore it can also be related to her condition as a diasporic subject. According to Iris Young, "[p]regnant existence entails … a unique temporality of process and growth in which the woman can experience herself as split between past and future" (46). In this sense, Ashima may then feel she is between her past, in India, and the challenges she faces in the United States, a process she considers a "life long pregnancy" (49).

Besides, Ashima considers being in the new country "a constant burden" (49), which characterizes the feeling of a first generation woman who, as Clifford states, has the painful role of mediating the two different customs (*Routes* 259-60). Ashima feels the responsibility of trying to raise a family according to the Indian culture, but the foreign land only makes it more demanding as she cannot rely on her surroundings or anyone else for help, as she knows no one in the new country. According to Daniela Silva, by trying to maintain the Indian culture at home, she is reproducing a patriarchal system when she tries "to play the role of the ideal Indian housewife and mother, the ones responsible for keeping the order ... to re-create

India in the space of home" (64). Ashima's attempt to recreate India in the private space is felt as something both demanding and unsuccessful as there is always something missing in her life for nothing feels like life in India. This feeling will continue during the time she spends in the US.

The first cultural adversity Ashima and Ashoke face in the US is when their first son is born and they are to leave the hospital. As it is a custom for Bengalis, the baby is supposed to have both a public/good name and a private/pet name. However, the letter from Ashima's grandmother, who traditionally has the honor to give their son his good name, does not arrive from India in time. When they are to leave the hospital with the baby, they discover that, differently from India, they cannot leave without his birth certificate, which requires a name. Thus, they see themselves forced to choose the baby's name. They decide to choose a pet name to put on the certificate so that they could wait for the letter which would bring the official name. Ashoke, then, remembers the train accident he had when he was still living in India. At the moment of the accident he was still awake, reading his favorite author, the Russian Nikolai Gogol, a fact which he claims had saved his life, as he ponders:

> The door shuts, which is when, with a slight quiver of recognition, as if he'd known it all along, the perfect pet name for his son occurs to Ashoke. He remembers the page crumpled tightly in his fingers, the sudden shock of the lantern's glare in his eyes. But for the first time he thinks of the moment not with terror, but with gratitude. (28)

Because of this meaningful event in his life, Ashoke decides to call the baby Gogol, a name which Ashima immediately approves as she is aware "that the name stands not only for her son's life, but her husband's" (28). They leave the hospital and wait for the letter which never arrives. Meanwhile, Ashima's grandmother falls ill and is unable to send another name

for the boy. However, the Gangulis only have to seriously think about Gogol's good name when he is about to enter kindergarten. At this time, Ashoke considers he has found the perfect name, Nikhil, as it has a meaning in Bengali, “he who is entire, encompassing all” (56), and it also resembles Nikolai, the first name of the Russian writer. However, Gogol does not want to be called by a different name and the principal decides to cross it from the records in the kindergarten.

As a consequence of this episode, Ashoke and Ashima have a feeling that they have failed to follow an important tradition of their culture. For them, the refusal of the hospital to let them leave without a proper name for their son, the fact that their son's pet name turns into a good name, as well as the decision of the school to ignore their wish to call their son Nikhil are examples that show them that, in the new country, they are unable to maintain some of their most meaningful cultural traditions. As a result, when their second child is born, they decide that she will only have her good name to avoid the trouble they had with Gogol: “[f]or their daughter, good name and pet name are one and the same: Sonali, meaning 'she who is golden'” (62). However, her name gradually undergoes changes and they soon start calling her Sonia: “at home they begin to call her Sonu, then Sona, and finally Sonia. Sonia makes her a citizen of the world” (62).

Although the incident with the name makes them conscious that it will not be possible to maintain their culture the way they had imagined, Ashima does all she can to teach Gogol the Indian culture:

> She teaches him to memorize a four-line children's poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities adorning the ten-handed goddess Durga during purjo … Every afternoon Ashima sleeps, but before nodding off she switches on the television to Channel Z, and tells Gogol to watch *Sesame Street* and *The*

> *Electric Company,* in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school. (54)

Although she teaches him the language and religion, she cannot stop Gogol from learning the American culture on TV and in nursery school. She knows it cannot happen otherwise and, therefore, she tries at least to preserve her culture at home. Although Ashima continues to cook elaborated Indian meals at home, as time passes she will start making concessions to her two children: "[i]n the supermarket they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, but not they, consume … At his insistence, she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat" (65). In like manner, slowly Ashima and her husband realize that their efforts to teach the culture and language are also not reaching the results they expected:

> Still they do what they can. They make a point on driving into Cambridge when the Apú Trilogy plays … when Gogol is in the third grade, they send him to Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday... For when Ashima and Ashoke close their eyes it never fails to unsettle them that their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them, in accents they are accustomed not to trust. (65)

Amit Saha in his analysis of Ashima and Ashoke believes they suppress their ethnicity so as to assimilate and be successful in the new country (4-5). He observes that "to a casual observer, the Gangulis … appear no different from their neighbors … they purchase a barbecue for tandoori on the porch in summer... For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than then worship of Durga and Saraswatti" (64), Saha focuses his analysis on the elements of the American culture present in the passage. However, I do not

see it as a wish to assimilate in order to become successful. Ashima and Ashoke do not seem to do it to placate their neighbors' prejudice, or to feel similar to their neighbors, but to please their children. Besides, the elements of the American and Indian culture are always present. For instance, the barbecue grill in the porch is there to cook a traditional Indian dish, and they do not stop celebrating the Indian holidays in favor of the ones celebrated in the United States. Therefore, I agree with Natalie Friedman when she analyzes Lahiri's characters as moving beyond the stereotypical Indian immigrant searching for the American Dream:

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

Eventually, Ashima also feels connected to the new country. Once she forgets a bag full of gifts she has just bought to give to relatives in India and, the next morning Ashoke is able to find it at the 'lost and found': “Somehow, this small miracle causes Ashima to feel connected to Cambridge in a way she has not previously thought possible, affiliated with its exceptions as well as its rules” (42-43). Because such situation seems not to be very likely to happen in India, Ashima feels somehow connected to her new city.

However, no matter how well adapted she becomes to the US, it is clear that it will never feel like home for Ashima. When her children grow up and Gogol is at university in New Haven, Ashima is unable to understand how her son used the word home to refer to the city that he moved to after living there for such a short period: “Ashima is outraged by the remark, dwelling on it all day. 'Only three months, and listen to you,' she says, telling him that after twenty years in America, she still cannot bring herself to refer to Pemberton Road

as home" (108). This passage raises an important issue because even after living longer in the US than in India, Ashima still thinks of India as home because the time she spends in the host country does not lessen her connection to India. She has no doubt about where she belongs to, even if an eventual return only seems possible for her when Ashoke retires.

When Ashoke accepts a fellowship to teach in an university outside Cleveland, Ashima decides to stay at home alone "pointing out that there would be nothing for her to do in Ohio for nine months" (144). Years before, there would be no doubt of Ashima going with her husband as she has done other times before. However, for the first time in her life, Ashima has a part-time job at the local library, and because of that she decides to stay. Her decision is a surprise to everyone as it indicates that she is doing something for her own sake. She is finally free to do things differently as she does not have to fill certain roles: "[s]he has time to do things like this now that she is alone. Now that there is no one to feed or entertain or talk to for weeks at a time" (161).

Accordingly, it is possible to see that her husband's absence also changes the way she deals with the housework. When she is alone "she does the laundry once a month. She no longer dusts, or notices dust, for that matter" (162). Conversely, when he comes for the weekend, "she shops and cooks as she used to" (163). Therefore, the routine she has maintained all her life, all the cleaning and cooking, does not seem to matter when she is alone. It may be argued that it is a duty that she is excused from performing when she is not adopting the role of a wife or a mother.

Another significant change in her life is that, during the time she has lived in America, she has befriended people essentially because they shared the same ethnic background, and now that she is older, she has made her first friends who are not from India:

> She is friendly with the other women who work at the library, most of them

> also with grown up children. A number of them live alone, as Ashima does now, because they are divorced. They are the first American friends she has made in her life. Over tea in the staff room, they gossip about the patrons, about the perils of dating in middle age. On occasion she has her library friends over to the house for lunch. (162-63)

Ashima only had Indian friends during her life abroad and the fact that she now feels free to befriend them shows that she has not remained the same. After her husband dies, she decides to divide her time between India and America as "[t]rue to her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (276). Her name, which means being limitless, without boundaries[2], is not only meaningful now as she will divide her time between India and the United States, but it also tells a lot about the time she has lived in the United States with her husband. During this time, it is possible to say that, although there is a geographical distance separating her from where she considers home, she is constantly crossing borders, approximating, through her memory and the maintenance of her customs, the two countries. Consequently, she lives without borders, between worlds, she mediates traditions throughout her life in the diaspora.

Aparna, who is one of the main characters from "Hell-Heaven" from *Unaccustomed Earth,* was also born in India and, after an arranged marriage she moved with her husband, Shyamal, out of India, just like Ashima. They first go to Berlin, where they had their daughter Usha, and later to the United States when Usha was only three. Aparna's story is narrated by her daughter when she is already an adult. Therefore, the story is not only told by her daughter's perspective, but it also relies on the memories she has from that time. Although Aparna does not have a voice in the narrative, it is interesting to investigate how her daughter perceives her mother's struggle between the two cultures. Besides, it is also possible to

2 The meaning of Ashima's name given here is the common one in Hindi.

perceive Usha's narrative as a way of understanding her past and the ways it affected her own identity construction. Anh Hua states that "[m]emory does not revive the past but constructs it" (198). By remembering and telling her mother's story may, thus, be seen as a form Usha finds of revisiting her past in order to understand her present condition as an adult second generation woman.

Usha starts her narrative showing how lonely her mother is as her father's job as a researcher keeps him away from home all day long. Aparna's loneliness in the new country is shown by her constant need to get out of the house after spending the day alone: "I would return from school and find my mother with her purse in her lap and her trench coat on, desperate to escape the apartment" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 63).

Accustomed to be approached by other Bengalis on the street, it is the approximation of a Bengali man, Pranab Chakraborty, one afternoon that allows the reader to see Aparna's view on Indian and American culture. As he mentions that he has not had a proper Indian meal in the two months he has been living in Cambridge, Aparna invites him to her house and feeds him with the leftovers of the day before, as she considers his situation unacceptable. Soon, Usha is told to address him as Pranab Kaku as if he were her father's young brother. Thus, Aparna and Pranab's relationship starts on the basis of two things that are very important for the first generation characters: their ethnic background and the food. Like Ashima, Aparna also relates to people because of their ethnicity as this seems to be reason enough for them to believe they have several points in common. Both women usually cook only Indian food at home, and it is also around elaborated meals that they gather family and friends. According to Anita Mannur, cooking may be seen as a tentative to hold on to "what is left of a past from which one is spatially and temporally displaced" (12). The food is, then, an important element of the Indian culture that they both try to perpetuate in the new country

and it is through food that they try to create an Indian community around them.

It is during the dinners cooked by Aparna that her relationship with Pranab develops. His visits then become a routine and Usha notices the first change in Aparna:

> Now I would find her in the kitchen, rolling out dough for luchis, which she normally made only on Sundays for my father and me … I did not know, back then that Pranab Kaku's visits were what my mother looked forward to all day, that she changed into a new sari and combed her hair in the anticipation of his arrival. (63)

The visits, however, are always in the presence of Usha as it would be inappropriate for Aparna to receive him alone (64). Usha soon realizes that her mother has much more in common with Pranab than with her own father, who apparently has gotten married only "to placate his parents" (65). His lack of interest in the marriage, according to Usha, is responsible not only for her father's acceptance of Pranab's presence in the house, but also for his feelings of relief in face of the effects Pranab has on his wife:

> One might think that he would have felt slightly jealous, or at the very least suspicious, about the regularity of Pranab Kaku's visits and the effects they had on my mother's behavior and mood. But my guess is that my father was grateful to Pranab Kaku for the companionship he provided, freed from the sense of responsibility he must have felt for forcing her to leave India, and relieved, perhaps, to see my mother happy for a change. (66)

Although her enthusiasm suggests to Usha that Aparna was slowly falling in love with Pranab, she keeps her feelings to herself as nothing in the plot suggests that she ever considers divorcing her husband despite the non existence of affection between the two. The above passage also shows their view on arranged marriage, as it seems that for both Shyamal

and Aparna, it is a tradition that is too strong to be broken even if they live so far from home.

Aparna's affection does not seem to be shared in the same way by Pranab who “wooed her as no other man had, with the innocent affection of a brother-in-law” (67), and soon Pranab starts dating an American woman, Deborah, and when she comes to dinner for the first time Usha asks her mother if she should also address her as a relative. Aparna's answer shows her view on their relationship: “what's the point?', my mother said, looking back at me sharply. 'In a few weeks, the fun will be over and she'll leave him” (68). It is interesting to observe that, in Aparna's opinion, it is Deborah who will end the relationship, assuming that Americans date only “for fun” and not considering the same behavior possible for Pranab.

Usha also narrates that, for Aparna, Deborah is also the one to blame for their non-conventional dating according to Indian standards:

> Sometimes they ended up feeding each other, allowing their fingers to linger in each other's mouth, causing my parents to look down at their plates and wait for the moment to pass. At larger gatherings they kissed and held hand in front of everyone, and when they were out of earshot, my mother would talk of the other Bengali women. 'He used to be so different. I don't understand how a person can change so suddenly. It's just hell-heaven, the difference,' she would say. (68-69)

The unity of customs of their group of friends, which is formed mostly by people who share the same ethnic background, is disrupted by Deborah's presence. Their intimacy in front of others shows how Pranab, in Aparna's opinion, has changed since his relationship with Deborah started. When they decide to get married, Pranab's parents are so outraged by the wedding that they call Shyamal and Aparna to say that if he marries a woman that is not from India, they “would no longer acknowledge him as a son” (71). Besides, Pranab's mother tries

to blame the situation on Aparna saying that she had allowed it to happen, and that his future wife was already chosen and that he had left India “with the understanding that he'd go back after he had finished his studies to marry this girl” (71). Pranab's mother's decision to blame Aparna might be explained following Gunew's observations that it is often the woman who is responsible to keep the traditions (33). Thus, for Pranab's mother, Aparna is the one responsible for keeping that tradition and she failed for not being able to make him change his decision to marry Deborah and not the Indian woman his parents had chosen for him.

Aparna believes that the wedding is not going to last as she is sure that Deborah “will leave him” (73). After the wedding, the two families grow apart. Again, for the Bengali's friends, Deborah is the one to be blamed:

> Their absences were attributed, by my parents and their circle, to Deborah, and it was universally agreed that she had stripped Pranab Kaku not only of his origins but of his independence. She was the enemy, he was her prey, and their example was evoked as a warning, and a vindication, that mixed marriages were a doomed enterprise. (75)

However, after being together for years and having two daughters, it is Pranab that decides to divorce Deborah because he falls in love with a Bengali woman. Although Aparna has always blamed Deborah in advance for all Pranab actions which were not in accordance with the Indian culture, it is to Deborah who she is somehow linked in the end of the story, as both their “hearts had been broken by the same man” (81). This change is not the only one observed in Aparna, as “[a]fter years of being idle, she decided, when she turned fifty, to get a degree in library science at a nearby university” (82). This episode presents perhaps the most significant change as it might indicate that she is finally not so strict about her role as an Indian wife and mother who should stay at home caring for the house and her husband, and

being in charge of keeping the traditions of their home country.

It is, then, possible to see that the geographical distance does not greatly affect the connection Aparna and Ashima have to the Indian culture, at least, not during the first years they spend in the United States. They both try to recreate home in the new country by befriending people because of their ethnic background, cooking Indian food at home, teaching their children their language and behaving, as wives and mothers, as the exact way it is expected from them. Besides, they act towards the houses and their husbands, in similar fashion with Huma's mother from "Unaccustomed Earth" does, keeping everything in order "as if to satisfy a mother-in-law's fastidious eye" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 22).

Besides, both Aparna and Ashima continue to wear the traditional Indian saris and the little red kumkum painted sign in their parted hair that a married woman must show in India. They do not challenge the roles they were assigned and trained to perform during their childhood. They seem to accept without questioning that it is their husband's duty to provide financially for the family, while they should stay at home and take care of the children and the household. During the time their children are growing up, they both make exceptions in the way they think they should raise their children and, thus, allowing them to behave differently from what they had previously considered as the usual in Indian tradition. While Ashima cooks American dinners to her children every now and then to please them, Aparna cannot avoid Usha's relationship with Deborah.

A significant change is observed in the two women when their children are already grown up and living away from home. When Ashima decides not to follow her husband so as not to quit her work in the library, and when Aparna decides to get a degree from a local university, they seem to assume roles which are not demanded, and which they assume for their own sake.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that, up to the time their children start introducing new customs in their houses, they are both very strict to the Indian traditions. They do not question their gender roles in the new country as they were raised to accept them. Maybe because they befriend mostly people from India, they are constantly reassured of their traditional roles as wives and mothers. However, after years living in another culture, it is possible to see some changes in both women which show that they have started considering their own necessities.

2.2 Double Belonging

> "Hybridity thus makes difference into sameness, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different."
>
> Robert Young (*Colonial 24-25*)

Usha, Aparna and Shyamal's daughter from "Hell-Heaven," was not born in the US, but moved to Cambridge at the age of three. Although she is educated at home according to the Indian traditions, the diaspora space she is inserted into makes it possible for her to question and transgress the traditions she is supposed to carry on.

The first significant change is observed in the language she feels comfortable to express herself. When she meets Deborah, Pranab's girlfriend, she compares the English and

the Bengali she speaks: “Deborah and I spoke freely in English, a language in which, by that age, I expressed myself more easily than Bengali, which I was required to speak at home” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 69). The language as well as the other things she has to do because of her ethnicity is seen by Usha as a demanding task, a fact which can be observed when she compares herself to Pranab Kaku and Deborah's daughters: “They were not taken to Calcutta every summer, they did not have parents who were clinging to another way of life and exhorting their children to do the same. Because of Deborah, they were exempt from all that, and for this reason I envied them” (75). It seems that her parents' lifestyle is meaningless to her, something that she would rather avoid if she could. Shivangi Srivastva analyzes Usha's identification with Deborah and relates it to the distance that slowly grows between her and her mother: “[“Hell-Heaven”] gives vent to schism that has been developing between these [first and second] generations. Usha's increasing fondness for Deborah over her mother is suggestive of her adherence to the mainstream culture” (3). Although Srivastva's statement may be true in relation to Usha, as it is through her relationship with Deborah that she starts choosing her affiliations and acknowledging her identifications, the same cannot be said of other second generation characters, like the ones which are going to be analyzed in this chapter, as my understanding is that they are represented as hybrid subjects with a sense of double belonging.

The Bengali dress code is also another element that makes Usha consider her affiliations. When she goes with her parents to a party at Pranab's house, her mother makes her wear a shalwar kameez, a traditional Indian attire that is a visible mark of her family's cultural tradition. When she arrives at the party she knows she will stand out from the other guests: “I knew they assumed, from my clothing, that I had more in common with other Bengalis than with them” (78). Her words imply that her clothes do not clearly represent her

cultural affiliation, and that she probably feels that she has more things in common with the other guests than with her own parents. Besides, when Deborah invites her for a walk on the beach and she declines because she thinks she is not dressed appropriately, Deborah offers her clothes, and when Usha goes downstairs wearing jeans, a sweater and sneakers, she considers: "[a]s I walked back downstairs, emboldened by this information, in the jeans I'd had to roll up and in which I felt finally like myself" (80). This last sentence reinforces the idea that, at that age, she feels more comfortable when she is culturally and visibly marked as American.

Because her mother forbids her from dating and attending American parties with her friends, when Usha becomes a teenager, she starts lying to her mother in order to do the same things her American friends do. Usha also starts rejecting her mother's lifestyle and the roles she has assumed in life: "I began to pity my mother; the older I got, the more I saw what a desolated life she led. She had never worked, and during the day she watched soap operas to pass the time. Her only job, every day, was to clean and cook for my father and me" (76). It is only in adulthood that they accept each other because her mother "had also accepted the fact that [Usha] was not only her daughter but a child of America as well" (81-82).

Other changes can also be noticed in other women characters of second generation. Hema from "Hema and Kaushik," for instance, was born in the US and, as a first person narrator, we can only glimpse aspects of her life that are related to Kaushik, the son of her parents' friends from Calcutta she first met as a child. Hema's first memory of Kaushik is at the age of six and by that age she feels she is different from him because of her birthplace: "I did not know what to make of you. Because you lived in India, I associated you more with my parents than with me" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 237). At this time, Kaushik is thirteen, but because he comes from Calcutta, she associates him with her parents' friends who all come

from India. At the age of six, already with American friends, she considers the space where they had been living before they met an important element in establishing differences and similarities.

As an adult, Hema dates a married man, Julian, for years with the promise that he will leave his family one day and be with her (295). After realizing that it will not happen, she decides to accept her parents' offer to have an arranged date: “They had asked Hema if he might call her, and finally, after years of refusing similar requests, after years of believing that Julian would leave his wife, she's agreed” (297). However, it is not only the disillusion with Julian that makes her agree to have an arranged date with Navin, but also the loneliness that she feels in her adult life:

> It was her inability, ultimately, to approach middle age without a husband, without children, with her parents living now on the other side of the world, and yet to own a house and shovel the driveway when it snowed and pay her mortgage bill when it came – though she had proven to herself, to her parents, to everyone, that she was capable of all of those things - it was her unwillingness to abide that life indefinitely that led her to Navin. (298)

Therefore, after proving to everyone how independent she is, she chooses to start dating Navin, a first generation immigrant that had left India to get his PhD (293). Although Navin “admitted to her that he'd had lovers in the past” he has only kissed her goodnight once as “he was old-fashionable when it came to a future wife” (297). Despite being unaccustomed to the old-fashionable Indian way of dating, Hema is conscious of the consequences of her decision:

> From the beginning it was assumed that as long as she and Navin were attracted to each other, as long as they got along, they would marry. And after

> years of uncertainty with Julian, Hema found this very certainty, an attitude to love she had scorned in the past, liberating, with the power to seduce her just as Julian once had. (298)

It is important to observe that Hema, differently from her mother, chooses to have an arranged marriage. In this sense, she is not doing it because the tradition tells her to or because she consents to a situation that she was raised to accept. Hema has the power to decide, a fact which makes her decision different from that of the other women characters of first generation from Lahiri's fiction because with the latter, whose weddings take place in India, the final decision about whom they are going to be married comes from the parents and the husband to be. Besides, also different from what happened to her mother, for her, accepting to go on a date with Navin does not necessarily mean she has to marry him because she can choose not to as it is possible to infer from the passage above.

After deciding to marry Navin, she goes to Rome for a few weeks before going to Calcutta to get married. It is in Rome that she meets Kaushik again. They are both invited to a lunch, and Kaushik approaches her on the street offering to help as she is looking at a map: “The woman looked up, confused, and he realized ... that she was not Italian. That in fact she was Indian. That he needn't have used the polite form in addressing her, that her face was one he'd known” (310). Actually, it is his familiarity that draws Hema to him: “Their parents had liked one another only for the sake of their origins, for the sake of a time and place to which they'd lost access. Hema had never been drawn to a person for that reason, until now” (315).

Although it seems that Hema and Kaushik are fast falling in love, Hema remains careful, mostly because of what she had learned with Julian: “Even the fact that Kaushik had to wear a condom helped to keep him in his place, reminding her, whenever he paused to rip open the little packet, that in spite of what they were about to do, they would remain

separate" (318). When Hema is about to travel to Calcutta, Kaushik asks her not to marry Navin and to go with him to Hong Kong where he is about to move in order to start a new career. She is flattered but she considers:

> She explained her reasons that had nothing to do with Navin. She told Kaushik she was not able to give up her life, not able to follow him that way. And that she didn't expect it of him. She said she didn't want to try to change him, didn't want to be accused, one day, of pinning him down. (322)

When Hema decides to go on with the arranged marriage even after falling in love with Kaushik, she is in fact deciding not to do as her mother, who gave everything up to follow a husband, did. She has a career and Navin is the one moving so that Hema does not have to give up her plans.

Ruma, one of the focalized characters in "Unaccustomed Earth" is also a second generation woman, but because of her mother's premature death, she feels nostalgic about her Indian heritage. As a child she believes that she had followed the traditions taught by her mother because she believes that she was careful not to become an American (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 23). However, the adult Ruma steadily approximates herself to the customs her parents tried to protect her from, and an important rupture happens when Ruma decides to marry Adam, a man who does not belong to the same tradition as her parents do. Her mother does everything to stop her "saying that he would divorce her, that in the end he would want an American girl" (26). Besides, her mother would always point out that marrying an American meant rejecting her own culture: "you are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian, that is the bottom line" (26). Instead of rejection, the marriage is a sign of Ruma's double belonging, seeing that she is not able to reject the influences the space where she lives has over her. When she has a son, Akash, she feels she is not able to maintain all the traditions

she was taught:

> After he started talking in full sentences English had taken over, and she lacked the discipline to stick to Bengali. Besides, it was one thing to coo at him in Bengali, to point to this or that and tell him the corresponding words. But it was another to be authoritative; Bengali had never been a language she felt like an adult. Her own Bengali was slipping from her. (12)

This passage can be compared to the one Ruma says that as a child she tried not to become an American girl. During childhood, under the strict control of her parents, she saw herself as more Indian than American. But during adulthood, with aspects of the foreign culture already incorporated to her life, she does not consider Bengali, the language that her mother made sure to teach her when she was a child, as part of her adult life. However, it is important to notice that she gave her son an Indian name and, although she believes she has failed teaching him the language, she at least attempted to do so.

Another important change in Ruma's life also happens after Akash is born as she decides to stop working full time in order to spend more time with her son. After her mother's death, she decides to quit her job at a law firm and dedicate herself entirely to her family: "[g]rowing up, her mother's example – moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household – had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet, this was Ruma's life now" (11). Like Hema who decided to have an arranged marriage, the same happens to Ruma who is also the one making the decision not to work and to take care of her family. The fact that both Hema and Ruma have the power to decide whether or not to follow the tradition makes them different from their own mothers, who acted in obedience to their parents and their tradition.

When her father calls one day saying that he is coming to visit her before one of his

usual trips abroad, Ruma worries that her father might consider moving in with her, as he is now living alone after her mother's death: “She knew her father did not need taking care of, and yet this very fact caused her to feel guilty; In India, there would have been no question of him not moving in with her” (6). Although Adam reassures her that her father is more than welcome in the house, Ruma cannot make her mind whether to invite him or not. When she tells Adam that her father is coming to stay for a couple of days, he says he is glad that there will be someone to help her while he is away working (6). However, at this moment Ruma shows what her view on the roles her parents had regarding the household is:

> It was her mother who would have been the helpful one, taking over the kitchen, singing songs to Akash and teaching him Bengali nursery rhymes, throwing loads of laundry into the machine. Ruma had never spent a week alone with her father. When her parents visited her in Brooklyn, after Akash was born, her father claimed an armchair in the living room, quietly combing through the *Times*, occasionally tucking a finger under the baby's chin but behaving as if he were waiting for the time to pass. (6)

It is clear from the passage above that, for Ruma, her father would not be coming to help but would become one more responsibility for her life. She disregards the fact that he is now living alone, taking care of himself and the house, to think that he will just demand more effort from her.

Cooking is also another tradition that Ruma has trouble keeping. While her mother always prepared elaborated meals with different dishes, Ruma knew that she could not compare herself to her mother:

> “Is that all?” her mother sometimes exclaimed in disbelief on the phone, asking Ruma what she was making for dinner, and it was in such moments that

> Ruma recognized how different her experience of being a wife was. Her mother had never cut corners, even in Pennsylvania she had run her household as if satisfying a mother-in-law's fastidious eyes. (22)

Ruma seems not to be able to maintain important traditions. She does not want to invite her father to live with her, she does not feel secure speaking Bengali and, therefore, will not teach it to her children. Besides, the food does not seem as important to her as it was to her mother. However, she feels that she should be maintaining the traditions. This feeling leads her to an anguish that she does not know how to resolve.

When Ruma was growing up it was obvious to her parents how different she was from them, as her father recollects: “The more the children grew, the less they had seemed to resemble either parent – they spoke differently, dressed differently, seemed foreign in every way, from the texture of their hair to the shapes of their feet and hands” (54). Thus, although her parents saw how different Ruma and her brother were while they were growing up, when her father arrives in her house, he observes the opposite: “Something about his daughter appearance had changed; she now resembled his wife so strongly that he could not bear to look at her directly. That first glimpse of her earlier, standing on the lawn with Akash, had nearly taken his breath away” (27). This passage can also be related to the one in which Ruma compares herself now with her mother's life in the past. It seems that during adolescence she had distanced herself from her culture, but after her mother's death, the Indian culture seems a way she has found to connect with her mother. But in the end, it only shows to her that she is not either truly American or Indian, that she carries characteristics of both cultures, and that she will always be torn between her parents' cultural tradition and the tradition of the space she was brought up in.

It is undeniable that the process of identity formation of the second generation

characters is affected both by the private and public space they straddle between. It is at home that they learn the Indian traditions which most of them try to reject, at least before adulthood. In the public space, they learn the American lifestyle, the language, and the differences between the two cultures. Also according to Srivastava, “[t]he influence of American culture is obvious in their lifestyle and they rarely subscribe to the polarized cultural identities their parents bear” (6).

While Usha seems to steadily distance herself from the Indian culture, Hema and Ruma seem somehow nostalgic of their heritage and tradition when they become adults. Ruma's mother's death seems to connect her with her parents' traditions. When her first child is born she misses the fact that she is no longer able to pass her parents' culture to her son. Hema, a financially independent woman, seems to get tired of emotionally draining relationships, and longed for the kind of stability her mother had before her.

However, what connects these three women characters of second generation is that, differently for their own mothers, they struggle in order to have the power to decide their future. To become different, like Usha, to accept a kind of arranged marriage, like Hema, or to give up a career to take care of her children like Ruma did is a matter of choice, a benefit their mothers never had. The space is then essential for the negotiation of their gender roles, where it is possible for them to have agency over their lives.

2.3. Generation Clash: Culture, Time and Space

"A combination of the local and the global
is always an important aspect of
diasporic identities."
Avtar Brah (192)

It is possible to observe from the characters analyzed in this chapter that first generation female characters are more closely attached to the Indian culture than their daughters. For them, home is undoubtedly India, and they all try to maintain their traditions in the country they live. However, the space they live and the time spent there also force changes upon them.

Ashima, for instance, decides after years dedicating herself only to her husband and children, not to follow her husband once he goes to Cleveland in order to keep her job at the library. She prefers to live alone for the first time in her life rather than to be at home all day in a place foreign to her, waiting her husband's return. Her decision is the opposite of the one which took her to the United States. For the first time she seems to consider what is better for her, and not to do what she is expected to.

Ashima seems to accept the changes she sees in her children as they become adults. The same can be observed in relation to Aparna, who is able to accept her daughter's relationships with American men, a fact she had condemned so fiercely in her first years in the United States. She is able to understand that her daughter is "a daughter of America" (Lahiri *Unaccustomed* 81-82), and the reader realizes that she is unable to keep the rigid

separation between the two cultures as she had before. Besides, deciding to go to university after so many years spent only taking care of the house and family shows that she finally decides to do something for herself, something that is not an obligation or a cultural demand.

The second generation characters, on the other hand, seem to grow up steadily distancing themselves from the Indian culture and assimilating aspects of the American culture. They do not strictly follow the dress code, they do not speak Bengali fluently and even have trouble understanding it in some situations. Although the cooking is still appreciated in adulthood, they fail to prepare it like their mothers did. But most important, Indian food is not all they eat or crave for like their parents did.

The second generation often compares themselves with their parents and their friends, the ones who are not Indian, trying to find their affiliation. Sometimes, like Usha, they feel they belong to America, but still they cannot deny the Indian culture in which they were raised. For Ruma and Hema, although they try to deny the Indian culture during their adolescence, they seem to accept it in adulthood, consenting to things that they have condemned and tried to avoid during all their lives.

Usha, Ruma and Hema are examples that although their parents try to maintain the culture at home, the diaspora space will make them different. Their identity construction is a process of denying and accepting two different cultural traditions, a process in which they are always searching to belong, not to a single country, but trying to bridge the two worlds they feel they are connected to. They end up, in adulthood, knowing that they are also defined by the hyphen as they are neither Indian nor American, but undeniably Indian-American.

CHAPTER THREE

Breaking Paradigms

"new roles and demands, new political spaces,
are opened by diasporic interactions."
James Clifford ("Diasporas" 314)

"It is very common for a child to be confused
at first. Please give it sometime. I
assure you he will grow accustomed."
Jhumpa Lahiri (*The Namesake* 59)

Lahiri's male characters struggle almost in the same way as the female characters do to deal with their feelings of being hyphenated subjects who live in-between worlds. They are often, as the female characters are, troubled with emotional conflicts and conscious that in the new space they also need to renegotiate their own roles. As a consequence, the male characters as represented in the narratives analyzed here often distance themselves from the stereotypical representation of Indian male characters, which according to Bonnie Zare, are usually portrayed by South Asian female writers as "the incarnation of selfishness" (99).

Hence, in this chapter, I analyze the male characters, showing how they also voice different, but equally meaningful, concerns. Thus, it is possible to observe that the gender barriers are more fluid and dependable of the space in which the subjects are inserted, and

that the diaspora space and the time spent in this space will also lead to changes in the male characters' behavior.

3.1 - Accustomed Masculinity Patterns

> "Identity thus transcends national boundaries
> and becomes deterritorialized."
> Agnew (5)

Ashoke Ganguli, from *The Namesake,* whose name is "a legacy of the British, an anglicized way of pronouncing his real surname, Gangopadhyay" (67), was born in India. After a train accident that nearly took his life and left him in bed for over a year, he decides, during his recovery, to change his life plans and travel to another country: "[h]e imagined not only walking, but walking away, as far as possible from the place in which he was born and in which he had nearly died" (20). Then, after graduating in Engineering, he goes to the US to continue his studies. It is important to mention that in the Indian tradition, the oldest son is supposed to be the one in the family to take care of his own parents. Thus, Ashoke's decision to travel abroad may be seen as a small fracture from the traditions he was raised to fulfill. The fact that he is already moving, contrary to his parents' wish, may also be a sign that he is not so rigid about traditions and, it may help to explain his flexibility in accepting changes in the new country.

At the time he is studying to earn a PhD, he goes back to India in order to find a wife, and he has his marriage arranged with Ashima. It is important to notice that, although he has lived in the United States for some time, Ashoke still decides to maintain the Indian tradition and have an arranged marriage with someone his parents approve.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the time Ashima is expecting their first child is when she misses her relatives the most, and she feels that something is missing throughout the pregnancy. In contrast, Ashoke, who has constant nightmares about his train accident, is more concerned with the life to come: "[a]lthough it is Ashima who carries the child, he, too, feels heavy with the thought of life, of his life and the life to come" (21). When their first son is born, the images of the train accident come back once again, and this time he connects his survival with his son's life more directly:

> He was raised without running water, nearly killed at twenty-two. Again he tastes the dust on his tongue, sees the twisted train, the giant overturned iron wheels. None of this was supposed to happen. But no, he had survived it. He was born twice in India, and then a third time, in America. Three lives by thirty. (21)

This moment of the narrative presents an important shift in which the focalization changes from Ashima to Ashoke. The omniscient narrator first tells Ashima's story of a painful life and a pregnancy away from the ones she loves, showing the perspective of a wife who leaves behind everything that is important for her to follow a husband. Therefore, when Ashima is the one focalized in the beginning of the plot, it is possible to observe her suffering as a woman who feels oppressed by the role of the obedient wife. The change in the focalization, however, when the train accident is narrated, not only shows Ashoke's reasons to move away, but it seems to humanize him, portraying a man who loves to read, but hardly

ever experienced any of the things he has read; a man whose life is marked by his almost death, but who sees in the moment of his child's birth a positive outcome of the train accident, a third birth at the age of thirty.

Thus, contrary to Ashima who is desolated by the fact that her son is born in the United States and will be deprived of the affection of their Indian relatives, Ashoke can only see positive aspects regarding the boy's birthplace: “'[l]ucky boy', Ashoke remarks, turning the beautiful sewn pages … 'Only hours old and already the owner of books.' What a difference, he thinks, from the childhood he has known” (24). Ashoke's remarks go along with the view of many diasporic subjects who see the new country as a place of opportunities. Thus, he observes how lucky the boy is as he will be granted opportunities that would be difficult for him to have in India and that he himself only got once he decided to move away from his homeland. Although Ashima and Ashoke have different feelings towards the place the baby is born at first, they both share the frustration of not being able to perpetuate their culture the way they both wished.

The diaspora space also highlights the cultural differences between the two of them and the other couples around. When Ashima is in the hospital, she hears a husband saying to another woman lying at her side “ 'I love you, sweetheart.' Words Ashima has neither heard nor expects to hear from her own husband; this is not how they are” (3). In the same way, when Ashoke is outside waiting for his son to be born, he sees the other husbands and realizes how different his experience is from theirs:

> The men wait with cigars, flowers, address books, bottles of champagne. They smoke cigarettes, ashing into the floor. Ashoke is indifferent to such indulgences. He neither smokes nor drinks alcohol of any kind. Ashima is the one who keeps all their addresses, in a small notebook she carries in her purse.

It has never occurred to him to buy his wife flowers. (12)

Therefore, as discussed earlier in Chapter One, the diaspora space is relevant for the subjects' recognition of their difference. But it seems that whichever changes they might go through because of the space they now inhabit, they are able to maintain their culture in the first years because they choose to surround themselves mostly of Indian friends who share with them the same willingness to preserve the culture: “[l]ike Ashoke, the bachelors fly back to Calcutta one by one, returning with wives. Every weekend, it seems, there is a new home to go to, a new couple or young family to meet. They all come from Calcutta, and for this reason alone they are friends” (38). However, as I observed in the analysis of Ashima in the second chapter of this work, it is their children who bring the American culture inside the Ganguli's house as they have to make concessions, first about food and holiday celebrations and, when their children become teenagers, about friends, going out and dating.

Although some significant changes are observed, namely his acceptance of his children's behavior, the celebration of the traditional American holidays for his children's sake, Ashoke remains attached to his culture and no major difference in relation to the gender roles he performs can be observed. When his children are already living away from home, he decides to accept a grant offered from a university in Cleveland. As Ashima decides to stay, he goes alone but returns home every three weeks and during his visits, “[h]e does the things she still doesn't know how to do. He pays all the bills, and rakes the leaves on the lawn, and puts gas from the self-service station into her car” (163). Thus, although living alone and performing all chores that would be Ashima's responsibility, when he goes home he continues to do as he is expected, fulfilling his role as a husband as he has always done. However, the fact that he accepts his wife's decision not to follow him to Cleveland is an important event, as he does not demand from her something that she is not willing to do.

Ashoke is, after all, raised in a rigid patriarchal society, so after getting married and taking his wife abroad with him, he is the one who provides for the family, while his wife stays at home taking care of the house and children. As Ashima is also focalized in the narrative, it is possible to observe that through the years she does not consider her husband an oppressor, like she did in the beginning, when she blames him for her solitude: “I'm saying I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It is not right. I want to go back” (33). However, even after telling Ashoke her desire to go back to India, she is not heard as he never really considers their return. During his life he continues to perform roles considered conservative in Western societies, for instance, he is usually the one making the decisions for the family; Ashima in turn seems resilient about both her husband's roles and her own. Thus, although Ashoke accepts the changes the diaspora space forces on him, he does not substantially change in relation to his attachment to the Indian culture as he is still faithful to most of the traditions he was taught to adhere.

Like Ashoke, Sanjeev, which appears in the short story “This Blessed House,” from *Interpreter of Maladies,* gives the reader an interesting perspective of a first generation character who marries an Indian-American woman. He is thirty-three years old, “with an excessively generous income for a single man, and had never been in love” (143). He has an arranged marriage to Tanima, twenty-seven, who has recently been abandoned by an American man. Tanima, who was born and raised in the United States only uses her American nickname, Twinkle, which suggests a successful acculturation process[3]. Like what happens to Gogol and Moushumi, their parents arrange for them to meet as they were old friends. Before the marriage, they have often visited each other as she lived in Stanford and he in

3 I decided to include the analysis of Twinkle, Sanjeev's wife in this chapter, and not in the second one, because the story is told from the perspective of the male character, that is, we only see her through her husband's eyes. Besides, the third person omniscient narrator focuses on the impact Twinkle's attitudes have on Sanjeev.

Connecticut. During her visits, it is possible to observe how organized his house is: “Sanjeev would save in an ashtray left on the balcony the crushed cigarettes she had smoked during weekend – saved them, that is, until the next time she came to visit him, and then he vacuumed the apartment, washed the sheets, even dusted the plant leaves in her honor” (143). It is his organization which will first contrast with Twinkle's untied manner. Therefore, when they are married and move to a new house, after knowing each other for only four months, Twinkle's indifference regarding the organizing of the house bothers Sanjeev:

> When he asked her why she was in bed in the middle of the day she told him she was bored. He had wanted to say to her then, you could unpack some boxes. You could sweep the attic.... They didn't bother her, these scattered, unsettled matters. She seemed content with whatever clothes she found at the front of the closet, with whatever magazine was lying around, with whatever song was on the radio – content yet curious. (141)

It is interesting to observe from the passage above that he is upset, but decides not to complain. He thinks he could tell her about his discomfort, but he does not. It is as if he is uncertain of how to assert his role as a husband in the new space. His uncertainty seems to derive from the fact that Twinkle does not behave the way he was led to expect from a wife. He also notices her indifference in the kitchen, and another divergence between them is observed:

> She was not terribly ambitious in the kitchen. She bought preroasted chickens from the supermarket and served them with potato salad prepared who knew when, sold in little plastic containers. Indian food, she complained, was a bother; she detested chopping garlic, and peeling ginger, and could not operate a blender, and so it was Sanjeev who, on weekends, seasoned mustard oil with

cinnamon sticks and cloves in order to produce a proper curry. (143-44)

Although it has been argued in Chapter Two that it is the woman the one responsible to maintain such tradition as the culinary habits in the diaspora space, in this story it is Sanjeev who tries to preserve it. Although he expects her to do it, he takes on what he has been taught to see as her duty because he seems not to be confident enough to demand it from her. As a second generation, Twinkle does not want to spend hours in the kitchen and, as Indian food is important to Sanjeev, he decides to assume the role that would otherwise belong to her. He plays a role that is supposed to be a woman's which might hint to the fact that he is willing to establish a compromise with her.

After being in the house for a few days, Twinkle finds an effigy of Christ in the house, and when she shows it to Sanjeev he tells her to throw it away. Instead, Twinkle puts it on the fireplace mantel, and at the end of the week there is a collection of images beside the one of the Christ, a fact that irritates Sanjeev terribly. When she finds a poster, Sanjeev warns her: “Now, look. I will tolerate, for now, your biblical menagerie in the living room. But I refuse to have this,' he said, flicking at one of the painted peanut-tears, 'displayed in our home” (139). Twinke's response shows that she will not accept his conditions just because she is now his wife: “Twinkle stared at him, placidly exhaling, the smoke emerging in two thin blue streams from her nostrils … 'I'm going to put it in my study.' She informed him. 'That way you don't have to look at it” (139). She is calm, she does not ask him if she can do otherwise, but informs him of her decision. She finds a way to mediate the situation without giving in to his demands.

It is also important to acknowledge the importance of the house for the plot development, as it might work as an analogy for the diaspora space. According to Bahareh Bahmanpour, the house may also be seen as a metaphor for moving to a new country with a

different culture (47). The space of the new house is full of elements alien to the Indian culture just as the new country has a different culture which they need to adapt to. It should also be noted that, as somebody that belongs to the second generation, Twinkle seems much more adapted and more open to accept difference than Sanjeev does. His resistance might be related to the strong connection he still has to Indian traditions.

Weeks pass and Twinkle keeps finding new treasures, but when she finds a plaster Virgin Mary on the lawn, Sanjeev is outraged by the thought she might want to keep it there:

> "All the neighbors will see it. They will think we're insane."
>
> "Why, for having a statue of the Virgin Mary on our lawn? Every other person in this neighborhood has a statue of Mary on the lawn. We'll fit right in."
>
> "We're not Christian."
>
> "So you keep reminding me." (146)

While Sanjeev thinks it is not only meaningless, but also contradictory for two Hindus to have a statue of the Virgin Mary on the lawn, Twinkle insists on doing as she pleases, saying they will fit in the neighborhood they live. For Sanjeev, the statues, as well as everything she has found so far, are just trash, as they do not have anything to do with who they are. At this moment he wonders if he has done the right thing by marrying her:

> He was getting nowhere with her, with this woman whom he had known for only four months and whom he had married, this woman with whom he now shared his life. He thought with a flicker of regret of the snapshots his mother used to send him from Calcutta, of prospective brides who could sing and sew and season lentils without consulting a cookbook. Sanjeev had considered these women, had even ranked them in order of preference, but he had met Twinkle. (146-47)

When Sanjeev lists the abilities the other relegated prospective wives had, he may be suggesting what he expected from Twinkle. It also shows how nostalgic he is towards Indian customs. When he married a woman who shares his ethnic background, he expected to find the model of woman or wife he believed he would find in India. When he investigates his feelings towards her, it is Twinkle's general qualities that come to his mind: "[n]ow he had [a woman], a pretty one, from a suitably high caste, who would soon have a master's degree. What was there not to love?" (148). He does not think of any personal quality of Twinkle as a woman that might distinguish her from others he might have met during his life. Instead, he thinks of characteristics that would be in accordance to his Indian tradition and that his parents would approve in a woman. Even the Master's Degree is not seen in light of a particular knowledge she may have, but as a title which would rank her above the other prospective wives.

Then, when he, as a man, considers that he has the power to decide whether the statue of the Virgin Mary stays or not in the house, he is confronted once more by Twinkle. He informs her that he is taking the statue from the lawn and that on his way to work in the following morning he is going to throw it away (149), but Twinkle challenges him: "No … This is our house. We own it together. The statue is part of our property" (149). It is at this moment that Sanjeev realizes that in order to be together, they would have to renegotiate their roles. Therefore, it is Twinkle's attitude of not accepting their house as only his, and not accepting his rules just because he is her husband that forces Sanjeev to change.

For the housewarming party they decide to throw, Sanjeev is the one cooking "big trays of rice with chicken and almonds and orange peels, which [he] had spent the greater part of the morning and afternoon preparing" (150). Thus, for the party preparations he assumes a role that was supposed to be Twinkle's, and during the event it is possible to see

that their roles have also been inverted:

> Over hectic jazz records, played under Twinkle's supervision, they laughed at her anecdotes and observations, forming a widening circle around her, while Sanjeev replenished the samosas that he kept warming evenly in the oven, and getting ice for people's drinks, and opening more bottles of champagne with some difficulty, and explaining for the fortieth time that he wasn't Christian. (152)

Nonetheless, it is not only Sanjeev who makes concessions. As he wishes that he were taller, he is always irritated when “Twinkle insisted on wearing high heels” (140), and during the party she eventually takes her high heels off, and when Sanjeev tells her that he is putting them in the bedroom, she answers: “Thanks. But my feet are killing me.' Twinkle gave his elbow a little squeeze and headed for the living room” (157), showing him that she is also willing to change.

Therefore, it is possible to see that although Sanjeev still keeps a strong bond with Indian culture as he tries to preserve the cooking tradition; and he has an arranged marriage with a woman his parents approve of, he realizes that he is married to a woman who does not have the same attachment to Indian traditions. Hence, he is faced with the necessity to change his paradigms of how a wife should behave in order to maintain his relationship. Sanjeev and Twinkle's story gives an interesting perspective of the conflicts and compromises established between different generations. As it is not a parent-child relationship, but a husband and wife relationship, the necessity to establish a balance seems much stronger. Besides, as the title of the story, “This Blessed House,” suggests, the space of the house is seen as a meaningful and positive element as the renegotiation of gender roles is facilitated by the new space.

Ruma's father, who is also one of the main characters of “Unaccustomed Earth” and

who is never named, also gives the reader a different perspective of the changes observed in first generation characters. After his wife's death, he sold the house where he lived with his wife and now lives in a “one-bedroom condominium”(Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 6). Instead of the expected solitude, it is the freedom that he feels and now praises:

> He stared out the window at a shelf of clouds that was like miles and miles of densely packed snow one could walk across. The sight filled him with peace; this was his life now, the ability to do as he pleased, the responsibility of his family absent just as all else was absent from the unmolested vision of the clouds. (8)

He seems to associate his family with responsibility as, in the past, he always felt he was the one in charge of everything. This fact can also be noticed when he compares his trips to India with his family and his acquired taste for traveling after his wife's death: “[h]ow freeing it was, these days, to travel alone, with only a suitcase to check” (7). It is in one of these trips that he meets Mrs. Bagchi who moved to America after her husband died in order to avoid another arranged marriage orchestrated by her parents. Their relationship is also different from the one he had with his wife: “[p]erhaps, because she expected so little, he was generous with her, attentive in a way he'd never been in his marriage” (9), and although they are sharing a bedroom in the next trip together, he has not mentioned her to his children:

> He had mentioned nothing to Ruma or Romi about Mrs. Bagchi, planned to say nothing. He saw no point in upsetting them, especially Ruma now that she was expecting again. He wondered if this was how his children had felt in the past, covertly conducting relationships back when it was something he and his wife had forbidden, something that would have devastated them. (19)

It is interesting to observe that it is in his old age that he understands what his children

had probably gone through, as he does something which is not part of Indian tradition, but something he now thinks acceptable after living in America most part of his life. Although the time he has spent in America makes him accept the fact that he is now having a relationship with no intention of getting married later, he still thinks it is difficult to tell his children about it, or to show them that he is doing something that is the opposite of what he had tried to teach them, following his traditional customs. Besides, when he decides to sell the old house and to move to a new place, he was already conscious that his life would not remain the same now that his wife was dead. Thus, he chooses to live in "another part of the state, close enough so things were familiar, but far enough to feel different. In the old house he was still stuck in his former life" (30). This passage is very meaningful as it shows that he is conscious that the new space will provide the possibility to change and redefine himself, as the new country clearly had done so for his own children.

When he arrives at his daughter's house just before one more of his international trips, the first thing his daughter notices is how American he looks:

> He was wearing a baseball cap that said POMPEII, brown cotton pants and a sky-blue polo shirt, and a pair of white leather sneakers. She was struck by the degree to which her father resembled an American in his old age. With his gray hair and fair skin he could have been practically from anywhere. It was her mother who would have stuck out in this wet Northern landscape, in her brightly colored saris, her dime-sized maroon bindi, her jewels. (11)

Contrary to the similarity he found between his daughter and his wife, which I discussed in Chapter Two, his daughter notices the difference between them as he, unlike her, looks American in his old age. Besides the change in his appearance, during his visit, his daughter also realizes that something else has changed in her father: "Though it upset her to

admit it, if anything, he seemed happier now; her mother's death had lightened him, the opposite of what it had done to her" (33). So, while her mother's death has caused Ruma to be nostalgic about the Indian culture and even resent the fact that she is now not able to teach her son the traditions her mother would have been able to, for her father it seems to have cut the strong bond that still made him keep certain roles he had been taught to perform.

A significant episode shows Ruma that her father's indifference towards the house and the family's dynamics, which she usually noticed in his previous visits while her mother was still alive, is now also part of the past. He observes that she has a yard and decides to plant a garden. During the time he spends outside working, he has the company of his grandson, Akash, and it is there that their friendship starts and Ruma is able to see a side of her father which was unknown to her. He teaches Akash to plant a garden, and uses this time to teach him some Bengali. At night, "[h]e helped put on his pajamas, brush his teeth, and comb back his soft damp hair … By now Akash insisted on being read to at night by her father, sleeping downstairs in her father's bed" (48). Besides, with his help around the house, Ruma realizes "she had not known certain things about him, she had not known how self-sufficient he could be, how helpful, to the point that she had not had to wash a dish since he'd arrived" (47). These attitudes surprise Ruma because she expected them from her mother and not from her father. When she thought about inviting her father to live in her house, she only considered that he would "become a responsibility, an added demand" (7). But now that her mother is not present, it is her father who assumes the roles she commonly associated with her mother.

During the time he spends in her house, he is upset by the fact that Ruma is no longer working, dedicating all her time to her son and the house. Although they talk about it, he does not seem able to convince her of the necessity of going back to work. When Ruma finally decides to invite him to live with them, he realizes that "it was not for his sake that his

daughter was asking him to live [t]here. It was for hers. She needed him, as he'd never felt she'd needed him before" (53). Although he is conscious of her needs, he does not rank her necessities before his: "[b]ut it was not what he wanted … He did not want to be part of another family, part of the mess, the feuds, the demands, the energy of it. He did not want to live in the margins of his daughter's life, in the shadow of her marriage" (53). However, he does think of her when he decides not to come and live with her family:

> He remembered his children coming home from college, impatient with him and his wife... He couldn't help thinking, on those occasions, how young they'd once been, how helpless in his nervous arms, needing him for their survival, knowing no one else. He and his wife were their whole world. But eventually that need dissipated, dwindled to something amorphous, tenuous, something that threatened to snap. That loss was in store for Ruma, too; her children would become strangers, avoiding her. And because she was his child he wanted to protect her from that. (55)

In fact, he is not thinking only about himself when he refuses to move in with his daughter. He considers the fact that she is living only for her family, that she has abandoned her career she had worked so hard for. Thus, his refusal is instead a warning that she should think about herself as well, about being independent and being able to do something for her own sake.

Unlike Ashoke who continues to perform the same gender roles throughout the time he spends in the diaspora space, and Sanjeev who marries a second generation woman and needs to renegotiate his roles as soon as he moves in with his wife, Ruma's father presents a different perspective of the renegotiation of gender roles in the diaspora space. When his wife was alive, he behaved as he was expected, performing the gender roles he was taught in

India, as if his marriage helped to keep alive the bond to the Indian culture. After his wife's death he seems free to change and renegotiate the gender roles he had so dutifully performed before. He moves to a place where no one knows him, where memories are yet to be created and where he feels free to do as he pleases. He starts dating, and when his daughter asks him to live with her, besides thinking what is best for her, he also considers the duties that the process will add, and refuses her invitation. In his old age, Ruma's father reinvents himself in the new space. He still seems sometimes unsure of his choices, like when he decides not to tell his children about Mrs. Bagchi, but he also sees the possibility of change when his connection to India weakens. According to Shirley Carreira, Lahri's narrative shows the conflicts of subjects who have to renegotiate their traditions in a different culture (258). Therefore, Ruma's father story shows a non-stereotypical representation of a first generation man, whose identity is reconfigured and constructed in the new space.

3.2 Double Belonging

> "[B]eing in the diaspora can lead to a positive renegotiation of gender relations."
>
> Agnew (6)

In *The Namesake*, Ashima and Ashoke's son is given a name that, as mentioned before, changes throughout the narrative. This change and his feelings towards the name he is

given may be seen as emblematic of what is experienced and felt by most second generation characters. Although he is born and raised in the United States, his parents try to maintain the Indian traditions at home, and Gogol feels divided between worlds. The feeling of not completely belonging to any of the two cultures that he feels he is supposed to be attached to, the Indian and the American, is translated into his first name that is neither Indian nor American, but instead Russian.

As it is the custom, Indians usually have both a private and a public name. The public name, which is called a good name, is "for identification in the outside world" (Lahiri *The Namesake* 26) and it is used primarily in the public sphere. The pet name, on the other hand, is similar to a nickname "meaning, literally, the name by which one is called, by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments... They are a reminder, too, that one is not all things to all people" (26). As it was discussed in Chapter Two, it is his pet name, Gogol, which goes to his birth certificate since Ashima's grandmother's letter with his good name never arrives from India. Therefore, when Gogol is about to enter kindergarten, his father considers he has found the perfect name, Nikhil, as it has a meaning in Bengali, "he who is entire, encompassing all" (56) and, it also resembles Nikolai, the first name of the Russian writer.

Gogol is concerned about his parents' decision to give him a different name: "[h]e is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him"(57). His parents' explanation that "they each have two names, too, as do all their Bengali friends in America, and all their relatives in Calcutta. It's a part of growing up, part of being a Bengali"(57) does not convince him of the necessity of having a new name. Consequently, Gogol refuses to answer by his new name at school and the name Nikhil is crossed out from his records.

When Gogol is young he does not mind the name he goes by: "[i]t all seems perfectly

normal. It doesn't bother him that his name is never an option on key chains or metal pins or refrigerator magnets" (66). However, when he is in high school, his name becomes a concern:

> For by now, he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything in Indian …. He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that is neither Indian or American but of all things Russian. (75-76)

Although his name seems Indian, for Gogol it lacks authenticity, as it is not related to who he is since it is a Russian name. Karen Cardozo states that "Gogol's naming bespeaks a lack of cultural authenticity: yet such intertextuality does not simply mark the son's distance from his ethnic origins but also the way the father was already a polycultural subject without ethnically pure origin" (15). Cardozo illustrates her argument by using Ashima and Ashoke's reasons not to name their son after a relative: "[w]ithin Bengali families, individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared" (28). Thus, while Ashoke and Ashima claim that they should strict themselves to a tradition, they allow their child to leave the hospital with a Russian name in his birth certificate. However, Cardozo fails to observe that Ashima and Ashoke leave the hospital with the clear understanding that Gogol will only be the baby's pet name and that they will later receive the letter with the good name which will be, according to Indian tradition, the baby's official name.

Furthermore, another problem with this name is that it seems alien to Gogol as it is linked to a part of Ashoke's past that no one has ever mentioned to him. The quotation from the previous page shows once more that Gogol feels his name is not linked to his supposed identity, and his emphasis that his name is neither Indian nor American may show that he feels his name should be a way of identifying himself with one of the two countries he is

culturally attached to, India or the United States.

However, as his father questions him once when Gogol says that no one takes him seriously because of his name, Gogol is forced to admit to himself that he has not been through any serious distressing situation because of his name as he is the only one who is troubled by what he sees as his lack of identity:

> "Who does not take you seriously?" his father wanted to know (…).
>
> "People," he said, lying to his parents. For his father had a point; the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name, the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol. (100)

Hence, the concerns he has with his name might be related to his condition as a hybrid subject, to his feeling of not belonging, and of not quite seeing himself as entirely American or Indian. In fact, he feels that his name does not translate well who he is; because it is Russian it does not help to reveal his expected identity: Indian, American, or Indian-American. Besides, as he considers later, Nikhil, the good name his parents tried to give him could be shortened to Nick, and therefore would be a Bengali name that could be perfectly translated into an American one.

At a party at a university, when Gogol is still in high school, he meets a girl and he wishes he had another name, just to get him through the night. In an impulse he says, "I'm Nikhil" (96). This new acquired sense of a different identity seems to give him confidence enough to go on talking to her, and there he spends the evening kissing a girl for the first time in his life. When he tells his friends what he had done and they are amazed by the fact, Gogol, who is also perplexed, thinks: "'It wasn't me,' he nearly says. But he doesn't tell them that it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim. That Gogol had nothing to do with it" (96). This

passage suggests the importance of a name for Gogol. It seems that for him by changing his name he is able to perform his identity more comfortably.

One day while he is waiting for an appointment, he reads in a magazine that any American citizen can change his/her name given that they undergo a simple legal process. After talking his parents into accepting his decision, Gogol goes before a judge that officially changes his name to Nikhil. When he is walking on the street for the first time with his new identity he "wonders if this is how it feels for an obese person to become thin, for a prisoner to walk free" (102). After legally changing his name, Gogol feels he has removed a burden from his life. He then becomes a confident young man. He goes to university where no one knows him as Gogol, and his name becomes a symbol of a successful process of relocation. Now that he has a new name and he is far from home, he begins to behave like any other American boy of his age. In addition, his relation with his family changes slightly as "now that he is Nikhil it's easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas" (105). Besides, he feels his name does not deny his heritage, but now it places him in two important spaces: at home and at the university. It is, for him, a fluid name that can easily be changed from Nikhil to Nick. It is a flexible name that allows him to perform his identity in accordance with the space he is in. For Gogol, his old name is a symbol of how dislocated he felt, and his new name, Nikhil, is a metaphor for his hyphenated Indian-American self.

The character's name change, from Gogol to Nikhil, can also be related to Rushdie's notion of a translated men discussed in Chapter Two, since his new name translates better his plural identity. It seems that Gogol gains more than he loses with his new name. In addition, his name may also be considered ambivalent as it has a double meaning. The name Nikhil is a result of a process of being accepted, of having a name that permits him to have an Indian name that sounds very close to an American one, and thus, having a name which allows

himself to identify with the two ends of his hyphenated identity.

Therefore, it is possible to say that the distress about his name may be a result of an identity issue related to his hybrid condition, which he seems at first not to be able to deal with. Rather, it is as if the act of naming stood for the hyphen in his affiliation as an Indian-American and as a kind of third space.

Bhabha's use of the term third space is closely linked to the concept of hybridity as he discusses the importance of the space in-between cultures for the understanding of culture itself (38). However, important for the discussion of Gogol's name is Sudesh Mishra's conceptualization of the third space. Mishra discusses the dichotomous idea of the subject being divided between two worlds, and he emphasizes a more recent tendency of considering the subject in relation to a third space, which is symbolized by the hyphen:

> In making the joint/rupture between one space and another (or several others), the border is clearly devoid of its own space and yet indispensable to spatial categories. It is the function of the border/hyphen to break up structured unities and pre-given stabilities while positioning them on every side. Inhabiting the hyphen, one is neither absolutely one thing nor another but constituted multiply in the line of fracture which, as logic would have it, is also the line of suture. From the vantage point of the hyphen/border, one is never solely one thing or another, but altogether something else - a veritable third. (83)

According to Mishra, the territoriality of the hyphenated subject as he analyzes it should be considered through the perspective of the hyphen as a bridge linking the two worlds and forming a subject who is in neither side, but inhabits both. Therefore, Mishra's concept is important to understand Gogol's process of naming as it becomes emblematic of the fact that he is neither American nor Indian, but inhabits an in-between space and is in

constant movement between the two worlds.

It is important to notice that when Gogol[4] decides to change his name, he could have chosen any name, but he chooses an ambivalent name that can be related to both nationalities he feels he belongs to. His choice is an act of assuming his double belonging, the plurality of his identity. It is a hybrid, ambivalent name and with it he is able to deal better with his private and public life, and he can easily deal with both ends of his hyphenated identity.

While in a relationship with an American woman, Maxine, it is possible to observe that Gogol behaves differently in Maxine's family and his own. Living far from home, and being welcome at her parents' house, he soon moves in. Living with an American family, he realizes how different the two families are and that "his immersion in Maxine's family is a betrayal of his own" (141). However, after Ashoke's death they grow apart as he feels Maxine cannot understand his necessity to be with his family. Eventually, he goes back to work and after sometime he feels that his solitude upsets his mother: "[t]he fact that he is single doesn't worry him, and yet he is conscious of the degree to which it troubles his mother" (191). Ashima tries to have him call a friend's daughter whom he has met in his childhood, but Gogol "refuses to let her set him up with someone. He refuses to go that far" (192). Yet, he gets closer to his family after his father's death, following all the traditional rituals that are supposed to follow it, but he does not consider the possibility of having an arranged marriage, in the traditional Indian way, as something acceptable.

Despite his initial refusal, Gogol ends up meeting Moushumi and he is surprised that "it is her very familiarity that makes him curious about her" (199). Here, it is interesting to notice that Gogol's observation is very similar to the one mentioned by Hema's when she meets Kaushik, as it is discussed in Chapter Two. When they get married he is able to

4 The name Gogol, and not Nikhil, is used throughout this work as the narrator in *The Namesake* continues to use Gogol, even after he changes his name.

understand that, although his is a kind of arranged marriage, it is still different from his parents':

> He thinks of his parents, strangers until this moment, two people who had not spoken until after they were actually wed. Suddenly, sitting next to Moushumi, he realizes what it means, and he's astonished by his parents' courage, the obedience that must have been involved in doing such a thing. (222)

While his parents acted in obedience to a tradition, he and Moushumi had the possibility to choose. They get to know each other before the wedding, and it is as if they are not marrying according to either the American or the Indian tradition, but somehow, having it both ways. But when the divorce comes after Moushumi's affair is discovered, he does not consider his duty to continue the marriage:

> But fortunately, they have not considered it their duty to stay married, as the Bengali of Ashoke and Ashima's generation do. They are not willing to accept, to adjust, to settle for something less than their ideal of happiness. That pressure has given away, in the case of the subsequent generation, to American common sense. (276)

The apparently arranged marriage and the divorce afterward show the importance of the time spent in the diaspora space for the character's lives. Being raised in the new space makes Gogol question the traditions and accept them only to a certain extent. He is not willing to accept them just as his parents did, just because it is the Indian custom. Therefore, it may be argued that Gogol is a fine example of a hyphenated subject who lives not in accordance with one culture, but who has to dwell in both places, which may be symbolized by the hyphen that he concludes is an essential part of his identity:

> In so many ways, his family's life feels like a string of accidents, unforeseen,

> unintended, one incident begetting another … And yet these events have formed Gogol, shaped him, determined who he is. They were things for which one spent a lifetime looking back at, trying to accept, interpret, comprehend. Things that should never have happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these were what prevailed, what endured, in the end. (286- 87)

Gogol not only acknowledges the fluid process of his identity construction, but he also reveals the impact of his parents movement to a new country in his own life.

Kaushik from "Hema and Kaushik," from *Unaccustomed Earth,* was like Gogol, born in the United States, but because his parents decided to go back to India, he lived part of his childhood there. When he was thirteen, his family moved back to America because of his mother's sickness. "Hema and Kaushik" might be considered a novella as it is divided in three different parts. The first part is told mainly through Hema's perspective, while in the second it is Kaushik's perspective which is heard. In the last part, Hema and Kaushik divide the narrative. Therefore, when Kaushik's voice is heard, the reader already knows important facts of his life as they were presented through Hema's perspective.

In the second part of the novella, Kaushik's is already at university where he went six months after his mother's death. When he receives a telephone call one Sunday morning from his father, the reader starts glimpsing who the adult Kaushik has become. His father tells him he had had an arranged marriage in his recent visit to Calcutta. Ready for his outburst, which does not happen, his father tells him that he "was tired of coming home to an empty house every night" (255), and he asks Kaushik to be understanding: "I don't ask you to care for her, even to like her... You are a grown man, you have no need for her in your life as I do" (254). Although Kaushik remains passive during the conversation, his thoughts are in his mother: "I didn't know which was worse – the idea of my father's remarrying for love, or of his actively

seeking out a stranger for companionship" (255). In both cases, it seems that what bothers Kaushik is the idea that there is going to be someone different from his mother at his father's side. Kaushik shows through several flashbacks in the narrative that his experience in the United States has always been shaped by his mother's sickness and death. Also through flashbacks, the narrator reveals what a sensitive man Kaushik is as it can be noticed from the passage below when he describes the days before his mother's death:

> I could imagine nothing worse than the moment my mother no longer drew air in and out of her lungs, no longer took us in through her weary eyes. I could imagine nothing worse than not being able to look at her face every day, its beauty grossly distorted but never abandoning her. (268)

When Kaushik returns to bed after talking to his father, there is a woman in his bed who he has known for a few weeks and who knows nothing about his past: "She knew nothing about my family, about my father's recent visit to Calcutta or about my mother's death the summer before I started college... That morning, after crying briefly against her body, I did." (256). This passage sets the tone for Kaushik's relationships as he slowly grows apart from his father. After his mother's death he starts drifting "across the globe without making meaningful ties" (306). Kaushik not only decides not to have a permanent home, but also not to be deeply attached to anyone. According to Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, "Lahiri's second-generation subjects become psychically and physically 'foreign' and nomadic and take refuge in wandering as a way to find a sense of belonging" (159). This statements is particularly true of Kaushik who uses his job as a form of making sense of himself.

When Kaushik goes home for the holidays, it is possible to observe that his father has adopted some of the Indian traditions that they had lost during their time in America. When he is served Indian food, which his father's new wife cooks, he remarks "I was no longer

accustomed to Indian food. At school I ate in the cafeteria, and during my time at home after my mother's death my father and I either went out or picked up pizzas" (259-60). The descriptions of his father's new wife and stepdaughters also show how the Indian culture is still very strong for them. Kaushik notices that Chitra, his stepmother "wore vermilion in her hair, a traditional practice my mother had shunned" (261), and when he describes Chitra's daughters, Rupa and Piu, it is clear that in his opinion the girls will soon be different because of the place they are now living:

> They spoke to me in English, their accents and their intonation sounding as severe as mine must have sounded in your fully American ear when we arrived as refugees in your family's home. I knew the accents would soon diminish and then disappear, as would their unstylish sweaters, their silly hairstyles. (263)

Kaushik knows from his own experience that change is inevitable. Besides, it is not only the space which will enforce changes on the girls, but also his father, who has been living in the United States for a long time, and who will also introduce new habits that have become part of his life to his stepdaughters. This change can be noticed when he asks Kaushik to buy a Christmas tree the next day. It is an interesting fact as he and his father had not celebrated it for the last three years, and they would not need to do it for Chitra and the girls as it is not an Indian tradition. However, his father has no second thoughts about introducing a Western tradition to the two girls.

Although Kaushik points out that the girls are so visibly and markedly different from what he has become, in the first opportunity he has alone with them, he acknowledges that he has more in common with them than he has noticed when they first met:

> I felt separate from them in every way but at the same time could not deny the

> things that bound us together. There was my father, of course, but he seemed to be the least relevant in a way. Like them I'd made that journey from India to Massachusetts, too old not to experience the shock of it, too young to have a say in the matter.... Like them I had lost a parent and was being asked to accept a replacement. (272)

However, the possibility of any real relationship among the three is broken when he enters the girls' room one day and sees them looking at his mother's photographs which had been hidden after her death. The harsh things he tells the girls only show how troubled he feels since he has arrived in his house. Comparing Chitra to his mother, her presence serves only as a constant remind that his own mother is no longer there with him. He leaves the girls alone in the house, and spends the rest of the holidays traveling alone without any real plan: "[t]he farther I went, the more desolate it became, more than any place I'd been, but for this reason the landscape drew me, claimed me as nothing had in a long time" (290). During his trip, he also discovers that he likes traveling alone: "[n]o one in the world knew where I was, no one had the ability to reach me. It was like being dead, my scape allowing me to taste that tremendous power my mother possessed forever" (290). This discovery together with his interest in photographs make him a photojournalist. According to Bidisha Banerjee, photography can be related to Kaushik's condition as a diasporic subject. The author contends that "photography allows Kaushik to counter his unrootedness by providing him with a sense of presence." However, "photography ultimately renders his efforts false and exacerbates his sense of phantom loss and diaspora mourning" (443).

Although Kaushik is able, through photography, to capture moments and make them eternal, his profession and "the demands of the job [that] allowed him permanently to avoid the United States" (305) make him feel that he does not create any real bonds to any place.

Thus, his choice of a job seems to prevent him from creating any attachment with the idea of a homeland. His profession reinforces his condition of unrootedness, as Banerjee argues. Besides, it is possible to observe that Kaushik feels a necessity to be always in movement, to be a citizen of the world:

> He was reminded of his family's moves every time he visited another refugee camp, every time he watched a family combing through rubble for their possessions... He wanted to believe he was different, that in ten minutes he could be on his way to anywhere in the world. But he knew that it was impossible, whenever he landed not to form attachments. (309)

Despite his intentions of not forming roots anywhere, he decides to take a position as an editor in Hong Kong: "[i]t was his need for a different life that was taking him to Asia. The promise, for the next few years at least, that he would be still" (308). It is, therefore, this new Kaushik that meets Hema again in their adulthood. He encounters her in Rome, just before going to Asia. He still has a small apartment there which he once shared with an Italian woman, a relationship which finished as "he could not bring himself to propose" (306).

They meet before a lunch in the house of a friend they did not know they had in common. They leave the apartment together and head to Kaushik's place knowing that "they would not part yet, unquestioned that though they had not seen or thought of each other in decades, not sought each other out, something precious had been stumbled upon, a newborn connection that could not be left unattended, that demanded every particle of their care" (311). He then learns that she is engaged to another man, questions her about the arranged marriage, but nothing seems to be strong enough to break them apart during the last two weeks they have together before Hema travels to Calcutta to marry Navin and Kaushik leads

to Hong Kong for the new job. In their last week together, Kaushik asks her to go with him. Although Hema explains to him that she "was not able to give up her life, not able to follow him that way" (322), Kaushik accuses her of being a coward. He does not realize that when he asks her to follow him and does not suggest the possibility of doing the same for her that he is acting in a selfish way, putting his career above hers. The next day he takes her to the airport so that she can meet Navin and get married.

Kaushik soon travels to Thailand where is going to relax for a few days before traveling to Hong Kong. The narrator tells the reader that it is on the plane that his anger dissolves (325). Although once again he does not see that he might have asked her too much, he is also heartbroken:

> She was the only person he'd met in his adult life who had any understanding of his past, the only woman he wanted to remain connected to. He didn't want to leave it up to chance to find her again, didn't want to share her with another man. That day in Volterra he had searched for a way to tell her these things. She had not accused him, as Franca had, of his own cowardice, of his inability to form attachments. But Hema's refusal to accuse him made him feel worse, and without her he was lost. (326)

One morning he is invited to go to a coral reef. There he remembers his mother, the way she always loved swimming and how afraid he was of it. He decides then to swim to the shore "to show his mother he was not afraid" (331), and it is in this moment that he is killed by the 2006 tsunami. Meanwhile, Hema learns about it through the newspapers, trying to find there a picture he had taken that would prove that he would be still alive, and when her friend calls to confirm it, she "needed no proof of [his] absence from the world" (333). She marries Navin and she is soon pregnant and it is then that she considers that "it might have been your

child but this was not the case. We had been careful, and you had left nothing behind" (333).

Hema's last sentence, which ends the story, may be read as a statement for Kaushik's life. Born in the United States, he moved to India and then back to the United States, and he makes traveling part of his profession, creating as few attachments as possible. Thus, Kaushik's story does convey similar dilemmas of second generation immigrants as the constant losses in his life may be related to his constant need to avoid roots. Besides, he dedicates himself to capturing moments and trying to make them last through the photographs he takes as a contrast to his life in which nothing seems to really last. However, contrary to Hema's statement, Kaushik's photographs were indeed left behind, and with them, the memories that they encode. Therefore, memory plays a central role in the story as it is through recollection that Hema starts narrating the story, and it is through photography that Kaushik tries to preserve moments. Maurice Halbwachs when analyzing the role of memory observes that "[w]e preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated" (47). It is possible to observe that Hema's and Kaushik's narrative are constructed in such a way that they reveal the character's attempt to understand the circumstances that brought them together, how their identities were shaped and what helped to make it impossible for them to stay together.

The recollection of memories is also important for Shukumar, from "A Temporary Matter," the first short story of *Interpreter of Maladies.* Shukumar, a thirty-five year old PhD student, is married to Shoba who works correcting "typographical errors in textbooks" (4). The beginning of the story suggests to the reader that the matter indicated in the title "A Temporary Matter" is the electricity that is going to be cut one hour every day for the next five days. However, as the story unfolds, it is possible to see that the plot revolves around a

different, more complex and lasting matter. Six months before, their baby was born dead and Shukumar was not present as Shoba went into labor while he was in a conference in Baltimore (2). Just like in Kaushik's and Ruma's stories, death is also a major trope in this story and it is possible to notice that Shoba and Shukumar have different behavior in the months that follow the episode:

> He ran his tongue over the tops of his teeth; he'd forgotten to brush them that morning. It wasn't the first time. He hadn't left the house at all that day, or the day before. The more Shoba stayed out, the more she began putting in extra hours at work and taking on additional projects, the more he wanted to stay in, not leaving to get the mail, or to buy fruit or wine at the stores by the trolley stop. (2)

It is interesting to notice that the baby's loss seems to push Shoba out of the private space of home, while Shukumar seems unwilling to leave home and it is in the baby's room, a place that Shoba seems to avoid, that he seeks refuge. It is commonly assumed that the mother is much more affected by a stillborn than a father as she is the one who has carried the baby alive insider herself. However, as Shukumar is the one focalized in the story it is possible to see only how the miscarriage has affected him. Dutt-Ballerstadt states that “[i]n Lahiri's work the tropes of death and dying manifest themselves in the levels of fracture and displacement in the formation of second-generation subjectivity” (168). Thus, although the narrator does not focuses on Shoba, it is possible to say from the ending of the story that the stillborn has deeply affected her subjectivity.

Shukumar's description of their routine as the months go by makes it clear that their relationship has been greatly disturbed: “he and Shoba had become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible”

(4). Besides, it is not only the relationship that changes, their roles in the house have also been modified. Although Shoba used to love to buy food and cook elaborate dishes, and was prepared for guests who dropped by (6-7), it is Shukumar the one who cooks now: "[h]e combed through her cookbooks every afternoon, following her pencil instructions" (7), as he realizes that "if it weren't for him … Shoba would eat a bowl of cereal for her dinner" (8). Shukumar also claims that the once organized Shoba is now careless with the house: "Shukumar moved her satchel and her sneakers to the side of the fridge. She wasn't this way before. She used to put her coat on a hanger, her sneakers in the closet, and she paid the bills as soon as they came. But now she treated the house as if it were a hotel" (6). The avoidance of the private space as well as her lack of interest in the house and cooking may reflect a rejection of the roles she played before in response to the loss of her baby.

In the first night when the electricity is cut, they have to eat in the kitchen lit only by birthday candles. When Shoba remarks that "[i]t's like India …[s]ometimes the current disappears for hours at a stretch. I once had to attend an entire rice ceremony in the dark. The baby just cried and cried" (11), Shukumar considers that "[t]heir baby had never cried" (11). Although Shukumar is upset after being reminded of the baby, Shoba seems to be enjoying their dinner and she proposes that they should play a game she used to play at her grandmother's house when the power was off. They should say something to each other, "something [they] never told before" (13). After hearing Shoba saying something about the first time she was in his apartment, Shukumar considers: "[w]hat was there left to say to her?" (13). His thoughts indicate that he is conscious that their relationship seems to be ending. However, they trade irrelevant secrets.

On the second day, Shoba arrives earlier than usual, and she invites him to sit outside. He seems excited, wondering what Shoba would tell him in the dark, but as Shukumar

realizes afterward, the things they start saying to each other are “an exchange of confessions” (18) that in the dark, they “were able to talk to each other again” (19). In the third night they kiss and in the fourth they go to bed together. It seems that in the absence of the electric light, they are able to see each other again and it is through this temporary matter that they are able to connect to each other again.

Although electricity comes back earlier in the morning of the fifth day, they decide to eat in the dark. When Shoba finishes the meal, she switches on the light and says: “I want you to see my face when I tell you this” (21), and she tells him that she is moving out, that she has found herself a new apartment. Shukumar seems not to expect what he has just heard:

> She wouldn't look at him, but he stared at her. It was obvious that she'd rehearsed the lines. All this time she'd been looking for an apartment … It sickened Shukumar, knowing that she had spent these past evenings preparing for a life without him. He was relieved and yet he was sickened. (21)

When she finishes and he realizes it is now his turn to speak, he thinks that Shoba does not know the sex of their baby as she wished to know it only at the baby's birth, and he says: “[o]ur baby was a boy …. His skin was more red than brown. He had black hair on his head. He weighed almost five pounds. His fingers were curled shut, just like yours in the night” (22). The detailed description of the baby shows not only his intention to hurt her, as he tells her what he has been holding up for six months to spare her, but it also helps to convey his double loss: the death of their premature baby and the end of the relationship.

Although Shoba is silenced in the beginning of the narrative since only Shukumar's concerns can be heard, it is possible to notice through the game played by the couple that Shoba is far from being a silenced woman, as it can be seen from the fact that she is the one who starts the game of exchanging secrets with the objective of ending their relationship.

However, as the narrative focalizes on Shukumar and not on Shoba, it seems to humanize the male character. Accordingly, Dhingra comments on Lahiri's choice to use the male point of view saying that "[a]lthough depicting the gender trouble within [some] marriages, Lahiri does not simplistically blame the men and instead evokes the reader's empathy for their lonely emotional states by providing the male point of view" (149). Although Shoba' silence and her retreat from the private space is a strong sign of her suffering, it is difficult to blame Shukumar for their divorce as the narrative humanizes him. Besides, as it is the woman the one who ends the relationship, through a game that seems to approximate them, Shukumar seems to be victimized by her action. Also according to Dhingra, Shukumar's decision to hurt Shoba by telling her the sex of the baby may be seen as an attempt to reassure his masculinity (151), considering that in the beginning of the narrative he is described assuming some of the roles that were once played by his wife. However, I do not think it is possible to grasp that from the narrative as Shukumar does not voice any complains about having to perform roles that were once his wife's. Instead, it seems more plausible to argue that his attitude of telling Shoba the sex of the baby is related to his double suffering, that is, the loss of the baby and the end of his relationship.

Connell and Messerschmidt argue that "masculinity' represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices" ("Hegemonic" 841). Therefore, the episode of their last dinner together also hints to the fact that although gender roles are represented as more flexible, Shukumar does not hesitate in enacting a more cruel behavior when he feels he had been deceived by his wife. Although I acknowledge that it difficult to argue that his decision is based on gender issues, the core of this short story revolves around gender roles as the loss of the baby is portrayed through a reconfiguration of the roles Shukumar and Shoba once played in their marriage.

3.3 Undeniable Change

"The journey creates 'us' and 'we'
become the frontiers we cross."
Rushdie (410)

As mentioned before, Jhumpa Lahiri's male characters are depicted differently from the way they are usually pictured in South Asian Diasporic works by women, as Dhingra also states (137). Lahiri's male characters seem to be going through internal conflicts between the patriarchal roles they had been assigned and the necessity to review the same roles in their new spaces (Zare 99). This necessity to change seems to be triggered not only by the new society they are inserted into, but also by the interaction with their wives. Connell and Messerschmidt argue that "gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity" ("Hegemonic" 848). Besides, these authors also contend that gender relations are constructed by an interaction between men and women, and that the configurations of masculinity are affected by women's identities and new practices (848). Lahiri's male characters show the importance of these interactions as she represents gender roles as flexible and constructed in the new space in relation to the new roles played by the women characters.

The first generation of male characters analyzed in this chapter show that even when they are very careful to perpetuate their culture, change is inevitable. Ashoke shows the perspective of the first generation that realizes that the country has different rules and he has to abide to them. Ruma's father is not forced, but feels free to change after his wife's death,

while Sanjeev feels the need to change in order to adapt himself to the demands of an Indian-American wife. No matter the reason, they all change in the new space, renegotiating the gender roles which they were taught to perform when they were still living in India.

The second generation male characters, on the other hand, live between two cultures as well, but differently from their parents, the foreign culture is much more present in their lives. They live between worlds, trying to understand who they are, and the construction of their identity is constantly shaped by the struggle to conciliate the culture their parents passed on to them and the space in which they grow up. Gogol is a fine example of that as his story is the one that may offer more evidence of the clash between two cultures and the process through which he reconciles with both. Gogol is then Lahiri's best example of a dislocated subject as she uses the process of naming as a metaphor for the subject who does not belong solely to one cultural tradition, who is not Indian or American, but who eventually makes peace with himself accepting his hyphenated self as Indian-American.

Shukumar shows a nice representation of a male character who is not only the one responsible for the house chores, but who is not outraged by the fact that his wife now avoids the roles she once assumed. Kaushik may be considered the second generation character who feels the most uprooted by his parents movements as they move three times before he is a teenager. Although he tries through photography to capture moments and make them last, it is his very job as a photographer that highlights his condition as an uprooted subject. Besides, all three characters have to negotiate their roles in relation to their female partners, Moushumi, Shoba and Hema, as none of them conform to the traditional Indian notion of a partner or the behavior conventionally expected of a woman.

In conclusion, the male characters are pictured in such a way that we feel sympathy for them. They do not fall in the “representations of men as stereotypical villains” (Zare 99),

but rather, they are “well-rounded, human, emotionally vulnerable, and usually humane” (Dhingra 142). Their feelings towards this new space that challenges them to review their identitarian configuration and behavior are voiced. The internal conflicts created by diaspora, as portrayed in Lahiri's characters, are shown not to be inherent only of women, but part of the process of the individual who is “torn between two cultures, two perceptions of the world” (Almeida 324). Therefore, the male characters move beyond the stereotypical representation as it is possible to observe that their identities and roles are also shaped by the new space they are inserted into.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Crossing Gender Barriers

"Do what I will never do. It will all be
for the best. Remember that.
Now go!"
Jhumpa Lahiri (*The Namesake* 38)

"[a]ll subjects are situated in a space in which
they must either recognize themselves or
lose themselves, a space in which they
may both enjoy and modify."
Henri Lefebvre (35)

The first generation female characters analyzed in this work, Ashima and Aparna, show how strong the cultural bonds to the homeland are for the ones who, in adulthood, move to a new country with a cultural tradition that is very different from their own. They both struggle to maintain the Indian culture at home, doing their best to perpetuate the traditions through their children, and dutifully performing the gender roles they were taught in India.

Ashima does not seem to refuse to perform any of the roles she was taught. Although she seems downhearted in the beginning, when she writes home she includes in her letter only the positive aspects of her life abroad, which illustrates how resilient she is as a wife and

daughter. As a mother, she does everything she can to teach her children the Indian culture, but as they grow up, she seems to understand that she has to accept the fact that they do not feel the same attachment to her home culture and that they are both Indian and American. Ashima cooks mostly Indian food, only making exceptions every once in a while to her children when they start asking her for specific American dishes. She only dresses saris, and only stops wearing vermilion in her hair when Ashoke dies. She only makes American friends at her job in the library, as she and Ashoke surround themselves of Bengali friends during most of their time in the United States. Thus, although she seems to accept the changes she notices in her children over the years, she is mostly faithful to her culture, even after Ashoke's death.

Aparna, unlike Ashima, seems unhappy as she is married to an absent husband who has married her only to placate his parents' complains. Because Aparna's story is narrated through her daughter's perspective, the reader cannot be sure that she never considers the possibility of divorcing her husband and marrying Pranab, but what is stated is that she is always careful not to do anything that is not appropriate for the traditional customs she inherits. Although she seems unhappy with her marriage and appears to be in love with another man, she does not end the relationship, even if she lives in a country where it would be perfectly acceptable. Besides, she dutifully performs the roles assigned to her, as a wife and mother. Apart from her unhappiness as a wife, she continues to follow the traditions the same way Ashima does, since she tries to teach her daughter all the Indian customs and warns her that she will not be allowed to behave like any other American girl. She cooks only Indian food at home, wears saris, and surrounds herself only of Bengali friends. The only change which can be noticed is that, also like Ashima, she seems to accept her daughter's boyfriends and relationships when she becomes an adult.

Ashima's and Aparna's attachment to the Indian culture is very similar and it seems to follow a pattern. Clifford contends that:

> women in diaspora remain attached to, and empowered by, a 'home' culture and tradition, selectively. Fundamental values of property and religion, speech and social patterns, and food, body, and dress protocols are preserved and adapted in a network of ongoing connection outside the host country. (*Routes* 259)

Both Aparna and Ashima are able to remain attached to the Indian culture, instead of the culture that surrounds them, because they still keep strong connections to their homeland. Because they befriend mostly Bengali friends, they are constantly reassured of their attitudes, no matter how different these attitudes are from the ones surrounding them in the public space.

When we consider the first generation male characters analyzed in Chapter Three, it is possible to observe that the maintenance of their roles is not only related to the patriarchal values which they were taught in their homeland, but also related to the relationships they have with their wives who help them maintain the attachments or make them less strong when their wives are not present or no longer accept certain roles.

Little change is observed in Ashoke, for instance, as he and his wife are able to maintain in their household the important customs from India. The most important changes are his acceptance of the acculturation he observes on his children and the roles he performs when he moves to Cleveland, where he is the one responsible for the tasks which would be Ashima's responsibilities, that is, the maintenance of his small apartment. Nevertheless, Ashoke seems to be resigned with the changes he notices in his wife and children, and his resignation may be explained by the fact that since the beginning of his life in the United

States he seems to focus more on the positive aspects of his life abroad than on the negative ones.

Although Ashoke and Ashima feel frustrated and at times unhappy, they respect the changes they observe in their children through the years. They learn that the new country has different laws, and they accept the fact that they live by different rules. In a similar manner, they learn to live with the inevitable changes the new space brings to their lives and the lives of their children.

Ruma's father also seems to have kept the same gender roles of the Indian culture in the diaspora space for the time his wife was alive. When the omniscient narrator focuses on him, months have passed since his wife's death and he observes that he had a demanding wife, and that certain roles he adopted were for him a burden, a responsibility. After his wife's death he feels free to do certain things. He travels with the sole objective of pleasure. He has a girlfriend, although he is still unable to call her that way or to confront his children with the news. He also notices that he relates to her in a completely different manner from the one he did with his own wife.

The most striking difference, however, is felt by his daughter who can compare the way he behaved when her mother was alive and during his present visit to her house. In his last visit, he sat in a chair “behaving as if he were waiting for the time to pass” (6), apathetic about the demands of the house, paying little attention to her newborn son. Before her father arrives, this is the precisely behavior that she expects from him. The opposite happens in his first visit after her mother's death. He is very cooperative around the house, helping her with the dishes and the laundry. He devotes most of his time to his grandson and to the garden they plant together for her. She also notices that he has changed, that her father seems happier after her mother's death.

Therefore, it is possible to state that some of the roles he performed before his wife's death were a burden for him and that he might also have been performing roles as he was taught to, even being unhappy about it. It seems that the marriage, and the bonds he had with his wife prevented him from behaving differently from what was expected of him. When that bond is broken, he feels free to act in accordance with different beliefs and feelings. It is important to notice that the changes observed are more in tune with the diaspora space. He dresses himself as an American, he allows himself to have a relationship that, although it is with an Indian woman, does not follow the codes of the Indian tradition. He associates the relationship he has now with Mrs. Bagchi to the relationships his children probably had in the adolescence, and that at the time he would not have approved of them.

He can be closely compared to Ashoke until the moment his wife dies. Before her death little change had occurred, since he lived in the diaspora space in accordance to the cultural roles of his homeland. As far as the relationship with Mrs. Bagchi is concerned, he behaves as if he is living between two cultures. He is happy with the new relationship, but he is still afraid to confront his children with it, a situation that is typical of second generation immigrants who are afraid to face the demands of the new space with the tradition of their parents who have taught them something different at home. The same is true for Ruma's father, a fact that can be explained by Hall:

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power … identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225)

The space Ruma's father is inserted into also affects his identity, showing that he is subjected to the time spent in the diaspora space. Hall's statement can also be exemplified by the Sanjeev's behavior in which it is possible to observe a reconfiguration of his cultural identity because of the different attachments he and his wife have towards Indian traditions. Sanjeev is a first generation character like Ashoke and Ruma's father but, there are two important things that differ him from the previous two. First, when the story is narrated, he has not been living in the diaspora space for a long time. And, second, he has an arranged marriage in the United States with a second generation woman, who seems to have gone through an acculturation process as she has even dropped her Indian name and only uses her American nickname. Therefore, Sanjeev has to face sooner than the other characters the reconfiguration of gender roles.

Sanjeev notices that his wife will not fulfill the expectations he has of a wife. She does not like cooking, does not care much about the house, and does not have second thoughts about keeping the religious images she finds around the house. According to Joel Kuortti, the issue of the religious paraphernalia Twinkle finds, her interest in the pieces and Sanjeev's resistance might be compared to the relation between the culture of the metropolis and the colony. In Sanjeev's case, he wants to deny the foreign culture as he is a Hindu, but he ends up recognizing the value of the bust of the Virgin Mary. Also according to Kuortti: "[t]he love-hate relationship exemplifies powerfully the boundaries of diasporic identity, whether you love it or hate it, there is an undeniably valuable thing from the 'other' culture taking centre-stage in your own house" (216). Although Kuortti recognizes that Twinkle's attitude goes also against patriarchal values, he focuses his analyzes on the clash between cultures. However, I believe that the cultural clash can also be approached through the perspective of different generations of immigrants, and I prefer to focus on the analysis of the

renegotiation of gender roles that are made possible because of the diaspora space. The title of the short story, “This Blessed House” indicates the importance of this space. The use of a positive adjective to describe it shows how important this new space is for Twinkle in her struggle against Sanjeev's traditional roles. For instance, when Sanjeev tells her what to do or what not to do, she simply tells him what she will do it, implying that she will not act as he pleases, an attitude that Sanjeev attributes to Twinkle's birth place. Besides, it is Twinkle's attitude against Sanjeev's patriarchal values that will cause him to reconfigure his own roles.

It is possible to conclude that most first generation characters tend to maintain their culture as they are still strongly attached to their home country. As Brah explains it, the first generation is still strongly connected to their homeland by a recent memory of what is left behind. However, as Brah also claims, the subjects of diaspora have to reorient themselves in the new space (190). As it is possible to observe, most first generation characters try to create relationships with people with the same cultural background, and through their memories they will reinvent or even translate their culture in the new space. But Lahiri, through different characters, portrays a multiplicity of experiences in the diaspora space which has different impacts on the characters. The changes that can be observed in Ashoke and Ashima, for instance, are gradual and more related to American habits which do not often accommodate some Indian traditions, to their children's demands about food and celebrations, and to the time they spend in the diaspora space. Ruma's father, for instance, shows how faithful to Indian customs he was until his wife's death, and, like Sanjeev, how fluid and continuous the process of gender relations and identity construction is.

The second generation characters, as represented by Lahiri, have a lot in common, regardless of their gender. During the time they are growing up in America, they all seem to recognize that they live between two different cultures, and it is probably the consciousness

of alterity that makes them so distinct from the first generation characters analyzed here. I agree with Shivangi Srivastava's statement that “the influence of American culture is obvious in their lifestyle and they rarely subscribe to the polarized cultural identities their parents bear” (6). I also consider that although all Lahiri's second generation characters are examples of hyphenated subjects which bear cultural traits of both Indian and American culture, some of them, as in the case of Ruma, Hema and Gogol look back, in adulthood, to the Indian culture with nostalgia, adopting some traditions, like the arranged marriage, which they considered inappropriate when they were growing up.

Usha, Hema, Ruma, Gogol and Kaushik have different experiences regarding their life as second generation immigrants while they are growing up. While Usha and Gogol feel that it is a burden to dwell between cultures, and Ruma and Hema seem to be more resilient, Kaushik seems to be more tormented by his mother's death than by his double belonging. His life in transit seems to be an attempt to avoid cultural and emotional attachments. However, no matter the diversity of experiences each character has, it is impossible to deny the impacts the diaspora space have on them during their adulthood. Although little is said about the adult Usha, all other second generation characters have successful careers with financial independence from their parents and partners which allow them to make their own decisions without much interference from their parents.

They all have several relationships with American partners, and Ruma even married an American man despite her mother's opposition. Besides, when Gogol, Hema, and Kaushik have relationships with people who share the same ethnic ancestry, they do that because they choose to, not because they are expected or forced to. While Gogol divorces Moushumi, a practice frowned upon by his traditional parents, the opposite seems to happen with Hema, who does not want to give up her career for love and instead marries a man her parents have

found for her.

However, they are not stereotypically represented with the same characteristics, suffering from the same effects of a life between two worlds. Instead, Lahiri often represents her second generation characters as having problems which would apply to cosmopolitan subjects of different cultures. She does not only describe confrontations which are results of a cultural clash, but also focuses on the character's conflicts among people who share the same cultural heritage. By doing so, she distances her narrative from generation stereotypes, separating or bridging characters from different and the same generation focusing, instead, on human conflicts. There often seems not to be a barrier which separates the representation of male and female characters of second generation, but, instead, Lahiri seems to make them cross, like their parents once did, an imaginary frontier by also portraying the male characters troubled by meaningful conflicts which may have resulted from the reconfiguration of gender relations, from the loss of what was once familiar and, from the space they are inserted in, in which people see them as different, and they recognize themselves as different.

Lahiri's fiction eschews the stereotyped representation of first and second generation of male and female characters, approximating them as they all cross borders, imaginary or not, through their life time. The space they all inhabit, as Lefebvre quotation which opens these considerations illustrates, brings forth the issue of recognition. Their brown skin, the colorful saris, and their names make them visible in the new space, in which they are not only seen as different but also recognize themselves as different, not only from the subjects from a different culture, but also from the ones that were left behind in India. For the first generation characters the strangeness comes from recognizing themselves as different from the American ones, while for the second generation, the strangeness comes from not being like their parents' relatives, not like their own parents nor like their American friends. Maybe it is

possible to argue that it is this multiple difference from multiple others that makes them question their belongings in and attachments to the new country. In other words, it is their recognition as hybrids which makes them contest and perform different roles in the diaspora space.

The most important change for the female characters is probably their acquired agency in the new country. It might be seen as a small achievement, as in the case of Ashima and Aparna, but they are meaningful ones. The changes of the first generation female characters have a deep impact on their children as it is the women who are often the ones responsible to transmit the culture and traditions to their offspring, as I have been arguing. For the second generation of female characters change is much more prominent as they are financially independent, they can freely voice their concerns, disagreements, and most importantly, they all seem to acquire agency as they are able to choose the course of their actions.

Although Lahiri's male characters of both generations are usually portrayed as middle-class successful professionals, a fact which in India would allow them “access to masculine power and privilege” (Dhingra 147), they do not openly perform the roles which result from their success in the new country, but instead, they are all deeply affected by the agency acquired by their partners in the new space.

It is the diaspora space, therefore, the main factor which favors the reconfiguration of both male and female characters' gender roles, as it is in the new space that the recognition of difference is accentuated. Besides, it is possible to observe from the differences between first and second generation characters that the time they spend in the diaspora space is also responsible for enforcing changes in their roles. The changes observed in Ashoke, Ashima, Aparna and Ruma's father in old age are examples of the importance of the time spent in the

new space, even for those with a strong connection to a different culture.

Besides showing the importance of space for the reconfiguration of gender roles for both male and female characters and how much is gained by crossing borders and living far from the place one was born, Lahiri's fiction also shows that loss is often present for diasporic subjects. In the case of first generation characters loss is most often represented as the bonds broken when they leave India and by the death of parents and relatives that they are unable to mourn properly. As far as the second generation characters are concerned, something is also lost for those born in a foreign land. In most stories, Lahiri often makes the point of representing characters who have lost someone dear to them. Ruma's mother's death makes her question her cultural attachment to India and miss what she had once disregarded. The same is true about Gogol, who gets closer to his parents' culture again after his father's death. Kaushik's life in the diaspora space is haunted by his mother's death, while the death of Shoba and Shukumar's baby seems to dissipate any bonding they once shared.

Although Lahiri's narratives often depicts the positive aspects of those who live their lives across borders, she also clings to the fact that something is always lost. Although Rushdie's statement emphasizes that being translated men something can also be gained (17), I believe that it is important to highlight that something is also lost . Lahiri's characters are usually middle-class, successful professionals, but it is important to state that their lives are not only marked by success and belonging, but also by loss and dislocation. However, Ashima's decision, after her husband's death, to divide her life between India and the United States, is an example of the impossibility of denying the importance of place for the diasporic subjects. For them, the new country is also a place “one dreams of the world” (Schick 26), a place they learn to call home.

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