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NARRATIVES OF DISPLACEMENT

IN SPACE AND TIME:

A study of *Brick Lane*, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*,

The Lowland and *Americanah*

Belo Horizonte

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*We all have dreams when
we start a long journey. All
my thanks to the ones who
encouraged me to finish
the crossing.*

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“I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart.” Psalm 9.1

ABSTRACT

As contemporary writers, Monica Ali, Mohja Kahf, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Adichie focus, in their respectively novels *Brick Lane* (2003), *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* (2006), *The Lowland* (2013) and *Americanah* (2013), on the representation of the lives of diasporic subjects as well as on the reconfiguration of the female characters' gender roles. The diaspora space approximates the different diasporic movements portrayed in the novels studied here since, in the process of relocation, the subjects are usually portrayed as dislocated and alienated. As far as gender roles are concerned, the specificity of each diasporic movement can prove to have different results.

This dissertation investigates the influence of the categories of space and time on the reconfiguration of gender roles with an emphasis on the identity constituents that mediate the transformations observed in the characters. In particular, this work emphasizes the importance of certain identity constituents in this process. Focusing on how trauma, race and religion interfere in the process of gender reconfiguration, this work analyzes how the specificity of these identity constituents are relevant for a discussion on gender and diasporic movements in contemporary literature.

RESUMO

Monica Ali, Mohja Kahf, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Adichie são escritoras diaspóricas da contemporaneidade que abordam em seus respectivos romances, *Brick Lane* (2003), *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* (2006), *The Lowland* (2013) e *Americanah* (2013), experiências de sujeitos diaspóricos e suas reconfigurações de gênero. O espaço diaspórico no qual as personagens estão inseridas indica uma aproximação da representação desses sujeitos, mesmo com as diferenças inerentes de cada movimento migratório a que elas pertencem. As especificidades desse mesmo movimento migratório se mostram primordiais na análise dos papéis de gênero e suas reconfigurações. Esta tese investiga o impacto do tempo e do espaço diaspórico nas reconfigurações de gênero. Mostra ainda como as barreiras de gênero são mediadas por determinados constituintes da identidade desses sujeitos. Em particular, enfatiza a importância desses constituintes de identidade nas adequações dos papéis de gênero. Discutindo como temas como o trauma e as questões de raça e de religião interferem no processo de reconfiguração de gênero, o trabalho aborda como as especificidades dos constituintes de identidade são relevantes para uma análise de gênero e dos movimentos diaspóricos na literatura contemporânea.

Home is no longer just one place. It is locations.

Home is that place which enables and promotes

varied and everchanging perspectives, a place

where one discovers new ways of seeing reality,

frontiers of difference.

(h o o k s 148)

Home is also the lived

experiences of a locality.

(B r a h 192)

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Introduction

Every story is a travel story -
a spatial practice.
(de Certeau 115)

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) are contemporary novels which portray subjects who migrate to a new country and their struggle to assert themselves in the new space. In this dissertation, I analyze these four novels as they provide different diasporic movements, each with its cultural specificity that, as a result, enable me to focus on the relevance of space and time for all diasporic subjects, as far as gender is concerned.

My hypothesis is based on the premise that all subjects are affected by the new space and the time spent in this space, no matter what their cultural background is. In other words, space and time are implacable in forcing changes in the subjects' identities and identifications, apart from the specificity that each diasporic community faces in their process of adaptation in the host country. As far as gender is concerned, I claim that the specificity of each diasporic movement is directly related to the process of gender reconfiguration. For that matter, I investigate how trauma, race and religion interconnect with the gender reconfiguration of diasporic subjects.

The four authors whose works are chosen for analysis are representative of important diasporic movements that started after World War II, and the characters of the chosen novels are emblematic examples of the dislocated, hybrid and translated subjects of the narratives of diaspora which are so important for contemporary literature.

Jhumpa Lahiri is the daughter of Bengali immigrants who was born in London in 1967

and was raised in Rhode Island, US. The novel analyzed here, *The Lowland*, was published in 2013 and it tells the story of two brothers born in India who are inseparable until their twenties when each decides to take a different path. While Udayan becomes a member of the Naxalite¹ movement, Subhash moves to the United States of America for a PhD degree. The novel explores the outcomes of Udayan's death on those who were closer to him, that is, Subhash, their mother and Udayan's wife, Gauri. Besides, it also explores the differences between those who remain in their countries of birth and the ones who choose to migrate, as well as the changes that the immigrants go through in the host country. This novel exemplifies my claim that the diaspora space inevitably establishes a difference in the renegotiation of gender roles between those who stay in the home country and those who migrate to a different culture. Lahiri also published *Interpreter of Maladies* in 1999, *The Namesake* in 2003 and *Unaccustomed Earth* in 2008. Her other books also tell the stories of Indian immigrants who have to deal with the feeling of being dislocated and hybrid. Her stories also focus on the reconfiguration of gender roles in the diaspora space. However, *The Lowland*, differently from her other works and from the other novels of this dissertation, portray immigrant subjects whose lives are not marked only by the movement to another country but also by the traumas the subjects go through in India. Therefore, it offers a different perspective than that of the other novels.

The concept of diaspora is essential to Mohja Kahf's novel, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, as the novel deals explicitly with this context. Kahf was born in Syria in 1967 and moved to the US when she was four. Her first book, *Western Representation of the Muslim Women*, is a critical work that discusses several images used to represent Muslim Women. Kahf also published two books of poems, *E-mails from Scheherazade* in 2003 and *Hagar*

¹ The Naxalite was a revolutionary movement that happened in post independent India which was based on the Chinese revolution of 1949.

Poems in 2016. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* was published in 2006, and it tells the story of Khadra Shamy, who is a Muslim Syrian immigrant in the United States. Khadra's feeling of dislocation is caused mainly by her inability to define where home is. Her ethnic background, her religion and her gender are constructed and reconfigured in the diaspora space. Khadra's struggles in the new country are represented mainly through her different readings of her cultural traditions and her religion. The reader can grasp her different attachments to her faith and culture through the different dress codes she adopts throughout the narrative.

The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf focuses on two important elements of the Syrian diaspora, that is, religion and the prejudices that this diasporic community suffers after political crises between the US and Arab countries. Thus, it helps me demonstrate that, despite the close attachment the main character has to her community, she consistently transforms herself through time, which shows her identity, and gender negotiations in the diasporic space.

Monica Ali was born in Bangladesh to a Bangladeshi father and an English mother, but moved to England at the age of three where she has been living so far. Her debut novel, *Brick Lane*, was published in 2003 and its filmic adaptation was released in 2007. She also published *Alentejo Blue* in 2006, *In the Kitchen* in 2009 and *Untold Story* in 2011. *In the Kitchen* is the only novel, apart from *Brick Lane*, that discusses the life of immigrants, although from another perspective. *Brick Lane* tells the story of Nazneen, who was born in Bangladesh but has to move to London at the age of eighteen when she has an arranged marriage to an older man called Chanu. The first chapter of the novel sets the tone of the narrative as it introduces one of the important themes that rules Nazneen's life: fate. As she moves to London, her husband tries to keep her inside their house explaining to her that although he sees himself as a westernized man, people will talk if she does things that are not expected from a village girl. But as years go by, Nazneen slowly learns to take her own

decisions. This novel is also important as it shows the story of a woman who continues to be oppressed by a man in the diaspora space, and because there is the contrast of her life with the one of her sister who stays in Bangladesh.

The last novel I choose for my analysis is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. Adichie was born and raised in Nigeria. She moved to the US at the age of nineteen to pursue a degree in communication and social science. Nowadays, she divides her time mainly between Nigeria and the US. Her first novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) are set in Nigeria. Adichie is also the author of a collection of short stories, *The Things Around your Neck* (2009) and several other essays published in newspapers and magazines. One of them, *We Should All be Feminists*, became a book in 2014. Her most recent publication is *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, which was published in 2017. *Americanah* was published in 2013 and it tells the story of Ifemelu who travels to the US to finish her undergraduate studies as Nigeria is under military conflicts and schools are often on strike. In the US Ifemelu has to face the question of what it means to be Black, an issue that never occurred to her while living in Nigeria. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu claims that “race is not biology, race is sociology. Race is not genotype; race is phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it's about how you look” (Adichie 419). So, although I recognize that there is not such a thing as a biological race, I use the term in this dissertation in the meaning ascribed by Ifemelu, that is, race as a still necessary concept when it is used in reference to the suffering Black people go through because of racism. Stuart Hall, while discussing the Black movement in Britain, claims that

The original critique of the predominant relations of race and representation and the politics which developed around it have not and cannot possibly disappear while the conditions which gave rise to it— cultural racism in its

Dewesbury form—not only persists but positively flourishes under Thatcherism. (“New” 455)

Hall's claim explains the use of the term race also in relation to the consequences of racism. For this reason, I adopt the term in my analysis of *Americanah*. However, I use the term ethnicity in the other parts of this dissertation to refer to characteristics that make one culture distinct from another (Bennett, Grossberg, Morris 112).

This dissertation has its axis in the relation of the categories of space and time, and how these two categories are paramount to understand the portrayal of subjects in transit. I propose then two different lines of investigation, that is, the relation between the category of space-time with diaspora and with gender.

In the first chapter, entitled “Space and Time,” I discuss the concepts of space and time to demonstrate that the two concepts should be considered together to provide a frame of analysis that encompasses the movement in space and the passing of time. The second part of this chapter deals with spaces that are important for the analysis of the novels such as diaspora space as well as the relation between place and identity in order to establish the connection between identity construction and the place the subject inhabits.

The second chapter, “Diaspora and Diasporas,” is about the diasporic movement represented in the four novels. First, I discuss the concept of diaspora and its characteristics and, then, I research the differences and similarities among the Bangladeshi, Syrian, Indian, and Nigerian diaspora, which are the ones described in *Brick Lane*, *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*, *The Lowland* and in *Americanah*, respectively. Finally, I also consider in this chapter the main characteristics associated with diasporic movements in order to identify how the diasporic characters portrayed in the novels are similarly affected in their lives in transit.

The third and fourth chapter deals with gender and the reconfiguration of gender roles

in the diaspora space through time. Since the main characters of the four novels are women, except for Lahiri's *The Lowland*, which also has a man as a protagonist, I choose the perspective of gender to analyze the importance of the diaspora space, through time, in the characters' identities. Despite the similarities observed in the relocation process of the diasporic subject in the host land, as far as gender is concerned, it is through the specificity of each diasporic movement that gender is reconfigured. Therefore, in the third chapter I discuss gender in the light of race and trauma, while the fourth deals with the intersection between gender and religion.

In my final considerations, I compare the similarities and the specificity of each diasporic movement. As far as the similarities are concerned, the lives of diasporic subjects demonstrate that the diaspora space tends to affect all subjects similarly, that is, that all subjects tend to reconfigure the social relations in the new space. However, it is the specificity that takes a central role in mediating the changes observed in the characters. 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 the importance of space and time for the diasporic subjects represented by some contemporary women writers. My hypothesis is based on the comparison between the characters who migrated and the ones who stay in the home country. This comparison demonstrates the importance of the diaspora space and the time spent in this space in the identity construction of the subjects. Since I choose to focus on gender relations to discuss the changes space and time enforce on the characters, I show as the final result of this dissertation that the issues that single the characters out in the diaspora space mediate the reconfiguration of the characters' gender roles.

Chapter 1

Space and Time

leaving home, one day,
for the great world beyond.

(Otsuka 66)

The four novels chosen for analysis in this dissertation may be called routes narratives, in the perspective of what Susan Friedman understands it, that is, as a narrative that involves leaving home and establishing interactions with others (*Mappings* 154). Routes narratives presuppose at least two different places: one from which the subject is coming from and another to which the subject is moving. I understand that the different places the subjects inhabit throughout the narratives are paramount to understand the changes they undergo.

As Friedman argues, “where people come from and where they travel to are constitutive of identity” (*Mappings* 178), which means that identities are constructed in relation to the spaces subjects inhabit. Friedman's statement may also be extended to the claim I make in this work, that is, that the fluid identities of the subjects are formed through a correlation of the dynamic categories of space and time. The relations established in the different spaces the subjects inhabit with the passing of time are then in the core of the analysis that I propose.

It may also be inferred from the novels analyzed here that different spaces have an impact on how subjects interact with one another, which may in turn affect their subjectivity. As the four novels portray characters who were born in one place and then move to a foreign one, it is then possible to observe how a geographical change directly affects their social interactions. The novels chosen for this study show that, for instance, to be a woman, Black or a Muslim has different meanings depending on the places the characters inhabit.

In this chapter, I explore different places the subjects inhabit in the novels in order to

illustrate the importance of the categories of space and time in the process of identity construction. The two terms place and space are distinct and they are going to be developed in the next section.

According to Vijay Agnew, “[i]dentities are socially constructed, contingent on time, place, and social context, and are therefore fluid and unstable” (12). Considering that identity is, as Agnew states, fluid and socially constructed, it is paramount to investigate the consequences that the movement across border has on identity constituents together with the category of time since identities are constructed over time. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate not only the importance of space in the changes observed in diasporic subjects, but how the time spent in the new space is determinant for those changes.

1.1. Space and Time: Corollary Concepts

Space by itself, and time
by itself, are doomed to fade
away into mere shadows.

(Minkowski 297)

The concept of time is commonly understood in relation to change observed in nature. The passing of time is related to natural phenomena such as the movement of our planet around the sun and the movement of the moon around Earth.

Émile Durkheim considers that time is “an abstract and impersonal framework that contains not only our individual existence but also that of humanity” (10). Because time is such an abstraction, the necessity to measure and to systematize such concept gave origin to certain constructions such as calendars, which, according to Durkheim, “expresses the rhythm of collective activity while ensuring that regularity” (10). Important in Durkheim's

understanding of time is its connection to human activities, that is, that time is used as a concept through which human activities are organized. Gilles Deleuze conceptualizes time in relation to memory:

Although it is ordinary, the first synthesis of time is no less intratemporal. It constitutes time as a present, but a present which passes. Time does not escape the present, but the present does not stop moving by leaps and bounds which encroach one another. This is the paradox of the present: to constitute time while passing in the time constituted... the claim of the present is precisely that it passes. However, it is what causes the present to pass, that to which the present and habit belong, which must be considered the ground of life. It is memory which grounds time. (79)

It is through the memory of an experience that time is apprehended. Thus, it is possible to say that according to Deleuze, our perception of the passing of time is constructed by the memories we hold during our life.

Stephen Bates relates time to change since he contends that “change is necessarily temporal. Furthermore, temporality implies change” (145). Having in mind Bates's definition of time, it is possible to understand why time becomes such a central issue for this dissertation as it is through this category that changes can be analyzed. However, the concept of time that is used in this dissertation is inserted in Bertolt Brecht's theory of historicization which is also based on the assumption that time and change are closely related. Meg Munford explains Brecht's concept saying that it is “an inquiring attitude towards the present through the past” which “can involve presenting an event as the product of historically specific material conditions and human choices” as well as “showing differences between the past and present and evidencing change” (72). Therefore, through historicization, it is possible to analyze the

changes the characters have gone through in the diaspora space.

As far as the category of place is concerned, Manuel Castells, like other geographers of his time, while writing about the relation of place, time and social relations, considered that neither time nor place could be conceived as having an active role in the way social relations are constructed. He claimed in the late 1970s that “space², like time, is a physical quantity that tells us nothing about social relations” (442). So, when studying social interactions at that time, neither space nor time were seen as relevant for the analysis, since they were only understood as physical categories which did not affect subjects.

The importance of places started occupying central stage within social sciences years later. Anthony Giddens, who states the opposite of Castells, claims that places do have an active role and should not be disregarded when thinking about social relations. Giddens argues that social relations are affected by a place in the same way that places are affected by these same interactions (29). He contends that “social systems are composed of patterns of relationships between actors or collectivities reproduced across time and space” (26). Giddens's definition of place is relevant as he considers it a fluid category that directly influences the way social relations are constructed. Giddens was one of the first geographers to mention the interrelation between time and place, and it seems relevant to state here the importance to study these two concepts together.

Susan Friedman states that “geography is providing literary studies with a new form of contextualization – a specifically spatial one that complements the long-standing methodologies of historicization” (“Migrations” 263). I share Friedman's point of view as I understand that the theories about space add to the existing ones about time. I propose, however, to approach them through a time-space perspective, as I believe that the association of the concepts of time and space provide the necessary frame to study the subjects in transit,

² The geographers discussed use the words place and space referring to locality.

for they provide the viewpoint of the movement across space and time.

Along the same lines proposed by Giddens, David Harvey contends that place and time are constructed through social practices, and that the conditions of a specific place can influence the social interactions established (“Between Space” 419, *Justice* 290). Harvey examines the particularities of localities to draw the conclusion that the specificity of a place is made by culture, environment and people.

Doreen Massey in turn states that space is “constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global” (*Space* 264). She also makes a distinction between the terms place and space contending that space “may be employed to picture the n-dimensional space of identity,” while she states that place “can raise an image of one’s place in the world” and it “can be used in the context of discussions of positionality” (Massey 1). Massey's concept of space is used throughout this dissertation as she places social interactions as one of the axis through which space is defined in opposition to the term place, which is used to refer to localities.

Massey also argues that space and time cannot be disassociated, as she claims that “the spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics, just as the temporal is to geography” (*Space* 269) and that “time and space must be thought together... for they are inextricably intermixed” (“Space-Time” 274). When Massey associates space to time, she is, in fact, emphasizing the dynamic and continuous construction of space. Massey relates space to the way social relations are constructed when she states that “space is constructed through social relations and material social practices” as well as that “the social is spatially constructed too” (*Space* 254). Therefore, it is possible to draw from Massey's statements quoted above that space and social relations are fluid and in continuous

construction through the passing of time.

Besides, in order to understand the argument that place is important for the construction of one's identity, it is relevant to investigate what makes one place different from another. Linda McDowell and Doreen Massey make very similar claims when establishing the relation between space and social relations. While McDowell states that “[w]e all act in relation to our intentions and beliefs, which are always culturally shaped and historically and spatially positioned” (7), Massey contends that “a 'place' is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location” (*Space* 168). What can be inferred from both statements is that the correlation among place, social relations and time cannot be denied. While we can infer from McDowell's claim that human interaction changes over space and time and that these relations depend on the cultural beliefs of each locality, Massey claims that social interactions are responsible for the specificity of a place. Massey's and McDowell's statements are in such a way interconnected that it is possible to restate them saying that what makes one place distinct from another are the social relations established locally, and that both place and social relations change over time since place is continually affected by social relations as much as social relations are affected by places. The dynamism of space, contrary to an idea of space as static and passive, is emphasized when we think of the term space which is constructed through social relations.

McDowell explains the relation between places and social interaction further stating that “[p]laces are made through power relations which construct the rules which defines boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded” (3-4). Therefore, we can say that places have a particularity or an identity forged by human interactions. This notion that the power relations constructed in a given place is responsible for the identity of a place is relevant for this study when we

consider that the novels deal with subjects who move to a foreign community and, therefore, they have to live under different power relations, which in turn, is directly related to the sense of not belonging of the subjects in transit.

Along these lines, Massey also discusses the concept of identities of places saying that these identities are unfixed because “the social relations out of which they are constructed are themselves by their very nature dynamic and changing” (*Space* 169). Massey goes further and explains that “the identity of place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with the 'outside'” (*Space* 169). Then, we can consider that places are constructed or informed not only by local circumstances, but also by the movement of people across the globe, which includes situations of people in the move, such as in transnationalism and diaspora. Massey calls this production of space that is both informed by local and global interactions a global sense of place, which is “extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local” (*Space* 154-55). It is also important to highlight here that Massey does not define one space or the community of such a space in opposition to the “Other who is outside” (*World* 168). In fact, difference is part of the ongoing process of the identity construction of a place. The identity of a space or its specificity needs to be considered at a given time. Massey also argues that “the definitions of both space and time in themselves must be constructed as the result of interrelations” (*Space* 261), which means that a given space and time is defined by the interactions established in that place.

If we consider the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, it is possible to see how the main character's perception of space is marked by social interactions. The first lines of the novel show Khadra returning to Indianapolis as an adult: “Liar,' she says to the highway sign that claims 'The People of Indiana Welcome You.' [She] spent most of her growing up years in

Indiana. She knows better than the sign” (Kahf 1). Her experience of living in Indianapolis is not of living in a receptive place. Rather, her memories of it define the place as hostile to Muslims like herself, as the following quotation shows: “America was mad at Khadra personally, the Shamy family, and all the other Muslims of Indianapolis” (Kahf 119). Along the narrative, Khadra establishes several emotional connections with certain places: the Mosque she attends is associated with protection; the road where a Muslim friend was murdered is associated with vulnerability.

Another important association with space that is present in Kahf’s novel is the one when Khadra is flying. On two important trips, one to Mecca and another to Syria, Khadra questions herself, on the plane, where she belongs. When she is in the US, mainly before her trip to Mecca, she believes she does not belong in the US: “[t]hey landed. At last, Khadra thought, someplace where we really belong” (Kahf 159). However, while in Mecca, she discovers it is not the place she had imagined and she says “[a]nd even though she was in a Muslim country at this moment, and not just any Muslim country, *the* Muslim country, where Islam started, she had never felt so far from home” (Kahf 177). It is, then, in this space between places, where she is not grounded, that she is mostly uncertain about a place to call home, where she feels how contradictory her relation to Muslim and non-Muslim spaces is.

In *The Lowland*, Gauri, one of the main characters, moves to her in-law’s house after she marries. The house is close to the place that gives the novel its title. It is in front of this same house that she sees her husband being murdered. This place represents for Gauri all the suffering she has gone through in India. When her husband’s brother asks her to marry him and to return with him to the US, she sees the opportunity to start over: “[t]his was the place where she could put things behind her” (Lahiri 125). Place is meaningful for Gauri as it is for the other characters. However, Gauri is, like no other character, aware of the importance of

time as far as space is concerned, that is of the connection between social relations and places. She feels that traveling abroad is also a chance to move away from her past:

On the plane time had been irrelevant but also the only thing that mattered; it was time, not space, she'd been aware of traveling through. She'd sat among so many passengers, captive, awaiting their destinations. Most of them, like Gauri, freed in an atmosphere not their own. (Lahiri 125)

This quotation shows that for Gauri time is undoubtedly important because she feels that in order to overcome the traumas of her past, she needs to move away from both time and the space in which her identity was forged.

In order to understand the portrayal of characters of the novels chosen, as in the examples of Gauri and Khadra given above, the spaces they occupy throughout the narrative have to be considered because they affect the social interactions established directly. Along this chapter, I show some of the spaces described in the narratives, which are linked to the characters' identity construction.

1.2 Diaspora Space

What this geopolitical space may be, as a local and transnational reality, is being both interrogate and reinitiated.

(Bhabha 6)

Diaspora, an important spatial concept that will be discussed in depth in the second chapter of this dissertation, “emerges out of migrations of collectivities” (Brah 193), that is, it indicates the dispersion of a people from one center to other localities. Susan Friedman, for instance, calls attention to the specificity of diasporic movements claiming that “[d]iaspora is

migration plus loss, desire, and widely scattered communities held together by memory and a sense of history over a long period of time” (“Migrations” 268). However, in this part of the chapter I investigate how the diaspora space should be taken into account when analyzing subjects in transit. My claim is based on the premise that different spaces foster the visibility of different identity constituents.

The concept of a diasporic space is used in this dissertation as the conceptual category described by Avtar Brah. She claims that this space is a category inhabited by those who migrate as well as by those who stay put (181). Therefore, diaspora space is understood as a combination of relations established by those living in transit, and affecting both diasporic and indigenous subjects. However, I want to broaden this definition and include the relatives of the ones who migrated, that is, those who did not migrate but who are also affected by the lives of the diasporic subjects. Although Brah used the term stay put to refer only to indigenous subjects, I will use it to refer to the relatives of migrants who stayed in their country of origin.

Brah goes further in her definition advocating the impact that diaspora space has on the subjectivity of its subjects:

It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed, where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition.

(208)

The notion of diaspora space proposed by Brah is that of a space that fosters the intersectionality of identity constituents, and, therefore, it is a space that allows subjects to interrogate and contest their identities. It is an approach to space that does not view it as a

mere location where things happen, but a notion of space that has a role in the transformations observed in diasporic subjects.

The characters of the novels studied have their identities constantly acknowledged and contested in the diaspora space. Friedman makes an important point about the transforming identities of subjects when she states that “the characters who move through narrative space and time occupy multiple and shifting positions in relation to each other and to different systems of power relations” (*Mappings* 28). When characters move through narrative space and time, they may acknowledge different identity constituents and their intersectionality which were not seen as relevant in a previous time.

In *Americanah*, for instance, it is possible to observe different positions the main character occupies in the narrative. First, in Nigeria, Ifemelu gets a scholarship and goes to a school where most students belong to the upper class. Because of her beauty, she is a popular student, but she feels that there is a distance from her world and theirs. At a party in the house of a classmate, she considers: “[e]ach time Ifemelu came to Kayode's house, she imagined what it was like to live here, in Ikoyi, in a gracious and graveled compound, with servants who wore white” (Adichie 67). When she arrives in the United States, without a job or enough money to survive, she occupies a different position as a Black, unemployed woman. She describes those days as if “she was at war with the world, and woke up each day feeling bruised, imagining a horde of faceless people who were all against her” (Adichie 187). After getting a job, she starts dating a rich, white and handsome American. Her position in society changes drastically and because of his money, she is respected: “[w]ith Curt, she became, in her mind, a woman free of knots and cares, a woman running in the rain with the taste of sun-warmed strawberries in her mouth” (Adichie 241). In the examples given above, class is the identity constituent, which is more accentuated. But in the following example when the

narrator talks about how people react when they see Ifemelu and Curt together, it is possible to observe that being a Black woman interferes with how the US society perceives her: “[a]nd it did not help that although she might be a pretty black girl, she was not the kind of black that they could, with an effort, imagine him with: she was not light-skinned, she was not biracial” (Adichie 362).

Diasporic space accentuates the visibility of the differences between individuals. Ifemelu claims that she only discovers what it means to be Black when she moves to America and when she goes back to Nigeria she says “I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black” (Adichie 585). Therefore, being from a place in which most of the population is Black, she states that she only became aware of race when she came to live in a place in which blackness is not the norm. For her, “race was not embroidered in the fabric of her history” (Adichie 418), but it becomes an issue for Ifemelu during the time she spends in the US. In each phase of Ifemelu's life abroad, an aspect of her identity is more in evidence. Friedman names this approach “relational positionality” since she postulates that “subjectivity is not only multiple and contradictory, but also relational.... Identity depends upon a point of reference, as that point moves nomadically, so do the contours of identity” (22). Therefore, as it is going to be seen further in this chapter, the movement across borders has a significant impact on the identity of diasporic subjects. Living abroad not only makes Ifemelu conscious of being Black, but also allows her to come to terms with this aspect of her identity.

Thus, the diasporic space in which the subject inhabits highlights the differences between cultures. The subjectivity of diasporic subjects are, then, formed not only through their identification with an ethnic community back in their homeland, but also in relation to the community of the diasporic space they now live in. This is evident in the example of Ifemelu given above, but it is also true for the other characters who, in contact with others, not

only question the values of the other culture, but also the values they learned in their homeland.

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). Thus, it is possible to say that identity is constructed in relation to space and, as far as diasporic subjects are concerned, their identity is also constructed through the awareness of difference in relation to other subjects who are culturally different from themselves.

Because of the impact on the identity construction of diasporic subjects, diaspora space is a site of possibilities. It is in this new space that the subjects may often free themselves from the constraints of a culture. Transformations are observed in all characters, even in the ones who do not believe that fate can be changed. This is the case of Nazneen from Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. After a life of subjugation, she realizes that she does not have to let others decide for her. She says: “*I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me*” (Ali 339). If we compare Nazneen's life with the one of her sister, Hasina, who stays in Bangladesh, we can observe that the diaspora space opens the possibility of a real agency.

Hasina ran away with a boyfriend at the age of sixteen, and because of that she is dishonored. After a series of events of domestic violence, she runs away from him. Her life seems a sequence of escapes that leads her nowhere. She once writes to Nazneen reasoning about the options she sees in front of her: “where I can go sister? I ran away for my husband. And I run away from him also. Now I afraid [sic] to run again” (Ali 132). She seems to be making her own choices, but her choices are not made out of possibilities, but out of despair. As a result, Hasina claims at a point in life that hers has become meaningless: “I am nothing. I have nothing. I am all that I have. I can give you nothing” (Ali 136).

Living in London, Nazneen makes her choices among the possibilities that lie in front of her. It is possible to say that, differently from Hasina, Nazneen is the one who acquires agency, as she is, in Judith Butler's understanding of agency, able to reflexively mediate the situations presented to her. In other words, she can transcend the constraints of established social structures and she is, eventually, able to reason and decide what is best for herself instead of letting her father or her husband decide for her. The space Nazneen lives allows her to choose without being constantly stigmatized by her choices, which is the opposite of what is observed in her sister. *Brick Lane* offers the possibility of observing the life of the two sisters, Nazneen and Hasina, the first who migrated to London and the other who stayed in Bangladesh. Although Nazneen feels very limited in her actions in the beginning, she slowly fights for what she wants. Hasina, on the other end, seems always more limited, with less options as time goes by.

Considering the spaces the two characters inhabit, it is possible to say that the diasporic space is fundamental for the changes observed in Nazneen. It is in London, where the constraints of her cultural background are not so strict, that she is able to question fate and take control of her own life.

1.3 Space and Identity Construction

In the world in which I travel,
I am endlessly creating myself.

(Fanon 204)

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue that the contact zone between different cultures are marked by ideas of rupture and conflict:

Representations of space in the social sciences are remarkably dependent on

images of break, rupture, and disjunction. The distinctiveness of societies, nations, and cultures is based upon a seemingly unproblematic division of space, on the fact that they occupy “naturally” discontinuous spaces... The premise of discontinuity forms the starting point from which to theorize contact, conflict, and contradiction between cultures and societies. (6)

The critics problematize the notion that cultures and societies are closely linked to the borders of nation-states. Conflict and contradiction start, then, in the contact zone between different cultures. The perception that the movement across borders might impact the identity construction of subjects comes most often from postcolonial studies. Homi Bhabha, for instance, claims that “it is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated” (*Location* 63). One of the effects of the arrival of the colonizer in other countries was, then, the emergence of questions regarding difference, identification, and representation which are in the heart of Bhabha's reflection about the identity of colonized subjects.

The identity of the diasporic subject is constructed in like manner since, in the new place, the identity of the subjects is also constructed in relation to different social relations established. The concept of identity that I use here is the one related to the notion of subjectivity. According to Brah:

Identities are inscribed through experiences culturally constructed in social relations. Subjectivity – the site of processes of making sense of our relation to the world – is the modality in which the precarious and contradictory nature of the subject in process is signified or experienced as identity. (123)

In Brah's concept there are two important points that deserve special attention. The first one is that if identity is culturally constructed through social relations, a change in the cultural scenario affects directly the subject's identity as well as their subjectivity, that is, the

way we relate to the world and to others. In other words, the movement to a foreign land, to a space in which social relations are constructed through different cultural processes is going to have a major impact on the identity construction and on the subjectivity of the subjects. The second important point is that Brah contends that identity construction is a process, and therefore, formed through time. As a consequence, the time spent in the diasporic space becomes relevant to observe the changes in the subject's identity.

Judith Butler also relates the concept of subjectivity to the one of identity, when she states that individuals need the “other” in order to acknowledge their own identities (“Subjects of Desire” 58). Similarly to what Brah proposes, Butler claims that the process of identity construction is, in any given place, based not only on similarities, but also on the awareness of differences noticed in the others. However, the diasporic space accentuates the visibility of the differences between individuals, as it was mentioned before in this chapter.

Therefore, considering both Brah's and Butler's claims, it is possible to say that, in diaspora space, the diasporic subjects contest not only the identity constituents and subjectivity construction which they were culturally raised with, but they are able to see other subjects who are different and then question and contest those identities as well. When Gauri from *The Lowland* looks at other women on the campus where her husband works and she begins “to want to look like [them], like a woman Udayan had never seen” (Lahiri 134), she is not only contesting what was taught to her as the acceptable dressing code, she is also questioning the appropriateness of the dressing code of the other women she can now observe around her.

Gauri's situation can also be understood through Irvin Schick's statement that the “construction of identity is at the same time the construction of a network of places” (24). The identity of diasporic subjects is affected by the multiple places that they are connected with.

By observing the other women on the campus, Gauri is able to choose her own dressing code, something she had not been able to do while for a while in India when her mother-in-law took away all her colored saris and made her only wear white ones. Although one may argue that Gauri's mother-in-law's decision is just the cultural norm in India, Subhash's questioning hints to the fact that Gauri could have also contested her, as we can see in their conversation:

You've taken away her colored clothes, the fish and the meat from her plate.

These are our customs, his mother said.

It's demanding. Udayan would never have wanted her to live this way. (Lahiri 114)

Although Gauri had not questioned her mother-in-law about the clothes she had to wear, she does not talk to Subhash when she decides to tear all her clothes up. A complete change of attitude in such a short time leads us to conclude that Gauri feels free to make her own decisions in the new space, without the constraints imposed by a cultural community. As far as clothes are considered, in India the dressing code for women might be acknowledged as culturally constructed and part of their identity since it was traditionally supposed to stand for some aspects of a woman's identity. According to Vinay Bahl the traditional dressing code for women found in religious documents “provide a clear stipulation for women to wear clothes according to their 'caste/class' and marital status” (86). Although the rigid rules established by the religious documents have changed recently, they are still followed in some parts of India.

In Gauri's case it is important to question not only why she decides to change the clothes she wears, but why she understands she is allowed to change. Bhabha, while discussing the representation of the other and the self, claims that “what is interrogated is not simply the image of the person, but the discursive and disciplinary place from which questions of identity are strategically and institutionally posed” (*Location* 68). Considering

Bhabha's statement, the answer to the first question is likely to be that Gauri wants to distance herself from the image of the “Indian woman,” but what interests me here is this diaspora space she now lives that allows her to interrogate her own identity as a woman, a space that empowers her to make her own decisions. Bhabha argues about the importance of the confrontation with the different to question representation and the image of the subject (*Location* 63-66). Therefore, the space Gauri now inhabits allows her to interrogate her own representation as an Indian woman, and to decide that she does not want her clothes to tell others who she is supposed to be.

Although my reading of the examples above might give the impression that the space only produces positive changes in the subject's identities, it is important to highlight that it is not always the case. For example, Ifemelu from *Americanah* shows, when she is back at Lagos, that some of the changes are far from positive. She is called a returnee in Lagos, those who were “the sanctified, back home with an extra gleaming layer” (Adichie 502). Ifemelu, as it is shown in the example bellow, gives a perspective that is not seen in any of the other novels, the one of the diasporic subject who decides to move back home and who does not feel that all her experiences abroad brought only positive changes to her life.

Invited to a gathering with other returnees, Ifemelu realizes that most of them feel superior because they had once lived abroad. They were talking about things they missed from abroad, when one of them invites the others to go to a new restaurant where “[t]hey have the kinds of things we can eat” (Adichie 503). The remark makes Ifemelu realize that she might have become like them:

They have the kinds of things we can eat. An unease crept up on Ifemelu. She was comfortable here, and she wished she were not... She loved eating all the things she had missed while away... but she longed, also, for the other things

she had become used to in America... This was what she hoped she had not become but feared that she had: a “they have the kinds of things we can eat” kind of person. (Adichie 503)

So, Ifemelu's reflection shows that the changes observed in the characters are not always positive, that the returnees, like herself, might have come back to Nigeria with a discourse of superiority which makes her feel uncomfortable.

Considering the changes observed in the characters, it is possible to state that the connection between the construction of the subjects' identity and the place they inhabit seems to be unquestionable. Living in a different culture produces changes in the identity constituents of the characters and very often the diasporic space becomes a place of identification, contestation and of empowerment.

1.3.1 Narrative Spaces: Blogging in *Americanah* and Photography in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

So if you're going to write about race, you have to make sure it's so lyrical and subtle that the reader who doesn't read between the lines won't even know it is about race.

(Adichie 417)

The anonymous blog *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black* written by Ifemelu in *Americanah* might be considered a narrative space inside the novel. Serena Guarracino contends that “[b]log writing, or blogging, features prominently in the novel as such a space, both embedded in but also outside creative writing, and a place where social realities of race

can be discussed without the trappings of character and action” (1). All the blog entries have a separate title and are graphically separated from the rest of the novel and therefore could be read apart from Ifemelu's story line. However, not only are the blog entries a result of something Ifemelu experiences, but they are also a space in the narrative that allows Ifemelu to reflect on the same experiences. Guarracino observes that:

Actually, as the novel progresses its social commentary moves back and forth, from the blog to the novel and vice-versa, contaminating fiction with the drive for elaboration expressed by blogging but also infusing blog entries of the emotional entanglements of creative writing. (2).

Besides, the blog, which is essentially about race, starts with Ifemelu's necessity to voice her own experience as a Black woman living in the US for “she longed for other listeners, and she longed to hear the stories of others.” She wonders: “How many other people had become black in America? How many had felt as though their world was wrapped in gauze?” (Adichie 366).

Ifemelu's blog writing becomes not only a place to exchange experiences, but it is also part of a process of making sense of her own experiences. Serena Guarracino claims that “blogging implies an elaboration of (more or less remote) past experiences” (15), so blogging becomes a space for reflection and self-knowledge, in which Ifemelu is also reassured by her readers that her experiences are shared by many others. Besides, it also renders the blog as a place in which race can be discussed freely. She invites her readers to reply to her stories saying: “[t]ell your story here. Unzip yourself. This is a safe space” (Adichie 380).

Ifemelu claims that the blog is a safe place as she soon discovers that race is a sensitive subject for Americans. After a lecture she receives an e-mail saying that her “talk was baloney. You are a racist. You should be grateful we let you into this country” (Adichie

377). The e-mail makes Ifemelu conclude that she was invited to talk “not to inspire real change, but to leave people feeling good about themselves” (Adichie 377). So, talking to white Americans in her lectures was not productive as she thought it would be. It was not a place for real discussion about race, mainly because “in America, racism exists but racists are all gone” (Adichie 390). The media of the blog makes it possible for people not to identify themselves and therefore Ifemelu sees it as a tool similar to the ones racists use. Cláudio Braga and Gláucia Gonçalves highlight the fact that the blog is anonymous and therefore it works in the same way racism works in the United States: “[t]hese unidentified posts, which we see a strategy of voluntary invisibility, suggests that Ifemelu fights isolation and hostility by expressing herself in a convenient way, applying similar manoeuvres used by her ‘enemies’” (191). Racists rarely call themselves racists since they do not publicly recognize themselves that way. Through the blog, Ifemelu fights racism without identifying herself.

The blog is then informed by Ifemelu's life but it also has a direct effect on the character's life. It also shows how much she has become aware of what it means to be Black. When her ex-boyfriend from Lagos reads her blog, he notices how much she has changed over the years: “[b]ecause he had last known her when she knew little of the things she blogged about, he felt a sense of loss, as though she had become a person he would no longer recognize” (Adichie 465). The blog becomes the place in the narrative in which it is easy to observe the construction of the character as she discovers herself as a Black woman or, in other words, she goes through a process of becoming conscious and dealing with an identity constituent that Ifemelu has never paid much attention to while living in Lagos.

Although not so present as blogging in *Americanah*, photography in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* might as well be seen as a narrative tool. Photography comes into Khadra's life when she is questioning the choices that were made for her. Unhappy with the course she

had taken at university, she decides to study photography. After a two-year course, she begins “doing morgue photography and selling photos to stock houses” (Kahf 49) until she gets a job with the magazine *Alternative Americas*.

While working for the magazine, Khadra is asked to go back to her old community in an assignment, as her old Mosque will be part of one of the magazine issues featuring minority religious communities. At this moment Khadra reflects on what she is about to do:

She cringes at the thought of putting her own community in the spotlight. She doesn't think she herself can take one more of those shots of masses of Muslim butts up in the air during prayer or the clichéd Muslim woman looking inscrutable and oppressed in a voluminous veil. (Kahf 48)

In this reflection, Khadra sees the photography she is supposed to take as a space of representation that helps maintaining certain stereotypes about Muslims. While at the Mosque, she questions the photos she might take as she is aware that she wants to show the magazine readers a side of Muslims that they do not know: “She focuses the camera on the current speaker, his mouth contorted with fierce words, nostrils angry. Do I shoot, do I take these pictures? Khadra sighs. Everyone already knows this face of Muslims. That's all they know” (Kahf 407). Khadra wants to show other aspects of her community because of her own position as a Muslim. Stuart Hall contends that “we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific” (234), that is, as Khadra is taking the photographs from the standpoint of a Muslim woman, she reflects on what she should portray in order not to increase the prejudices society already has against the community. Besides, she knows that there is much more about Muslims than the stereotypes shown in the media, and because of that, she wants to transcend them.

Reading the passage above we can make a parallel between Khadra's reflection about

what to show with her photos and the writing of minorities that try to distance themselves from the stereotypes constructed by others. Khadra wants to use her photos as a space to question the usual representation of Muslims and not as a space for the proliferation of the stereotypes that the American society has about Muslims. She wants to use the photos, reconstruct the conventional representation and give the magazine readers a more humane perspective, that is, her perspective as a Muslim woman who grew up in the community and who, therefore, knows the hardship Muslims usually go through.

Tanyss Ludescher, while discussing the reasons why there are many Arab-American writers nowadays, claims that:

Two factors spurred the growth of Arab American literature. The first was the search for voices outside the traditional canon of Anglo-American male literature, a search which led to the burgeoning interest in ethnic American writers. The second factor, like so many things in the Arab American community, was political. Recent events in the Arab World combined to raise the political consciousness and solidarity of the Arab American community. In order to combat the proliferation of anti-Arab stereotypes, writers dedicated themselves to putting a human face on the Arab American immigrant population. (106)

Thus, Arab-American writers try to portray more humanizing characteristics of their population, representing characters that are not idealized or stereotyped, in order to create a feeling of community and, then, be able to deal with the prejudices they face in the US society. Similarly, in a talk with her brother about the photos she has been taking, Khadra says:

You don't have to tell me how harsh the scrutiny is that the Muslim

community is under. I know all that. We still need to face our darkness too.

Negatives and positives. No, for our *own* sake, not to pander to *them*. For the sake of '*studying what our won souls put forth*,' you know? (Kahf 436 emphasis from the original)

Khadra wants to change the usual image of Muslims in her photos. She wants to rewrite their stories, through a different representation, but she knows that they also have to face what she considers to be negative as well. In one of the last pictures she takes for the magazine article, Khadra is at an Indy Speedway track to take photos of her old friend Hanifa, a Muslim woman who is a professional race driver. This scene, which presents a Muslim woman in a position normally associated with men, shows that Khadra's pictures will tell a story with less stereotypes, more humanizing, as Ludescher claims above.

In *Americanah* and *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* blogging and photography function as narrative spaces of contestation since the characters use these two narrative tools to discuss important identity constituents, that is, race and religion. It is also through these two spaces that Ifemelu and Khadra make peace with important parts of their identity, in which they are able to question and critically reflect on parts of their identity.

1.4 Gendered Space

We must be insistently aware of ... how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology.

(Soja 6)

The notion that space is gendered comes from feminist discussions that date back from the late 1960. Jane Rendell contends that:

The most pervasive representation of gendered space is the paradigm of the “separate spheres,” an oppositional and a hierarchical system consisting of a dominant public male realm of production (the city) and a subordinate private female one of reproduction (the home). The origins of this ideology which divides city from home, public from private, production from reproduction, and men from women is both patriarchal and capitalist. (103)

This gendered division of space means that while men are supposedly to go out and earn a living, women are often expected to take care of the house and children. Linda McDowell contends that “because this housekeeping was seen to rely on women's 'natural' skills and was financially unrewarded, it was correspondingly devalued” (73). So, the division of space also established a division of power, in which women were considered inferior to men. The construction of women's inferiority to men was then established through a division of spaces based on the supposedly “natural” characteristics associated with each gender.

Along these lines, Doreen Massey contends that

space and place, spaces and places, and our sense of them ... are gendered through and through. Moreover they are gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time. And this gendering of space and place both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live. (*Space* 186)

Massey's considerations are relevant because she claims that the gendering of spaces differ from one culture to another. Therefore, as subjects move to a country in which spaces are gendered in a distinct way, there is the possibility of contesting such spaces.

Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose also contend that “the social construction of gender difference establishes some spaces as women's and other as men's; those meanings then serve to reconstitute the power relations of gendered identity” (3). The relation between the gendered spaces and power relations are clearly observed in *Brick Lane*.

Nazneen's life is narrated, almost in its totality, in the space of the house. After marrying and bringing Nazneen from Bangladesh, Chanu does not allow her to leave the house arguing that the rules in the new country are not different from the ones back home: “if you were in Bangladesh you would not go out. Coming here you are not missing anything, only broadening your horizons” (Ali 30). Nazneen, an obedient wife, spends the whole day alone at home while Chanu goes out to work: “[w]hat she missed most was people. Not any people in particular ... But just people” (Ali 12). Not only is she constrained to the home space, but Chanu also prohibits her to learn English, which makes Nazneen even less empowered. So, she stays home not only because of her supposedly “natural skills,” as McDowell stated above, but also because Chanu uses his power over Nazneen to maintain her there. According to Daphne Spain gendered spaces “separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege” (30), and that is the case of Nazneen. Chanu uses his power to prevent Nazneen from learning the language, which would make her independent and allow her to leave the house and, by doing so he maintains the power he has over her.

Although Nazneen lives in a space in which she has more choices than her sister Hasina who stayed in Bangladesh, the traditional gender roles between her and her husband, which they carry from their cultural and social background, do not change in the first years. She obeys her husband because she was taught to do so by her mother, who once told her: “if God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men” (Ali 60). As she was taught not

to question, but to obey her husband, the traditional roles are maintained.

In order to understand better the idea that the gender roles and relations established between a couple affect the spaces women inhabit, it is important to analyze the spaces that Gauri from *The Lowland* occupy in her two marriages. When Gauri meets Udayan, “she's finishing a degree in philosophy” (Lahiri 46), but after their marriage they move to the countryside to live with his parents. Under her mother-in-law's rules, she has to perform the traditional roles usually assigned to women, as this quotation shows: “[h]er mother-in-law had told her, the first morning, to put away the book she'd brought with her, and to concentrate on the task at hand” (Lahiri 290). As a married woman, Gauri has to obey her in-laws and do the housework assigned to her. After Udayan's death, she marries his brother and moves to Rhode Island. Because Subhash has already lived alone before she came to the US, and because he decides to respect her mourning period, he never demands anything from Gauri, and remains as independent as he was before she arrived. The comparison seems inevitable for Gauri, as shown in this passage:

She was thankful for his independence, and at the same time she was bewildered. Udayan had wanted a revolution, but at home he's expected to be served, his only contribution to his meal was to sit and wait for Gauri or her mother-in-law to put a plate before him. (Lahiri 126)

As we can see from the quote, the two brothers have different views as far as the roles of a wife are concerned. However, it is also important to observe that the spaces Subhash and Udayan inhabit are different accounting for such distinct expectations concerning the roles their wife, Gauri, has to perform. McDowell contends that it “is crucial to understand the intercutting relations of all axes of social power and oppression and the ways in which sexual differences and gender relations are constituted in different ways across space and time

because of their interconnection with these other axes of power” (10). Consequently, Subhash's migration to the US and the time he spends alone far from his culture makes a difference as far as gender relations are concerned. He has, during his time alone in the US, learned not to depend on a woman to take care of the house and his meals, and he continues to do so after Gauri arrives. The distinction between Subhash's and Udayan's understanding of women's roles are heightened because of the different spaces in which the two characters dwell. Udayan expects Gauri to serve him exactly as his mother has always done.

It is possible to conclude that the division of spaces between private and public spheres and the gender roles associated to each space are clearly observed in the novels analyzed here, and they can be related to the cultural traditions the characters come from. It was also observed that the male characters often try to maintain the segregation in the diaspora space, but this space often accounts for significant changes in women's agency and, therefore, for women's new roles in spaces otherwise restricted to men.

1.4.1. Gendered Spaces in Religious Places

Although religion is also a recurrent theme in *Brick Lane*, it is in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* that a religious place is described in more detail. For this reason, I choose here to focus my analysis on the mosque that is portrayed in Kahf's novel.

In general, it is possible to say that the mosque, like many other religious places and practices, are gendered. I believe that the division of spaces and duties inside a mosque directly affects the gender relations inside a community. So, the rigid constructs and divisions of space inside a mosque become a mirror of the differences between Muslim men and women outside the religious sphere, as it is analyzed in Chapter 4.

In the case of Muslims, Line Predelli explains the reasons of the division of spaces

between men and women:

The gendered allocation of space is related to the perceptions and rules about who has a duty to participate in congregational prayer (a duty limited to men), and perception of women as objects of male sexual desire. The physical gender segregation can also be seen as an expression of social control, in the sense that contact and touch between women and men is minimized. (249)

This segregation mentioned by Predelli is observed when Khadra and her family go to Mecca. Khadra wakes up early one day and leaves the house to pray in the Mosque. Thirty minutes later she is brought back by two policemen and her father explains that “women are not allowed to pray in the mosque here... They don't in most Muslim countries” (Kahf 167-68). Although Khadra experiences the division of spaces between men and women in the mosque she attends in Indianapolis, she is disheartened to discover that the segregation in the mosques in Mecca are even worse, since she is not even allowed to pray there.

Kahf's novel portrays a few mosques in the US that show different levels of inclusion of women. Khadra's family is, for instance, scandalized with the habits of one of the oldest mosques in the US:

None of the women up there wore hijab and none of the men had beards – they didn't even look like Muslims. And they did shocking things in the mosque, like play volleyball with men and women together, *in shorts*. And they had dances for the Muslim boys and girls – dances! (Kahf 103)

Here again, it is important to observe the relevance of space and time. There is not only a difference between mosques in Muslim countries and mosques in diaspora, but there is also a difference between the many mosques in diaspora, a difference which, in Kahf's novel, seems to vary according to time.

Predelli explains that the roles of the mosque in diaspora are different from the ones in Muslim countries. In diaspora, the mosque is “a place for social meeting and learning” (250), and they hold “an increasingly important role in the maintenance of religious belief and in the religious education of migrants” (251). In Kahf's novel, the mosque is portrayed in a similar way to the one described by Predelli, except for the fact that in the novel women also attend the mosques to pray. However, there is a separation of spaces like the one described at an engagement party which is only for women “so they could remove their headscarves and coverups ... and enjoy an evening as they were within the home, and their hair out and their bodies as attractively clothed as they wished” (Kahf 78). Besides, there is also a division of duties, as when Khadra needs a special permission to attend a course to learn to recite the Quran. The Imam allows her to “sit in the back of the men's *tajwid*³ session” (196), implying that although she is able to participate, she has to sit behind all men. When there is an international *tajwid* competition, Khadra studies hard and after her recital the sheikh exclaims that hers “was flawless, the best in class” (Kahf 199), but when she hands him the cassette for the competition he explains “Well -you see – I never meant to imply – the contest, I'm afraid – it is not open for women” (Kahf 199). Although the Imam is apologetic, Khadra is taken aback because she once again experiences gender segregation in a religious context.

However, the passing of time and the effects on gendered spaces can also be observed in the mosque Khadra attends. When she returns to Indianapolis after some years living away, she notices that the seminars given in the mosque are not “advertised as a 'Sisters' Program' – apparently the new Dawah Center no longer offers parallel women's programs, its new gender integration being a sign of the changing times” (Kahf 392). However, as Khadra well notices, the topic of the seminar “Raising God-Conscious Children” (Kahf 392) would call the attention of women only. Although the sign shows that raising children is still a role attributed

³ *Tajwid* refers to the rules associated with the proper recitation of The Quran.

almost exclusively to women, it is possible to observe that with the passing of time, small changes are observed even in this very conservative place.

The gendered division of spaces can be noted in a myriad of contexts and, it is not different in religious spaces. Considering the analysis of the mosques presented in the novel, it is possible to say that not only do they present gendered division of spaces but they also influence the gender relations and the gendering of spaces outside the mosque. It is also important to highlight that the diasporic space also influences the roles and duties of the mosques in relation to the ones in Muslim countries.

1.5. Mapping the Body: The Body as a Space

Any insect that undergoes a complete metamorphosis has several different life stories, one that describes how it lives in its immature, larval forms, what goes on in its pupal transformation – if it has one – and how it behaves as a mature sexual adult.

(Hubbell 34)

In this part of the chapter I want to discuss the body as a space that is transformed accordingly to the changes that take place in the subject identities. For this matter, I discuss here how the body is a space of manifestation, in which the changes are clearly perceived. As with an insect and its metamorphoses, as the quotation above shows, the body is also subjected to several metamorphoses, some of which are related to the subject's process of identity construction.

So far in this chapter I have tried to establish the connection between space-time and identity construction showing that the spaces in which the subjects live directly affect their

subjectivity. Therefore, considering that cultural and religious traditions transcend beliefs and manifest themselves concretely in the form that the individual constructs his or her own image to others, the body, then, becomes an important part of the representation of cultural and social constructions. Sérgio Costa contends that “[t]he body is an inseparable part of the subject's process of articulation which opposes to domination... To position oneself is, in a way, to perform, to make oneself present through the body and its movements... the body is always a sign to which meaning is ascribed⁴” (120, my translation). Therefore, while analyzing the identity construction of subjects in transit, the body also becomes a site where changes are embodied and performed.

McDowell considers that “the body is the place, the location or site, if you like, of the individual, with more or less impermeable boundaries between one body and another” (34). In this work, I choose to broaden this definition arguing that the body is the place of the individual that represents some of his or her identity constituents as well as their intersectionality. Besides, the body also shares another characteristic with geographical locations, since it is a place that also changes with time. In this matter, McDowell claims that “contrary to common sense or first impressions, our bodies are more fluid and flexible than we often realize” (34). As a result, it is possible to consider the body a flexible space in which it is possible to observe some of the subject's identity articulations.

Developing the argument above, it is possible to establish a connection between the body and culture if we consider that marks of a certain culture might be represented on and by the body. Susan Bordo claims that “[t]he body – what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body – is a medium of culture” (165). She also asserts that “the body may also operate as a metaphor for culture” (165). In other words, the body is a

⁴ “O corpo é parte inseparável do processo de articulação do sujeito que se opõe à dominação ... posicionar-se é, em alguma medida, performar-se, manifestar-se presente com o corpo e seus movimentos... o corpo é sempre um signo ao qual se atribui significado.”

space of cultural manifestation and, therefore, it is pertinent to observe the body and its changes as a mechanism to analyze the diasporic subjects.

Along the same lines, Sandra Goulart recognizes the body as a space in which it is possible to observe transgressions of limits that are conventionally established (101), and defines the body in the narratives of diaspora as the diasporic body that “may be defined as a body located in the border between two spaces of belonging. It is a body that challenges subjectivity and threatens the inflexibility and the unity of identity⁵” (103, my translation).

The corpus of this dissertation presents rich material for the establishment of the parallel between culture and the body. As an example I cite a passage from *Brick Lane* in which the main character reflects on the relation between clothes and identity. It clearly establishes a comparison between Nazneen's captivity in the private space and the clothes that she has to wear:

Suddenly, she was gripped by the idea that if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well. If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels, then what else would she do but walk around the glass palaces on Bishopsgate and talk into a slim phone and eat lunch out of a paper bag? If she wore trousers and underwear, like the girl with the big camera on Brick Lane, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud. And if she had a tiny, tiny skirt with knickers to match and a tight bright top, then she would – how could she not? Skate through life with a sparkling smile and a handsome man who took her hand and made her spin, spin, spin. (Ali 228)

In the above quotation, Nazneen makes an association between the clothes other women wear and the spaces they attend in contrast with the saris she wears and with the space

⁵ O corpo diaspórico “pode ser definido como um corpo que se localiza na fronteira, entre espaços de pertencimento. É um corpo, pois, que desafia a constituição da subjetividade, que ameaça a fixidez e a unidade da identidade.”

she mostly occupies, that is, the private space. For Nazneen clothes seems to be connected to her submission, as she links the clothes that are a mark of her culture to the roles she has to perform as a woman.

For Khadra, the main character of the *Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*⁶, the relation between religious beliefs and clothes is discussed several times in the novel. For Muslims, a woman should cover up and wear hijab after she menstruates, and when Khadra finally wears her first hijab, she is completely overwhelmed, as the quotation below shows:

Hijab was a crown in her head. She went forth lightly and went forth heavily into the world, carrying the weight of a new grace (...), hijab soon grew to feel as natural to her as a second skin, without which if she ventured into the outside world she felt naked. (Kahf 113)

It is interesting to notice that Khadra feels the *hijab* as something natural, like a garment that provides her with protection from the outer world. After Khadra starts wearing *hijab*, she goes through different phases. The first phase, which is important to mention, is the radical one, which she enters while she is still a teenager. She decides to dress herself in black headscarves and navy-blue *jilbab*, which is a long garment. The clothes she wears in this phase indicate her attachment to what she considers to be supposedly genuine Muslim behavior, and that contrasts with any kind of assimilation or deviation of tradition. However, even her family does not quite approve of that:

[her parents] exchanged looks but didn't say anything. What could they say? They were the ones who had introduced Khadra to the works of Islamist revolutionary Sayid Qutub, after all, and his multivolume *tafsir* of the Qur'an sat on their rickety bookshelf in the living room. She seemed only to be taking

⁶ Part of this analysis I published under the title "Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* seen through the Hijab Perspective" which was co-written by Gláucia Renate Gonçalves.

his rhetoric a step or two further along the path of its own logic. (Kahf 150)

After this orthodox phase, she starts wearing more colors replacing the *jilbad* with blouses and skirts. It is the beginning of what she calls “her neoclassical phase,” when “she thirsted now to study traditional Islamic heritage. It seemed to her the answer lay in there somewhere” (Kahf 194). It is clear from this passage that going from radical to traditional Islam is a matter of finding answers and, it may suggest as well that she is in search of who she is.

Khadra's conceptions about religion start changing after she ends her marriage and spends some time in Syria. Once, while she is contemplating the city, she thinks:

Sitting on Mount Qasyoon looking down on the city of Damascus, you could not possibly hold that one religion had claim to an exclusive truth. Damascus demanded that you see all religions as architectural layers of each other, gave you the tangible sense, real as the crumbling citadel steps beneath you feet, that ill all came together somehow in a way that made sense. (Kahf 297)

Thus, it is in Syria that she reconsiders her religious beliefs and, consequently, the necessity to unveil herself. In this moment we can also observe that her dress code once again reflects the changes in her beliefs, as she stops wearing the *hijab*. She begins to realize “[h]ow veiling and unveiling are part of the same process, the same cycle, how both are necessary; how both light and dark are connected moments in the development of the soul in its darkroom” (Kahf 309).

The lack of the *hijabs* and scarves marks the beginning of a new phase in Khadra's life. Her decision is an important sign of change and rupture with her beliefs. Besides, it is also a moment of contradictions and of uncertainty for her, as it is possible to see when she states: “some days she just wanted her old friend hijab standing sentry by her side” (Kahf

312). Costa asserts that “to attribute new meanings to relations of oppression – sexist, racist, etc. - does not necessarily mean ... to produce diametrically opposite body representations⁷” (120-21 my translation). So, making a connection between Costa's theorization and my reading of the novel, it is possible to say that in order to represent her body with new signs, Khadra has to break with the culturally constructed dressing code she has used for years, which is not a linear process, but rather a new construction of representation. As Costa recognizes, the process of rupture, with its contradictions, is not a simple mechanism. When Khadra decides it is time to go back to the US, the clothes she decides to wear at the moment of return are also meaningful. She puts on a headscarf as “[s]he wanted them to know at O'Hare that she was coming in under one of the many signs of her heritage” (Kahf 313), showing, at this moment, that the clothes she wears is a choice rather than an imposition.

Considering the close relation the body has with an individual's subjectivity, McDowell claims that the term embodiment should be used when defining the body as the place of the individual: “the term embodiment is more useful as it captures the sense of fluidity, of becoming and of performance that is a key element in the recent theoretical approaches that question the relationship between anatomy and social identities” (39). So, the analysis of the clothes Khadra wears in different phases of religious attachments might be seen in light of the embodiment theorized by McDowell since it demonstrates that her body is a place of representation and performance, through which she shows to the outside world some of her beliefs. Besides, the body can also be considered as a place of refutation, especially religious.

Similar changes can be observed in the characters of the other novels, I add here two more examples as they will help to reinforce my point. In *Brick Lane*, Karim, Nazneen's lover,

⁷ “Re-significar as relações de opressão – sexistas, racistas, etc.- não significa, contudo, necessariamente, produzir representações do corpo diametricamente opostas.”

does the opposite of what Khadra has done. At the beginning of the novel he is described by Nazneen as having his hair “cut so close to the skull” and wearing “his jeans tight and his shirtsleeves rolled up to the elbow” (Ali 170). Throughout the narrative, Karim steadily becomes more radical about Islam. The transformations are first seen in his face as “he had begun to grow a beard... and the hair on his face was the same length as the hair on his head” (Ali 249). By the end of the novel, when he is completely involved in the radical Islamic movement, his clothes give a clear idea of how much he has changed, as the following quotation shows: “Karim had a new style. The gold necklace vanished; the jeans, shirts, and trainers as well ... Karim put on panjabi pajama and a skullcap. He wore a sleeveless fleece and big boots with the laces left undone at the top” (Ali 313). In the case of Karim, he wants to enact with his clothes the sign of his beliefs, in the terms theorized by Bordo (165), as a metaphor for his cultural and religious convictions and as well as a political enactment of these beliefs.

In *Americanah*, the emphasis on the body is given not through clothes, but through hair. The main difference here between Ifemelu and the two characters analyzed above is that the latter seems to be changing because of their will, while in Ifemelu's case it seems to be a consequence of her interaction with the society in the host country. Ifemelu first notices that the problem is how her hair is perceived by others and how this perception might interfere in her own life. Soon after she arrives in the US, Ifemelu, who braids her hair, listens to her aunt say that braids can affect your job prospects in the US. Auntie Uju explains to Ifemelu her decision to relax her hair: “I have to take my braids out for my interview and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional” (Adichie 146). Although Ifemelu does not consider relaxing at that moment the right thing to do, it is Ifemelu, later in the narrative, who relaxes her hair for an

interview and she explains it to her boyfriend:

My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky. (Adichie 252).

Both Aunt Uju and Ifemelu change because they do not want the stereotypical view linked to their hair to affect their job opportunities. The idea of the stereotype is highlighted when Ifemelu writes about hair in her blog and uses Michelle Obama as an example:

Imagine if Michelle Obama got tired of all the heat and decided to go natural and appeared on TV with lots of wooly hair, or tight spirally curls. (There is no knowing what her texture will be. It is not unusual for a black woman to have three different textures in her head.) She would totally rock but poor Obama would certainly lose the independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote. (Adichie 368)

But why do these two episodes relate to identity as in the case of Khadra, Nazneen and Karim? The reason is that in order to accept their hair, Aunt Uju and Ifemelu need to accept who they are, and therefore this episode is linked to their identity construction as it is the case of the other characters. Ifemelu claims in her blog that hair is the perfect metaphor for race in America. In this sense, Ifemelu claims that she “had become black in America” (Adichie 366-67) and to accept her natural hair becomes a metaphor for acknowledging and accepting her identity as a Black woman.

The narrator of *Americanah* tells Ifemelu's story while she is braiding her hair in a salon in Trenton. Amol Khedekar explains that the salon “acts as a place of self revelation for

Ifemelu” (39), a place that she starts “unveiling herself” and “identifying herself” (Khedekar 39) with the hair braider, who is also from Nigeria. Ifemelu also realizes that this moment of being conscious of her connection with other Nigerian women is related to other moments in her life when she becomes aware of other parts of her identity as it is possible to see in the following quotation: “Ifemelu watched Mariama in the mirror, thinking of her own new American selves. It was with Curt that she had first looked in the mirror and, with a flush of accomplishment, seen someone else” (Adichie 235). In this passage, the mirror might be seen as a metaphor for the moments of self-knowledge when Ifemelu reassures herself of her identity as a Nigerian woman.

The body is for all the characters analyzed a space of performance and, of manifestation of their identities. The body is then a place through which the contestation and transformations of the subject's identity can be clearly noticed. They are, as McDowell claims in her theorization of the body, a fluid space in which the fluid construction of identity finds a reflection.

In this chapter it is possible to see that space, time and social relations are interconnected terms, which cannot be excluded in the analysis of each one of them. Spaces are then defined through the social and cultural relations established with the passing of time. It seems clear to me, however, that the categories of space and time should be considered together, as a space-time category in the analysis of the social and cultural relations.

As the novels chosen for this study tell the stories of diasporic subjects, it is paramount to consider the foreign space the subjects inhabit and how space-time affect their identity constituents. As it is claimed in this chapter, in the diaspora space, certain identity constituents become more visible, which in turn, favor their questioning and reconstruction. For this

matter, the comparison between the two sisters of *Brick Lane* show the importance of the diaspora space for women's agency, as it provides the two perspectives, that is, of the one in transit and the one who stays put.

The other spaces considered in the chapter, that is, blogging in *Americanah* and photography in Kahf's novel also reflect the processes of self-reflection to important identity constituents of the subjects. The body and the manifestations observed in the body are also relevant tools for the analysis of the identity construction of the subjects.

Implicit in all the statements above is the fact that the relation between space and time should be taken into account when analyzing the portrayal of diasporic subjects. As identity is a fluid process of construction, it is both affected by the space the subject inhabits as well as by the passing of time.

Chapter 2

Diaspora and Diasporas

On the boat we crowded into each
other's bunks every night and stayed
up for hours discussing the
unknown continent ahead of us.

(Otsuka 6)

The four novels chosen for this study describe the characters' experiences in the diaspora space and can be inserted into the field of Diaspora Studies, as their main characters are immigrants or children of immigrants who are trying to adapt to a new country. In this chapter, I discuss the points of convergence among the four diasporas represented in the novels. I observe, as well as if the points of divergence establish any differences in the relocation process. The main objectives of this chapter is to discuss the concept of diaspora as far as the diasporic subject is concerned, that is to examine the common aspects that delineate the construction of the identity of diasporic subjects. Besides, I trace the diasporic movement described in the four novels in order to compile their similarities and differences.

2.1 Diaspora: Origins and General Aspects

I can still see your footprints
in the mud by the river.

(Otsuka 87)

The term diaspora was first used to characterize the movement of the Jewish people from Palestine to other countries caused by the invasion of old Palestine by the Babylonians

and forced the Jewish people to move to other countries. This first movement was, according to Gayatri Spivak, “the results of religious oppression and war, of slavery and indenturing trade and conquest” (“Diasporas” 245), and were “associated with forced displacement, victimization, alienation, and loss” (Vertovec, “Three” 2-3).

Nowadays, this diaspora has been defined as the old diaspora and the term new diaspora, coined by Spivak, is used to describe the more recent movements of people from one country to another. This new diaspora is understood as a movement that 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 what has been currently referred to as transnational world. In this definition of the new diaspora, Spivak highlights that a special attention should be paid to diasporic women and their respective roles in the new space since their recurrent presence and role account for the most substantial difference between the old and new diaspora (“Diasporas” 248). As the four novels chosen for this study portray subjects who migrated after the second half of the twentieth century and show a special concern with the role of women in these contexts, Spivak's definition of the term is the one used here.

Susan Friedman uses the term new migration to describe this movement after 1945, claiming 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). I believe Friedman's concept for the migratory movement after 1945 adds to Spivak's concept of new diaspora. These two terms are, in my understanding, in no way contradictory, but are instead complementary. At the end of this chapter, I hope to make it clear that the diaspora movements portrayed in the novels in addition to showing the importance of women in the process, they also characterize the fluidity of identity, the resistance to assimilation as well as the hybridity of its subjects typical of diaspora space, as

discussed in Chapter 1. However, because the four novels have a special focus on women characters, I use the term new diaspora in this dissertation, but keeping Friedman's definition in mind since it also helps us understand the process of identity construction of these women.

Friedman also mentions that new technologies have shortened the distance between homeland and abroad (“The 'New Migration' 9). These recent possibilities in communication might be the factor that enables subjects to maintain close ties with the home culture and consequently have more resistance to assimilation, as Friedman indicates. I believe the resistance to assimilation also happens because the immigrants tend to create bonds in the new country with people from the same cultural background. It is the case of the subjects represented in *Brick Lane* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. The main characters of these novels live surrounded by a community and they try to preserve relevant aspects of the home culture which, therefore, serve as a constrain for assimilation.

As Stephen Greenblatt observes, one of the main “characteristic power of a culture is its ability to hide the mobility that is its enabling condition” (3). This power observed by Greenblatt might be clearly perceived in *Brick Lane* and *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*, as the main characters are constantly reminded of the traditions they are supposed to maintain by the other members of the communities in which they live. However, this ability can also be noticed outside the constraints of a community, as it is the case of *The Lowland*. The main male character in the latter novel, Subhash, does not become part of an Indian community in Rhode Island, and in the first years he continues to live as if he had not left India, considering his parents' approval of his life in America and maintaining the customs of his culture, as the following quotation shows: “[h]is parents' disapproval threatened to undermine what he was doing, lodged like a silent gatekeeper at the back of his mind” (Lahiri 77). Although Subhash is living thousands of miles away from home, the traditions passed by his parents continue to

haunt him, and he tries to maintain some of the customs abroad.

Therefore, what I want to highlight with the above discussion of the old and new diaspora is that, although Spivak and Friedman use different terminology to describe the more recent migratory movements, they both emphasize that it is a new phenomenon, different from the Jewish diaspora (Spivak 248, Friedman 22, Brah 194). Friedman also calls attention to the fact that the displacement of women “begins indeed within the home and homeland and travels with the women as they face the difficulties of negotiating between new ways and old ways of living” (“The 'New Migration 23). Certainly, it is hard to deny that the conditions women face in the homeland affect their lives in the diasporic space directly. As I see it, the displacements usually begin in the homeland where, even in the best scenarios, women are subjugated and discriminated against because of their gender. A relevant example comes from Lahiri's *The Lowland* in which it is possible to see that Udayan regards his girlfriend Gauri as an intelligent and independent woman, but as soon as they get married she has to perform tasks which are considered traditional roles a wife. Before getting married, Gauri inhabited a variety of spaces. She went to university, and spent hours studying at the library and discussing her ideas with Udayan. After moving to her in-laws', things change and Gauri is not allowed to devote her time only to study, as she is now a wife who has duties imposed by her mother-in-law. This narrowing of the spaces she is now allowed to inhabit is probably one of the reasons why she decides to move to the US with Subhash after Udayan's death. It is a fact that Gauri's situation in India will directly shape her experience as a woman when she moves to the United States.

Before analyzing the main concepts that are usually associated with diaspora and its subjects, I present a brief account of each diasporic movement portrayed in the corpus of this analysis.

2.2 Scattered Seeds

All diasporas are unhappy, but every
diaspora is unhappy in its own way.

(Vijay Mishra 1)

In this part of the chapter I give a brief history of the diasporic movements described in each of the novels, and also discuss the specificity of each of these migratory movements. Although I feel the necessity to discuss certain identity constituents here that are remarkably present in the novels, I do not want, in this chapter, to focus on the differences. My aim is to concentrate on the similarities that the different forms of diaspora share as I trace the importance of the diasporic space and what changes it may cause on diasporic subjects.

2.2.1 The Bangladeshi Diaspora

When I came I was a young man.
I had ambitions. Big dreams.... And
then I found things were a bit different.

(Ali 21)

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* portrays subjects who migrated from Bangladesh to London. The first wave of Bangladeshis to the UK started in the 1920s, but a considerable number of immigrants only arrived after 1950 when the immigrant laws in the UK were changed to encourage “labour migration from its erstwhile colonies” (Saddiqui 17) as the UK needed to increase their workforce after the end of II World War. The immigrants from this period faced economic problems in East Pakistan that were caused by the conflicts with West Pakistan, and then moved to the UK searching for better opportunities.

According to official documents from the British government, during the war of

Independence, many male migrants from East Pakistan moved to London “to escape political instability” (Change Institute 6). These immigrants were mostly Muslim and working-class and also became, according to a report of the Change Institute “the most concentrated and ethnically segregated Muslim community in England with 24 percent of the total Bangladeshi Muslim population living in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and a further 19 per cent of the total population living in surrounding boroughs” (6).

The characters of *Brick Lane* are part of this second wave of immigrants that occurred after the Independence. Chanu, an educated man, arrives in England with the dream of financial prosperity. However, his life in London is marked by underemployment and resentment as he feels he is not given the positions he deserves. He blames the white underclass because he believes they need foreigners to be below them in the social ladder (Ali 24). He claims that it is the prejudice society has against his ethnic origins that prevents him from succeeding in the new country.

Besides ethnicity, religion is another issue present in *Brick Lane*. The novel shows two characters who have different religious affiliations. Although Chanu does not read the Quran or prays, he knows that he will nevertheless suffer the consequences of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. Karim, Nazneen's young lover, has a much deeper attachment to his beliefs and his involvement in radical Islam is heightened after 9/11. Comparing the two different levels of allegiances to Islam shown by Chanu and Karim, it is possible to state that the novel tries to demystify the stereotypical view of Muslims as radicals. However, the novel shows that the prejudice the society has against Muslims does not aim only at the radical Muslims. The society shown in *Brick Lane* judges Muslims based mostly on the same stereotypes discussed in relation to the Muslims in *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*.

Nazneen's feeling of dislocation is exacerbated because she stays mostly at home and

she is also denied the chance to learn English. Alistair Cormack comments that women are often “treated as alien by their host nation and as commodity by the men in their own communities” (700). Nazneen is a perfect example of that as she does not have agency in neither of the two spaces, the public or the private. Her diasporic experience is similar to other female characters who are, as Cormack stresses, twice oppressed, that is, both by the host country as well as by their husbands.

The main characters of *Brick Lane* are visible minorities because of their skin color and their dress codes, which are also related to the fact that they are Muslims. The visibility is, similarly to the other novels, a source of displacement.

2.2.2 The Arab Diaspora

“Liar,” she says to the highway sign that claims

“The People of Indiana Welcome you.”

(Kahf 1)

In order to understand the dynamics of the Arab community represented in the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and its particularity in relation to the other novels, it is necessary to understand the Arab diaspora to the US, which is usually divided into three waves, the first beginning in the 1880s.

The first immigrants worked as peddlers and, thus, lived dispersed in the country. As Tanyss Ludescher explains, “it was a lifestyle which accelerated assimilation because it provided ample opportunities to learn English and mix with the local people” (93), which led these immigrants to “embrace American values” (93). However, World War I had a determining effect on the Arab community in the US. During the war, the Arab community had to rely on itself as the communication with their homeland was interrupted, which

“increased the community's sense of isolation and encouraged a feeling of communal unity and solidarity.” Thus, they had to address “crucial questions about their identity as Arab-Americans and their relationship to America” (Ludescher 98).

The second wave of immigrants, which started after World War II, differed from the first wave as the immigrants were often “educated, skilled professionals, who were more likely to be familiar with the nationalist ideologies that permeated the Arab world” (Ludescher 94). The third wave started in 1967, after the war between Palestine and Israel, and continues to the present. The diaspora portrayed in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* corresponds to this time in history. The immigrants, like Khadra's parents, were often refugees which were highly politicized, as they formed several Arab-American organizations in the US which not only focused on the rights of Arab-Americans, but also on the “foreign policies affecting the Arab World⁸” (Fadda-Conrey 13). This third wave continues until today, and it has shaped, with its politicized subjects, the Arab community living in the US.

Arab-Americans are officially classified in the US Census Bureau as whites since the 1940s (Fadda-Conrey 15). However, Fadda-Conrey claims that the 9/11 attacks exacerbated “the demonization and racialization of Arabs and Muslims in the US” (23). Their invisibility as white was transformed and because of their dress code, they were singled out as a group that is feared because it is linked to the stereotype of so-called radical Muslims.

Being a Muslim in the US is a central issue in *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*. It is this characteristic that directly affects Khadra's sense of belonging in the diasporic space as she is constantly aware of her foreignness because of the reaction her clothes cause on people around her.

⁸ The expression Arab World used here by Fadda-Conrey is related to the countries that she names as part of the Arab League, that is, Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, The United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Fadda-Conrey 191).

Comparing *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *Brick Lane*, it is possible to observe that being a Muslim in these two novels has a different meaning. The reason for this difference may be accounted for the political and military operations of the US in different countries of the Muslim World, which affects more directly the Muslims living in the US, as it is the case of the characters in *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*. Fadda-Conrey states that these conflicts between the US and the Arab World are “replicated and recalled in the US diaspora” (17).

Joana Kadi follows the same line of thought when discussing the invisibility/visibility of Arab-Americans living in North America. Although Kadi claims that the Arabs are “the most Invisible of the Invisibles” (xix), she also develops the argument that Arabs become visible every time there is a political crisis between the US and the Arab World stating that “during crisis, Arabs can be reassured we exist as a distinct racial group.... We will feel the effects of the social construction of 'the Arabs' that has cast us as enemy, other, fanatical terrorists, crazy Muslim” (xvi). As a result, the feelings of alienation and not belonging are the main consequences of the visibility and the stereotypes constructed around Arabs and Muslims in diaspora.

2.2.3 The Indian Diaspora

The difference was so extreme that he
could not accommodate the two places
together in his mind.

(Lahiri 34)

According to Narayana Jayaram, the Indian diaspora can be divided into two distinct

phases, the colonial and the post-colonial one (18). Also according to Jayaram, during the colonial phase, Indians migrated to several places, but mainly to the British colonies, where cheap labor was needed (20). As the migration portrayed in Lahiri's *The Lowland* deals with the second phase, I focus my analysis on the phase that Jayaram calls the new Indian diaspora.

This second phase of dispersal of Indians abroad started after India's independence in 1947. After 1965, the immigration laws in the US were relaxed, as national-origin quotas were abolished, and skilled immigrants were welcomed. There was then an increase in the flux of immigrants from India, which Jayaram calls the brain drain phase, as it was formed mainly by skilled professionals, and which was “essentially voluntary and mostly individual in nature” (22).

According to Anjali Sahay, during that time the US also increased the admission of scholars in the country (108). They were usually admitted temporarily in the country in order to pursue masters, doctoral and post-doctoral degrees. The Immigration Act of 1990 benefited those immigrants who wished to stay in the country as Daniel Naujoks explains:

The Immigration Act of 1990, effective from 1995, facilitated this process further by introducing the H-1B temporary worker category. This visa category allows U.S. businesses to hire foreigners with at least a bachelor's degree in "specialty occupations" including scientists, engineers, and IT specialists.

Indian citizens are by far the top recipients of H-1B visas each year.

(“Emigration”)

Subhash, one of Lahiri's main characters, is a legal immigrant, who voluntarily decides to move to the US only to pursue a doctoral degree, but when he finishes his degree, he starts working as a professor in the same university in Rhode Island. His initial intention is to go back to India as soon as he completes his studies, but he never returns.

In the first years abroad, Lahiri portrays Subhash divided between two places as he always seems to experience his new life in comparison to life back in India. He feels uncertain, “drifting from his point of origin” (Lahiri 40), but at the same time, he feels life now has “ceased to obstruct or assault him” (Lahiri 34). The feeling of freedom Subhash experiences in the diasporic space surpasses the feeling of not belonging which he does not pay much attention to: “[h]e didn't belong, but perhaps it didn't matter ... it was here ... that he could breathe” (Lahiri 65). The freedom he feels is not only because he is away from home and his parents, but also because he is apart from his younger brother, since Udayan always seemed a step ahead of him: “He'd wanted so much to leave Calcutta, not only for the sake of his education but also - he could admit this to himself now - to take a step Udayan never would” (Lahiri 40).

Subhash is part of a visible minority because of his skin color, but Lahiri chooses not to focus on that. However, there is an episode in which his ethnicity is regarded as exotic. The first American woman he dates seems so attracted by his difference, that Subhash states that “the most ordinary details of his life, which would have made no impressions on a girl from Calcutta, were what made him distinctive to her” (Lahiri 76). Apart from this episode in which his ethnicity is taken into account, Lahiri does not portray Subhash experiencing prejudices from the US society. This acceptance is probably because he is a middle-class character, a respectable professor. Besides, Lahiri's novel focuses more on the individual experience and on the growth of each of her characters in the diasporic space, rather than on the relation between society and the individual.

Subhash visits his parents after Udayan's death, and a couple more times after his father passes away, but he does not consider returning to India. In fact, what is observed is that he tries to create roots in the new country. However, the most important aspect of the

novel is the relation between past and present. Subhash has vivid memories of India, which shape his life abroad. Raising his brother's child as his own makes him constantly aware of his connection to his past in India. He is conscious of his foreignness, but he is mostly disturbed by his past, and not by the acceptance of the society in the adopted country.

2.2.4 The Nigerian Diaspora

She stared at buildings and cars and
 signboards, all of them matte,
 disappointingly matte; In the landscape
 of imagination, the mundane things in
 America were covered in high-shine gloss.

(Adichie 127)

Adichie's novel, *Americanah*, deals with subjects who migrate from Nigeria to the US. This diasporic movement has a specificity that differentiates it from the others in the corpus of this dissertation as the documentation of the Nigerian diaspora is interwoven with the African diaspora, which started with the flow of slaves to the US in the year of 1619. After the trade of slaves was abolished in the 1800s, few Africans migrated to the US.

According to John Arthur, there was an increase in the number of African immigrants to the US between 1900 and 1950, that is, during the period of colonial rule in Africa (2). Nowadays, there is an ongoing number of voluntary immigrants still going to the US in search of better life opportunities. The Nigerians account for 17% of the African immigrants in the US, being the largest group (Arthur 2).

Adichie's *Americanah* portrays many characters who have the intention to leave Nigeria after they graduate because they cannot find good jobs in their area of qualification.

Arthur explains that although Nigerian authorities promoted an “expansion in secondary and post-secondary education” (6), there was not a similar preoccupation with the expansion of the job offers. The result was “massive underemployment and unemployment” (Arthur 6) that was followed by a brain drain similar to the one described in the Indian diaspora.

The two main Nigerian characters that Adichie portrays living in the US, that is, Ifemelu and Auntie Uju, are part of this last group described by Arthur. Although Auntie Uju does not migrate because of the inability to find a job, it is clear that she worked as a doctor in Nigeria only because of her affair with The General⁹. Ifemelu, on the other hand, travels to the US with the intention to finish her studies and find a job.

It is pertinent to add that Ifemelu's friends at high school in Nigeria all have an idealized view of the US. She attends a high-class school because of her good grades and she is surrounded by other teenagers who overestimate life abroad. However, as the epigraph that opens this section demonstrates, her initial years in Princeton help her to deconstruct the US as the land where all dreams come true.

The main characteristic of the diaspora represented in *Americanah* is that the characters are judged because of their skin color. According to Arthur, in this case “the majority of immigrants are never able to insulate themselves from white racial stereotypes and discrimination” (4). This is exactly what Adichie shows in her novel. Through Ifemelu's successful racial blog, Adichie is able to point out that most African immigrants in the US cannot free themselves of stereotypes. Although Ifemelu always identifies herself as Nigerian and not as African, the hair braider explains to her that telling Americans the name of your African country does not mean much for them:

“Where is she?”

⁹ The narrator does not tell the reader the name of Auntie Uju's lover. He is always referred to as The General, in capital letters.

“In Africa.”

“Where? In Senegal?”

“Benin.”

“Why do you say Africa instead of just saying the country you mean?” Ifemelu asked.

Aisha clucked. “You don't know America. You say Senegal and American people, they say, Where is that? My friend from Burkina Faso, they ask her, your country in Latin America? [*sic*] (Adichie 18)

Aisha considers that for white Americans it does not matter which country she comes from because what they see is just her skin color.

Displacement in Adichie's *Americanah* has several sources, that is, Ifemelu feels displaced because of her gender, her ethnic and racial differences as well as her economic condition. Her feelings of not belonging and of displacement are only lightened when she improves her financial situation.

2.3. Approximating the Diasporas

According to James Clifford, the main characteristics of diaspora 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” (247). These broad characteristics are easily observed in the four novels in this study, except for the desire to return which does not remarkably appear in *The Lowland*. I now discuss these characteristics pointed by Clifford, in relation to the novels studied, as I believe they are complementary in the understanding of the concept of diaspora

and diaspora space as well as of the issues of hybridity, alienation, memory and belonging, which are commonly observed in the experience of diasporic subjects.

2.3.1 Dispersion and Encounters

Some of us came from the city...
 but many more of us came from the country...
 Some of us came from the mountains...
 and some of us were the daughters of fishermen...
 (Otsuka 3)

To be considered a diaspora, the migratory movement usually comprises the dislocation and dispersion of a people (Brazier & Mannur 1, Hua 193), which differs from travels or from the dislocation of single individuals. According to Brah, “diasporas emerge out of migrations of collectivities, whether or not members of the collectivity travel as individuals, as households or in various other combinations” (193). A history of dispersal of the diasporic subjects is represented in the four novels studied by the presence of a community of their ethnic background that the immigrants usually find abroad.

The term community is used in this work to describe the group of people usually with the same cultural background who try to recreate an idea of home outside the boundaries of a nation-state. I mean an idea of home as in Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined community, as the communities portrayed in the novels are constructed as if that specific group of people shared characteristics that distinctively single them out from other groups. They are named in the novels, for instance, as a Bangladesh community or a Muslim community, as if these names did not accommodate heterogeneity, as if they were a “deep,

horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7).

Although the term community may embody the negative notion of a ghetto, the concept is an antithesis of the feeling of not belonging and of alienation that the subjects usually experience in the diasporic space. Besides, I want to suggest that the communities of the novels studied can be related to an attempt not to assimilate to the mainstream culture of the host country. Thus, the communities may represent an effort to keep the subjects' cultural identity preserved. Franz Fanon's discussion of the concept of national culture might be related to what makes people gather in communities since he claims that national culture is “the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence” (120)

The definition of community is not only linked to the culture of a nation as in Fanon's discussion of the term. McDowell claims that the term refers to “a fluid network of social relations that may be but are not necessarily tied to territory” (100). McDowell's claim is particularly important for this work as the communities presented both in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and in *Americanah* are not established around a shared national affiliation, but around a religious faith in the former novel and around the notion of race in the latter.

In *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*, the Mosque Khadra attends is the symbol of the Arab community in the novel. The community is in Indianapolis where her father had decided to move to in order to work in a Muslim community center, called the Dawah Center. Along with the family core values, the Dawah Center is the foundation of Khadra's beliefs. It is in the Mosque that Khadra studies the Quran as a child and learns how to behave properly according to the Muslim faith.

The Dawah Center community also serves as a constrain for the assimilation of

Muslims, as it can be observed when a Muslim family moves to Fallen Timbers. Khadra describes some of the changes saying that “[a]fter a while, Tayiba's dad changed his name from Joe to Yusuf. Then he grew a beard. And sent their dog away to his brother in Chicago. He started to fit in at the Center much better” (Kahf 29). As far as Tayiba's mother is concerned, “it was the special project of Khadra's mother to persuade [her] to 'perfect her Islam,' as she put it, by covering that red hair with hijab” (Kahf 42).

The community is also a place in which Khadra feels safe and accepted. It is, in this sense, the antithesis of the American environment. The feeling of belonging to the Muslim community is inversely proportional to the growing awareness that she is not fully accepted in the American society. There she relates to other people who share the same cultural background and beliefs. It is also there that she meets people who have been through the same experiences, who have been in the country for much longer than she is, and who understand her feelings of displacement.

A similar kind of community is observed in Monica Ali's novel. The title *Brick Lane* in fact refers to a street in East London where there is a Bangladeshi-Sylheti community. The portrayal of the character Mrs. Islam shows the hierarchical construct of the place. She knows everything that happens in Brick Lane and is respected, at first, as if she is the keeper of the customs of the Muslim community. The word islam, which etymologically comes from the verbs to submit, to accept and to surrender can, thus, be associated with Mr. Islam's role in the community as the one who supposedly helps to preserve the customs and behaviors. In the development of the novel, the community is portrayed as heterogeneous as it is possible to observe different generations of Bangladeshis, each with their own struggles in the process of relocation. Besides, Mrs. Islam loses the respect of some of the community members along the narrative. When Nazneen discovers that she is a usurer and therefore her behavior goes

against The Quran, she is able to question and even threaten Mrs. Islam.

In Adichie's *Americanah*, the community does not seem so much present. Although Ifemelu has an aunt living nearby with whom she maintains a close relationship during the time abroad, she is not the main reference Ifemelu has of Nigeria. Although Ifemelu claims that she has not been aware of race issues back in Nigeria, it is around the issue of race that a sense of belonging to a different place, and of being dislocated in the place she lives is created.

The community portrayed in Adichie's *Americanah* is not established around a nationality, but around Ifemelu's awareness of what it means to be Black in the US. As Massey explains, communities are not based only on a shared ethnic background, but “communities can exist without being in the same place – from networks of friends with like interests, to major religious, ethnic or political communities” (*Space* 153). Accordingly, it is around race, which is the central topic in the novel, that most characters feel connected with each other.

The presence of a community, however, is not a strong element in *The Lowland* as neither of the main characters seems to crave the contact with their home culture. Subhash's attempt to be closer to the Indian couples he has met at university is discouraged by Gauri who says that she does not want to befriend the Indian women. She claims that she does not have anything in common with them (Lahiri 140), which is partially true as Gauri's last years in India are marked by an unavowed marriage to Udayan, the indirect participation in a murder, the death of her husband followed by a second marriage to her husband's brother. Therefore, the presence of a character like Gauri, who wishes not to be reminded of her past, is probably the reason why Gauri decides not to relate with other Indians living in Rhode Island.

The communities portrayed usually serve as the background in which the narratives of the diasporic subjects unfold. However, it is important to point out that none of the communities shown in the novels are homogeneous. Besides the distinction between first and second generations with contrasting degrees of acculturation and affiliation, the communities also portray characters from different social classes and different levels of education. Nonetheless, they support the understanding that there is the dispersal of a people from one center to another as the communities represented in the novels gather people from the same cultural background. They also show that diaspora is not about the movement of individuals from one country to another, but rather about the movement of collectivities, as Brah claims.

2.3.2 Memory and Imagination

The past is not a truth upon which
to build, but a truth sought, a
re-memorializing over
which to struggle.

(Matsuda 197)

The second characteristic Clifford assigns to diaspora is the one related to the role of memory. As far as first generation immigrants are concerned, they have fresh memories of their country and these memories usually shape the way their lives are experienced in diaspora (Brah 194). Vijay Agnew argues on the importance of the role of memory for diasporic subjects claiming that the process of remembering our individual and collective past is constantly defining our present (3). This statement is particularly important to understand the subjectivity of diasporic subjects as their past history is often recollected and, thus, influence their perception of the present time.

Along these lines, John Urry contends that “memories are materially localized and so the temporality of memory is spatially rooted” (12). The memories of the characters are connected to space and time. For the characters who long for their homeland as well as for the relatives who stayed back home, memory seems to shorten time as it connects them to happy memories of their past.

Anh Hua's definition of memory is also relevant since she claims it is a process of construction:

Rather than mental imprints or iconic likeness, memory is formed through elaborated mental mappings that change over time. Memory is the construction and reconstruction of what actually happened in the past. Memory is distorted by needs, desires, interests, and fantasies. Subjective and malleable rather than objective and concrete, memory is emotional, conceptual, contextual, constantly undergoing revision, selection, interpretation, and reconstruction. (198)

Hua's definition applies to all characters studied in this work, but it is most easily observed in Nazneen whose past is always deconstructed and reconstructed throughout the narrative. At first, she mostly has fond memories of home, but eventually, she is also able to reconstruct it more critically. Her sister's letters are also important in the process of revision as they help her not to rely only on the fond memories she has from home, but to see the cruel reality her sister faces daily in Bangladesh.

However, as Agnew states, “memories are not stable and static but fluid and temporal” (10). This fluidity of memory is exactly what is observed in Nazneen's process of remembering her homeland. With the passing of time, she is aware that her memories no longer the same: “[t]he village was leaving her.... As the years passed the layers of netting

multiplied and she began to rely on a different kind of memory. The memory of things she knew but no longer saw” (Ali 176). In other words, it is possible to state that the memories of first generation immigrants are usually fresh and vivid, but they change over time becoming something that may be far from reality.

For second generations, the memories of the homeland are usually passed on by relatives. That is clearly the case of Khadra from *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, who claims that, unlike her brother, Eyad, she did not have clear memories of Syria when she was a child living in Indiana: “Eyad remembered Syria in complete sentences, not flashes of words and tastes [like herself]” (15). Instead, the memories of Syria were passed on to her by her parents, relatives, and the adults from the Dawah Center.

Hua considers that memories are not reliable, instead they can be regarded as “imagined” as Salman Rushdie proposes. The Indian author and critic sustains that the country the subjects remember is a constructed image created by their distance from their home country (10). Accordingly, Brah sees the memories of the homeland as a “mythic home in the diasporic imagination” (192). For this reason, the idea of the homeland the subjects cultivate and pass on to other generations may be seen as a construct and not as a real description of a country. Rushdie claims that memory works as a broken mirror and that when “the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (10-11). Although Rushdie is discussing the case of Indian writers, the homeland is also constructed through blurred images and memories in the other novels studied here. When Khadra, for instance, goes to Mecca for the first time she is shocked to learn that what she had learned at the Dawah Center does not correspond to the reality she can now see with her own eyes (167-68). The same is true for Ifemelu. She leaves Nigeria after a few semesters in college, lives in

the US for thirteen years, and when she goes back, she states: “[h]ad it always been like this or had it changed so much in her absence?” (475). It is as if the country she sees does not accommodate the memories she holds of Nigeria during the years abroad. In this sense, Agnew states that the memories of the diasporic subjects are related to the construction of their identities in the new space (3). Memory, then, plays the role of confronting present and past and thus opening the possibility of renegotiating new identities in the new country as it is the case of most characters from the novels analyzed in this work.

Gauri, from Lahiri's *The Lowland*, is a character who deserves special attention as far as memory is concerned. Married to Subhash's brother, Udayan, in India, she gets indirectly involved in the Naxalite movement. Although she is not a member of the revolutionary group, Udayan asks her to do some assignments since she would not draw much suspicion from the police. After Udayan is killed by the Indian police because of his participation in a police officer's murder, she discovers she is pregnant by Udayan, marries Subhash, and moves to Rhode Island with him. For Gauri, the second marriage is understood as a possibility to move away from her past, to leave behind an old life. She does not seem to hold any idealized views of India and she wishes to forget all the past memories that continue to guide her present. Ahn Hua claims that “[f]orgetting is an act of creative invention, a performance, a selective loss” (195). In fact, Gauri chooses to forget her past to recreate herself anew in the new space. She considers after a few days abroad that that “was the place where she could put things behind her” (Lahiri 125). However, leaving India but living with the daughter she had with her first husband is still a constant reminder of her past, and she decides to run away from her house in Rhode Island leaving her daughter to be brought up by Subhash. I believe her act of running away is a proof of how painful her memories are and how eager she is to recreate a new beginning.

In her old age, Gauri has to stop running away from her past and needs to deal with her memories in order to be in peace with herself. Back in India, Gauri tells her brother that she returned because she “needed to see it again” (Lahiri 318). But later she realizes that she is back in India to die where she was born: “[t]his was the place. This was the reason she'd come. The purpose of her return was to take her leave” (Lahiri 323). Gauri's memories of India are so traumatic that her return makes her consider attempting suicide. When she closes her eyes to jump out of the balcony, the narrator says:

Then one by one she released the things that fettered her. Lightening herself, the way she'd removed her bangles after Udayan was killed. What she'd seen from the terrace in Tollygunge. What she'd done to Bela. The image of the policeman passing beneath a window, holding his son by the hand. (Lahiri 323)

What Gauri recollects at this moment are the memories that have imprisoned her for years, and it may be said that remembering the painful moments makes Gauri to be in peace with them as she decides not to jump out of the balcony. Agnew explains the relation between memory and trauma stating that “[o]thers who had wounds of memory inflicted on them consequent to horrific dislocation and dispossession may find travels to the past an involuntary, albeit necessary, journey to come to terms with their present selves” (10). Echoing Agnew’s statement, Gauri needs to remember in order to conciliate with the choices she had made during her life in India.

In conclusion, memory works similarly for the diasporic subjects portrayed in the other three novels studied since it is what links past and present, acting as a catalyst for the construction of new identities in the new space. The same is observed even for Gauri, whose memories are related to trauma, as it is analyzed in the third chapter.

2.3.3 Alienation and Belonging

You now belong to the
invisible world.

(Otsuka 26)

Clifford's third characteristic of diaspora, that is, the alienation in the host country, is observed in the four novels studied as well. The main characters of the four novels studied experience, at least at first, an alienation that is revealed by an awareness of not belonging to their new place of residence. The tension of experiencing the present in comparison with distant customs helps to create the feeling of alienation in relation to a certain place.

The acceptance of the immigrant in the host country should also be taken into account as far as alienation is considered. This acceptance varies according to political and economic issues and changes over time. One episode in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* serves as a fine example. It portrays the feelings of the young Khadra when some American embassy workers are taken hostage by Iranian revolutionaries. She compares herself to the hostages, as she has to face the consequences of the media coverage of the story:

Khadra counted out her days in George Rogers Clark High School where, for four hundred and forty-four days, she was a hostage to the rage the hostage crisis produced in Americans. It was a battle zone. Her job was to get through the day dodging verbal blows – and sometimes physical ones. (Kahf 123)

The passage shows how immigrants may be completely alienated and not welcomed in the host country when their foreignness is highlighted in opposition to the national cohesion against a political crisis. However, for the young Khadra, the nonacceptance is not only related to the fact that she is an immigrant, but it is also accentuated by the fact that she is an Arab descendant during the time of a crisis between the US and an Arab country. It is

important to observe here that although she is not from Iran, her attackers seem not to take that into consideration. Although Khadra is raised in the US, for her attackers, what matters is that she is an Arab, and therefore, she probably has more in common with Iranians than with them. Khadra seems to be the character, among the others from the four novels, who seems to suffer most from not being accepted in the host country. In *Americanah*, however, Ifemelu hints at the fact that her teenage cousin's suicide attempt may also be related to the fact that he is an immigrant who feels alienated, as she says to her aunt: “[h]is depression is because of his experience, Aunty” (Adichie 470).

Similar examples of the Iranian episode faced by Khadra are shown both in *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf* as well as in *Brick Lane* after 9/11. Carol Fadda-Conrey claims that the 9/11 attacks have intensified the Orientalist discourse against Arab-Americans in the US, “portraying Arabs and Muslims as perpetual aliens, volatile extremists, and potential or actual terrorists” (2). Accordingly, the Muslim characters portrayed in the novels suffer prejudices because being a Muslim becomes a label associated with the characteristics pointed out by Fadda-Conrey.

Similarly, Arjun Appadurai contends that, in the globalized world, minority groups challenge national narratives of social cohesion and purity and as a consequence create identities which he calls predatory. The predatory identities are those “whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as a we” (51). Although Appadurai's point is constructed around a majoritarian ethnic identity that feels threatened by a minority and as a result becomes predatory, I believe the violence of the 9/11 created similar identities that promote violence against Muslims because they identify this minority group as a threat and as something to be feared.

It is precisely the terrorist attack in America that makes Chanu seriously consider taking his family back to Bangladesh. He senses the attacks will add to the already difficult situation of his family. His concerns are justified in the voice of the narrator who states that “a pinch of New York dust blew across the ocean and settled on the Dogwood State” (Ali 306) when showing the prejudice the community goes through after the attack just because they are Muslims. The narrator adds that “Sorupa's daughter was the first, but not the only one. Walking in the street, on her way to college, she had her hijab pulled off” (Ali 306), and Chanu concludes: “Now you see what will happen... Backlash” (Ali 306). Chanu's fear of retaliation leads him to conclude that going back to Bangladesh is the best solution as he predicts that his alienation in the host country will only become worse.

Finally, alienation is also related to the fact that all characters portrayed in the novels are part of visible minorities in their places of residence. According to Eleanor Ty, the term visible minorities was coined by the Canadian government in order to designate people who are “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in color” (4), and with this nomenclature Ty claims that “color was translated into the language of visibility” (6). In other words, minorities are usually in the margins of the societies where they live as they have little representation and political power. Although they may be invisible because of the lack of representativeness, they become uncomfortably visible because of their skin color and are thus discriminated against. However, I use the term here to include differences other than the skin color. Most Arabs portrayed in Kahf's novel have white skin but they are visible minorities because of their dress code. As I see it, the invisibility of the minorities may become visible through certain differences such as language and clothes. In the novels studied, the visibility is noticed in the character's dress codes and in their skin color.

In *Brick Lane* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, novels that portray Muslim

characters, the clothes are what single them out. In *Brick Lane*, after 9/11, “[s]ome of the parents were telling their daughters to leave their headscarves at home” (Ali 313) implying that clothes made them an easy target for prejudice and discrimination. In *Americanah*, it is the skin color of the characters that mark them as different. In an episode in which Ifemelu's cousin, Dike, is accused of being aggressive at school, Auntie Uju claims that because her son's skin color is different, he is treated differently:

Look at him, just because he looks different, when he does what other little boys do, it becomes aggression. Then the principal told me, 'Dike is just like one of us, we don't see him as different at all.' What kind of pretending is that? I told him to look at my son. There are only two of them in the whole school. The other child is a half caste, and so fair that if you look from afar you will not even know that he is black. My son sticks out, so how can you tell me that you don't see any difference? (Adichie 212)

Although the Principal assures her that he is treated like any other kid at school, the situations Auntie Uju has been through in the country tell her that the discourse of equality does not always work in reality. However, what is possible to state is that the visibility of the minorities is undoubtedly linked to the characters' sense of alienation, which is the case of the experiences lived by both Dike and Auntie Uju. Therefore, the awareness that they are seen as different only heightens their perception of not belonging to the place they live. *Brick Lane*, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, and *Americanah* portray subjects who feel alienated in the foreign culture and, thus, dislocated because of double belongings. The feeling of not belonging connects Khadra, Nazneen and Ifemelu, as their lives are marked by a strong awareness of alienation and as they are constantly reminded that they do not belong to the place they live.

The same can be stated about Subhash from *The Lowland*. Although he does not seem to feel dislocated in the United States, his few friends and the lack of a social life before he marries in old age might hint at the fact that he is also alienated from the place he lives. Except for his university roommate whom he meets again in old age, there is no other mention of friends in the narrative. Besides, in old age when he reexamines his past, he considers:

He felt his presence on earth being denied, even as he stood there. He was forbidden access, the past refused to admit him. It only reminded him that this arbitrary place, where he'd landed and made his life, was not his. Like Bela, it accepted him, while at the same time keeping a distance He was still a visitor. Perhaps the worst kind of visitor: one who had refused to leave. (Lahiri 253)

Implied in Subhash's words is the realization of not belonging to neither of the places he has lived. He considers that before coming to the US “[h]e had belonged to his parents and Udayan, and they to him” (Lahiri 251), a statement that shows the strong connection between them. After Udayan's death, his mother, Bijoli, acknowledges that Subhash “should have been a comfort; the one son remaining when the other was taken away. But she was unable to love one without the other. He had only added to the loss” (Lahiri 186). Therefore, Subhash concludes that he feels detached from the place where he lives at the moment but, worse still, that his birthplace is not a welcoming place either. Unlike Chanu, Nazneen and Ifemelu, Subhash is twice alienated as he recognizes that he has no place to return to, idealized or not.

In sum, the feeling of alienation is present in all characters as most of them share the awareness of belonging somewhere else. The exception is Gauri who seems certain during all her time abroad that she does not belong to India anymore. However, Gauri, like the other characters portrayed in the four novels are part of visible minorities either because of their

skin color or because of their dress code, a fact that directly influences their alienation and lack of belonging. Gauri may feel that she does not belong to India, but that does not mean she is not alienated in the host country.

Brah claims that the diaspora space is a place at which “boundaries of ... belonging and otherness ... are contested” (209). The analysis of the characters above demonstrates that the questioning of belonging is observed in most diasporic subjects. However, I see that the subjects feel they do not belong because of a specificity of the diasporic movement, and as a consequence of an identity constituent that is in evidence. Khadra and Nazneen are both Muslim, but while Khadra is alienated because of her religious belief, Nazneen is mostly alienated because of her ethnicity, a fact that is aggravated by her husband who prohibits her to leave the house alone and to learn the language of the country she now lives.

2.3.4 The Impossible Return

Because we were on the boat now,
the past was behind us, and there
was no going back.
(Otsuka 12)

Although Clifford claims that the desire to return is one of the features of diaspora, Brah relativizes such claim by arguing that “not all diasporas sustain an ideology of 'return'” (180). While I agree with Brah, the analysis of the four novels in this work suggests that the eventual desire for return might be related to the character’s experience in diaspora, rather than a feeling that pervades the narrative from the beginning. In my view, in the novels studied, the desire to return works as a response to the feeling of not belonging, of not being able to fulfill the dreams the characters often have of encountering a promised land. The

characters who feel oppressed and discriminated nurture the desire to go back, which is the case of Nazneen, Chanu, Ifemelu and, Khadra.

Nazneen's oppression can be first observed as soon as she moves to London. She hears her husband describing her on the phone as an “unspoilt girl. From the village.... Not beautiful, but not ugly either... Hips are a bit narrow but wide enough, I think, to carry children. All things considered, I am satisfied” (Ali 10-11). Chanu's description of Nazneen demonstrates that he fails to see the person, as it is her cultural background who makes her suitable to be his wife. As a diasporic subject, he wants a woman that will teach his children values he relates to his idea of home, as he tries to recreate in the space of his house an environment closer to the one of his homeland. That is the reason of his emphasis that Nazneen is an unspoiled girl from the village. In order to keep her an unspoiled girl, Chanu maintains her constrained to the home space.

Nazneen who was raised to be an obedient wife and who claims that she is not “the wishing type” (Ali 7) of a person, believes she should be where her husband is and as a consequence she does not ask him to go back. But her desire to be reunited with her sister who stayed in Bangladesh is a constant feeling throughout the narrative.

Naila Kabber claims that “Bangladeshis who came to the UK had started as sojourners rather than 'settlers,' hoping to make their fortune ... and to return as rich men of high status” (198). Chanu is portrayed by Ali as a man who, as Kabber states, migrates to London with the dream of wealth and success:

When I came I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane, I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me... And then I found things were a bit different. These people here didn't know the difference

between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their head. (Ali 21)

Chanu's dilemma about returning might be related to the impossibility of reaching the goals described by Kabeer. His dream is to return as a rich and successful man, but he feels his chances are denied as he believes he is condemned to be in the bottom of the social ladder: “we are the only things standing in the way of them [poor and uneducated English] sliding totally to the bottom of the pile” (Ali 24). Chanu's misery is, then, related to his class status but also, in his point of view, because of the social immobility that is a result of his status as an immigrant. The discrimination from society only adds to his disappointment since his failures constantly remind him of how successful he had dreamed to be in London.

As Brah claims, one of the reasons for migration is “people's desire to pursue opportunities that might improve their life chances” (178). That is exactly the reason why Chanu migrated to London. However, the reality he faces over the years does not seem to get him any closer to his dreams and, especially after 9/11, he realizes that his situation will only get worse which makes him start planning his return to Bangladesh.

The main characters of *Americanah* and *The Girl from the Tangerine Scarf* also share Chanu's disappointment. Ifemelu realizes that being Black in the US will always make her feel alienated in the country. Khadra is oppressed by both gender and religious issues. Because of the discrimination, these characters eventually start idealizing home and considering that back home things could be different.

Once again Chanu provides a good example of this idealization of home as a place where he could start over. He complains that his daughter might be learning a stereotypical view of Bangladesh in which just bad things are presented. However, his own perception of

the country seems also biased, as the following quote shows:

In the sixteenth century, Bengal was called the Paradise of Nations. These are our roots. Do they teach her these things in the school here? Do Shahana know about the Paradise of Nations? All she knows about is flood and famine. Whole bloody country is just a bloody basket case for her. (148)

Returning to the discussion of Rushdie's "imaginary homeland," Chanu's desire to return is constructed around an idea of the homeland in which reality has faded with time, but reconstructed with fond memories. He has been far from his own country a long time and, in the quotation above, it is observed that he seems not to be able to critically address issues regarding his home country.

Lahiri's characters are examples of the ones who reach the goal they aimed at when moving away from home. Subhash moves from India to Rhode Island to pursue a doctoral degree and the narrator explains what has changed in Subhash's life since he left India:

Until he left Calcutta, Subhash's life was hardly capable of leaving a trace. He could have put everything belonging to him in a grocery bag... Until he went to America he had not had his own room.... Here he had been quietly successful, educating himself, finding engaging work, sending Bela to college. It had been enough, materially speaking. (Lahiri 251)

Although Subhash's initial plan is of an eventual return, his accomplishments as well as the freedom he feels living so far away from home make him change his mind and only return briefly to India after the death of his brother and parents. As discussed above, he does not see any reason to go back both because he becomes a professor in the university he had studied, and because after Udayan's death his parents treat him as if he were also dead.

Gauri never thinks of going back, and only does so for a visit when she feels the urge

to deal with her past. She has painful memories of India and she relates her restless present to these memories. After leaving Subhash, she also becomes a professor in the United States, a fact which does not give her any reason to go back to India. Later in life she decides to become a US citizen as she considers that “California was her only home” (Lahiri 235). The absence of the desire to return is not only because both Subhash and Gauri have successful careers, but mainly because they do not seem to find any reason to go back.

Nazneen, from *Brick Lane*, is the only character that migrates as an adult who did not travel to another country with dreams and objectives. As mentioned before, she travels to London out of obedience to her father, who arranged her marriage to Chanu. Her homesickness is aggravated because she is constantly worried about her sister who stayed behind. During the first years in London, her life seems not to be very different from what it was back in Bangladesh. Nazneen craves for her sister's letters, which is the only way for them to communicate. In fact, it is through these letters, and the realization of the hardship of her sister's life in her home country that Nazneen eventually wonders if going back to Bangladesh is the best option for her and her daughters:

A thousand thoughts crushed into Nazneen's skull. Dhaka would be a disaster. Shahana would never forgive her. Chanu would be finished. It was not even going home. She had never been there. Hasina was in Dhaka, but the city of her letters was an ugly place, full of dangers. (Ali 358)

As a result, when the time to return comes, she decides to stay in London while her husband goes back to Bangladesh.

Ifemelu's decision to go back to Nigeria is as surprising as Nazneen's decision to stay in London. After becoming a successful blogger and finally getting the financial stability she aspired since the beginning, she decides to go back because she feels as if “there was cement

in her soul” (7). Similarly to Nazneen who misses her sister, Ifemelu's homesickness is also exacerbated because of a boyfriend she had left behind.

The desire to return seems to result from a peculiarity in each of the character's stories rather than a characteristic inherent of the diasporic movement. Brah claims that diaspora is about “setting down, putting roots 'elsewhere’” (192) and that is the case of the characters studied here. They all try to build a life abroad and create roots, and the desire to go back is observed in the characters who are disappointed with their lives in diaspora.

2.3.5 Identification, Alliances and Hybridity

Sometimes we feel we straddle
two cultures; at other times, that
we fall between two stools.

(Rushdie 18)

Agnew suggests that although diasporic subjects are still connected to their homeland and ethnic background, they systematically create attachments in the new country (14). The diasporic subjects are, then, connected to their homeland as they still recognize themselves as part of an ethnic community, while new allegiances are created with the passing of time.

As far as the first generation characters are concerned, good examples of Agnew's statement are Subhash, Ifemelu and, Nazneen. These characters continue to have bonds with their ethnic background while being slowly transformed by the new space. In other words, although these subjects do not deny their ethnic background, new affiliations are created with the passing of time. Sudesh Mishra's idea of a “dual territoriality” applies to these first generation characters who have to deal with conflicts that are caused by a life between “hostland and homeland,” as these subjects are “[s]uspended between two such terrains

-living without belonging in one, belonging without living in the other” (16). Dr. Azad, one of characters of Ali's *Brick Lane* characterizes this tension caused by living in this dual territoriality saying that “[Bangladeshis] don't ever really leave home. Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there. And anyway, look how they live: just recreating the villages here” (Ali 19). Ali's and Kahf's characters are good examples of subjects whose lives are marked by the distress of being suspended between host land and homeland.

Gauri offers a different example of a first generation since she does not want to perpetuate the Indian culture in Rhode Island. She does not feel connected to India and wants to break the constraints of being an Indian woman abroad, something she successfully does with time. She wants to look like the women she sees at the university campus in Rhode Island, and the transformation in her appearance occurs one day after meeting some Indian couples at a social gathering. She cuts her hair short and tears all her clothes with a pair of scissors “as if an animal had shredded the fabric with its teeth and claws” (Lahiri 140-41), in a clear attempt to distance herself from the image recreated by the Indian women in saris she met the day before. After a short time in the US, she stops wearing her saris and cuts her hair short.

Ahn Hua relates the lack of nostalgia to the condition of women in their homeland. She explains that women are more likely to have a “painful recollection of patriarchal attitudes, customs, and traditions found in the 'Old World'” (195). Hua's statement can be related to Gauri because before Subhash offered to take her away, she was supposed to live as a widow at her in-law's house where she could no longer continue to study and had to live under her mother-in-law's rules. Although she marries Subhash and travels abroad in order to leave her past behind, it seems that she is reminded of the roles usually attributed to Indian women. She not only changes her appearance, but something deep inside her starts changing

as well. She, then, challenges what is expected from her as a wife and a mother. I believe this change only happens so fast, in comparison to other first generation characters whose transformations are slowly observed over time, because of her traumatic experiences in India and the painful memories she holds from her past. It may be argued that the changes observed in the other characters with the passing of time are shown in Gauri in the first years abroad. I discuss these changes with more attention in the third chapter as I approach these transformations with a focus on gender issues.

The tension between host land and homeland is also observed in second-generation characters. The novels portray seven characters, but the more important ones are: Nazneen's older daughter, Ifemelu's cousin, Gauri's daughter and, Khadra from *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*.

Nazneen's daughter, Shahana, feels stronger connections to the culture of the country where she is born than to the culture that has been passed to her by her parents, as the narrator explains in this quote:

Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her Kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. If she could choose between baked beans and dal it was no contest. When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face.... Shahana did not want to go back home. (Ali 144)

Although the narrator uses the expression to go back home, Shahana seems to have no doubt that home is where she lives, and not a distant land she has only heard of.

Dike, Ifemelu's cousin, is similarly portrayed as he seems to have more attachments to the US than to his mother's cultural background. He was born in the US since his parents wanted him to have an American passport, and then he returns to Nigeria where he lives for

less than two years. After his father dies, his mother goes back with him to the US. Unlike Shahana, Dike's affiliation to Nigeria is something he is willing to build. He is curious about the place where he was born but knows so little about, as his mother avoids the subject, probably because she does not want to tell him that she was his father's mistress and had to run away to the US.

Bela, Gauri's daughter, is a second-generation character whose life is marked by constant losses. Gauri abandons her when she is still a child and, after that, she is raised only by Subhash. When she grows older she decides not to go to university, but to get a job at a farm. Her decision is for Subhash "the closest she came to rejecting how both he and Gauri lived" (Lahiri 221). When she gets pregnant and looks for Subhash for help, he decides to tell her that he is not her father, but her uncle. I believe that the peculiarity of her family makes Bela the character who is most distant from her parent's culture. She does not speak Bengali or wear saris. It is not only that she rejects going to university, but she is not portrayed as having any close links to India.

Khadra is the only second-generation character that feels more attached to a homeland than to her place of residence. She always assumed that for her home is Syria because of the way she is treated both at school and in her neighborhood. She is so aware that she does not belong to the place where she lives that she is convinced that home and her roots are back in Syria. However, after a time spent there as part of a healing and self-discovery period, she returns to the US claiming that she is going home:

She knew by the time she crossed the Atlantic that she was headed home, if there was any home in the world of worlds. She loved her country of origin, and found that something ... corresponded to the deep structure of her taxonomy. ... She knew at last that it was in the American crucible where her

character had been forged, for good or ill. (Kahf 313)

I want to suggest with this quote that at first Khadra believes, similarly to first generation characters, that home is where her parents came from. However, after being in Syria, she discovers that she cannot deny that she is also American. This passage is important because it provides a relevant example of a subject whose identity is constructed around two cultures. Although Khadra accepts the US as her home, she also draws attention to the fact that she also feels attached to Syria. Her identity is not constructed around one culture only, and she realizes that she cannot deny her double attachments.

The three second generation characters mentioned above are examples of hyphenated subjects who have allegiances to both nationalities they are attached to. Here is Sudesh Mishra's reflection on the hyphen, which according to him also helps define who the hybrid subject is:

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)

Sudesh Mishra discusses the dichotomous idea of the subject being divided between two worlds, and considers the subjects in relation to a third space, which is symbolized by the hyphen. Khadra, an Arab American, and Shahana, a Bangladeshi American, are the best examples found in the novels studied because they show the complexity of feeling displaced because of double attachments. Except for Gauri's daughter, Bela, the narrator in those novels does not give us insights of the feelings of the other second-generation characters, which is why I focus my analysis on the other characters mentioned above.

According to Mishra, the territoriality of the hyphenated subject should be considered through the perspective of the hyphen since it works like a bridge linking the two worlds and forming a subject who is in neither side, but inhabits both (83). The focus on the hyphen is related to the notion of a subject who is raised according to a culture, but who also internalizes cultural elements of his/her host land country, and consequently, has characteristics of both cultures.

The hyphen is important in defining the subject's double belonging, which might be translated by the term hybridity, a term which comes from biology referring “to the cross-breeding of plant and animal species” (Friedman 83) and which is used in cultural theory to denote “identities and cultural forms [that] are a product of intermingling and fusion, a product of movement” (McDowell 212). Implied in the notion of mixing and fusion is the production of a third which is different from the two original forms. Homi Bhabha defines hybridity through the concept of a third space:

hybridity ... is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. The third space displaces the histories that constitute it... the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to a something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation (“The Third Space” 211).

Bhabha has a positive and political understanding of hybridity as he sees it as a form of agency, in which a new discourse can emerge. Although I agree with Bhabha that the term hybridity is politically positive, I believe that there is also the negative side of it as the rupture of belonging to a single culture or nation often causes a feeling of dislocation for diasporic subjects.

I find that both the ideas of dislocation and hybridity might be translated by the

“Möbius Strip,” which is, according to Eliana Reis, “a sequence with no beginning and no end, and therefore, with no fixed center” (86, my translation)¹⁰, and it might as well be seen as a metaphor of identity when Reis contends that

identity and alterity can be compared to the sides of the Möbius Strip as, in their continuous movement around themselves, they can alternately be seen as outside and inside, front and back. Thus, the subject shows his/her different sides depending on his/her different curves (94, my translation)¹¹.

As the hybrid subject usually has to transit from one culture to another, his or her feeling of dislocation may be caused by a lack of a center, by a continuous movement between the two cultures that affects his or her identity construction.

Furthermore, the notion of hybridity breaks with the idea of purity as Stuart Hall points out when claiming that “diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (244). Thus, the identities of the diasporic subjects are constructed through lived experience and differences. Besides, as argued by Prina Werbner, hybridity also breaks with the concept of nationhood “as transnational social formations, diasporas challenge the hegemony and boundedness of the nation-state and, indeed, of any pure imaginaries of nationhood” (30). All the novels analyzed here portray characters who have not migrated and, therefore, it is possible to contrast them with the ones who have moved to foreign lands. In this sense, the representation of diasporic characters break with the notion of purity and with the imaginaries of nationhood in the terms discussed by Werbner.

It is possible to say that all characters in the diaspora space are affected by double

¹⁰ “A Faixa de Möbius indica uma sequência sem princípio nem fim, portanto, sem um centro fixo.”

¹¹ “A identidade e a alteridade comparam-se às faces da Faixa de Möbius que, em seu contínuo movimento ao redor de si mesmas, funcionam alternadamente como fora e dentro, frente e verso. O sujeito se mostra, então, em suas várias faces, de acordo com as diferentes curvas.”

affiliations. The first generation characters have a stronger alliance to the homeland while slowly creating new bonds with the host culture. The only exception is Gauri from *The Lowland*, who wants to break the connections with her past not long before she arrives abroad. The second generation characters are often portrayed in a similar way as their parents usually raise them in accordance with their home culture. However, for the second generations, the new affiliations are made much earlier, and much faster as the contact with the host culture happens at school where they often spend most of their time. The exception is the case of Khadra, from *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, who does not have many friends at school who do not belong to her Muslim community and, she remains closely attached to her beliefs. Besides, she is a constant victim of bullying at school mainly because of her clothes and because of an international crisis between the US and Arab countries.

The four diasporas analyzed in this dissertation are voluntary movements that happened in the second half of the twentieth century. All the immigrants portrayed in the novels are legal aliens who benefited from new immigrant laws, both in the US and the UK. The characters are all part of visible minorities because of either their skin color or their dress code. Religion is also a main issue in two of the novels as both the characters in *Brick Lane* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* are Muslims. The ethnic origin of the characters is the characteristic that unites them, although each ethnicity represented in the novels elicits different levels of response from the society the characters are inserted into. For instance, race in *Americanah* and religion in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* are different issues, which prompt similar responses, that is, prejudice and the alienation of the main characters.

It is not my intention to essentialize the diasporic movements nor to claim that ethnicity or religion are the same for the diasporic subject. On the contrary, my conclusions relate to the novels studied and the responses their characters had when faced with the

prejudice elicited from their experience abroad. Brah claims that “the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life, in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively” (183). Following Brah's lead, I do not want to claim that the identities of diasporic subjects are similar, but that they are similarly constructed because of the reception the characters usually have in the host country. Because the identities are fluid and always in a process of construction, they will change with time according to the experiences lived in the diaspora space.

The specificities of the diasporic movements portrayed in the novels studied show that what prevails is the relation between the society reception and the response feelings created by the acceptance or not of certain subjective characteristics. All the characters portrayed in the four novels feel dislocated in the new space, but mostly for different reasons.

Returning to Clifford's characteristics of diaspora, I suggest that they are not always shared by all diasporic movements and, even when they are common to a number of these movements, they are a consequence of the relation between the diaspora space and a specificity of the subject's identity. For instance, although communities are observed in three of the novels studied here, each of them is established around a specificity and not always because of national affiliations. While memories approximate Chanu and Ifemelu and their respective homelands, memory distances Gauri and Subhash from India, but in all cases memory is one of the mechanism which all characters negotiate their present and past and consequently their identities in the new space.

All characters are alienated, but as their acceptance in the new place of residence is related to the acceptance the immigrant has in the host country, their alienation have distinct causes. As far as the characters from Lahiri's *The Lowland* are concerned, their alienation is

not even caused by the reception they have in the host country, but because of the traumas lived by each of these characters in India.

Therefore, it is through the specificity of each movement or each individual story that alliances and displacement, for instance, can be analyzed. Consequently, the characteristics analyzed are not inherent of the diasporic movement per se, but a consequence of the relation between the diaspora space and the identity constituents of the subjects. Besides, as it is shown in the next two chapters, the specificity of each diasporic movement will directly influence their gender reconfiguration in the diaspora space.

Chapter 3

Gender Relations: Trauma and Race

All 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.

(Lefebvre 35)

In accordance with Lefebvre's quotation above, it is in the new space the subjects inhabit that they are able to recreate themselves. Therefore, in this chapter I analyze the reconfiguration of gender roles in the diaspora space. I discuss the relation of the category of space-time with these reconfigurations. Besides, I consider the relevance of the intersectionality of other identity constituents for the transformations observed in the diaspora space. My claim is that the movement across space-time, that is, to a foreign land over time, directly affects the power relations previously established in the country of origin and foster the reconfiguration of gender roles in the new space.

Gender is a paramount issue in the four novels chosen for this study, but there are also other issues which are equally relevant in the novels. In order to study the intersectionality of gender with other identity constituents, I focus on the interaction of gender with race, trauma and religion. As they are both lengthy topics, in this chapter I analyze gender and trauma in Lahiri's *The Lowland* and gender and race in Adichie's *Americanah* and, in the fourth chapter, I analyze Ali's *Brick Lane* and Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* focusing on gender and religion.

The contemporary understanding of gender rejects the common held belief that it is something that is natural to the individual, and sees it as socially and culturally constructed. 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* 191). It is important to notice that in Butler's statement gender is constructed through a repetition of acts that are externally instituted, that is, gender cannot be seen as something naturally inherited, but it is rather dependable on the social environment in which it is constructed. Therefore, gender is constructed differently according to the culture and power dynamics ruling each space. This argument is relevant because it establishes the connection between space and gender. When we consider the changes in the characters' gender roles in the diaspora space, they demonstrate the abiding forces of a culture on gender construction and that when the characters feel they are free from the cultural constraints according to which they have been raised, they may reconfigure some of the roles they had been previously taught. Butler emphasizes this relation between gender and culture when she states that “it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural interactions in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (*Gender* 4-5). Along these lines, Butler also introduces the concept of gender performance arguing that gender is created through sustained social performances:

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*180)

Butler's argument is relevant 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* 180). She argues against the fixed and dichotomized idea of femininity and masculinity contending that a discussion of gender should avoid dichotomous positions such as an opposition between male and female (180). I agree with Butler as I believe that gender roles are shaped by the culture into which the subject is inserted. It is then important to investigate how the category of space as well as how a shift of location changes the gender relations, that is, how subjects who move to a different location tend to reconfigure their gender roles. Therefore, the insertion of the subjects into a different space and culture often requires a reading that presents a different approach to issues regarding gender and feminist criticism.

Susan Friedman proposes another approach which she calls “locational feminism” as she believes that space and time have to be taken into consideration as “different times and places produce different and changing gender systems as these intersect with other different and changing societal stratification and movements for social justice” (*Mappings* 5). Locational feminism is, then, an important tool in the study of diasporic subjects because in the foreign space, and with the contact with a different culture in which women often have more agency than they used to have in their previous country, subjects question and redefine their position in society. Regarding Butler's statement mentioned before, it is relevant to observe how gender is constructed in the different spaces the diasporic subjects inhabit along the narrative for an analysis of how gender is redefined in diaspora. In other words, it is necessary to investigate the specificities of gender construction in the subject's homeland and in his/her host country in order to analyze if there is a significant configuration of gender roles because of the space the subjects inhabit.

Friedman emphasizes the relation between gender and the constituents of identity

among which are race, ethnicity, religion, and class, contending that it is necessary to study the interaction of these constituents in accordance with the space the subject inhabits (*Mappings* 22). Friedman explains that “[c]hange the scene, and the most relevant constituents of identity come into play. The other axes of identity do not disappear; they are just not as salient in this particular scene” (*Mappings* 23). This statement is particularly important for this dissertation because in the novels studied the issues of race and religion are not particularly relevant when the subjects are portrayed in their homeland. However, after the movement towards another country, these two identity constituents become evident for the diasporic characters of the novels.

Along these same lines, Sherry Simon claims that the concepts of location, identity, and gender are intertwined when challenging the notion of the stability and purity of the self in the diasporic space,:

the plurality of difference has led to the prioritization of the concept of “location.” Identity is understood as a positioning in discourse and in history. Sexual difference – gender – becomes one lens through which differences of all orders (national, ethnic, class, race), therefore, are scrutinized. Emphasis is placed on the active nature as representational practices, which are seen to construct positions for subjects and to produce identities, binding people across diversities, and providing new places from which they can speak. Cultural practices are central to the production of subjects, rather than simply reflecting them. (141)

Both Friedman and Simon argue about the importance of location as they provide new places of enunciation for the study of the subjects' identities as well as the intersectionality of the identity constituents.

As the four novels studied here portray women who are discriminated against and marginalized often because of the power relations endorsed by a traditional patriarchal society, I believe that it is important to establish the grounds of feminism in the countries portrayed in the novels studied.

It is not my objective to make an essentialist comparison between the different forms of feminism that exist in the countries portrayed in the novels. Spivak claims that “comparison assumes a level playing field and the field is never level... It is, in other words, never a question of compare and contrast, but rather a matter of judging and choosing” (“Rethinking” 253). Instead of comparing, my aim is to establish the different conditions, as far as women rights are concerned, in the different spaces the characters inhabit along the narratives.

In order to have comparison grounds to analyze the reconfiguration of gender roles in Lahiri's *The Lowland* and in Adichie's *Americanah* respectively, I first analyze the characters who are portrayed in the homeland and then the ones who live in the diaspora.

3.1 Women Characters in India: Bijoli and the young Gauri

At every moment the past is
there, appended to the present.

(Lahiri 275)

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* covers a long time in the history of India. The beginning of the novel is set in the late 1960's during the Naxalite movement, which was a radical left wing movement that aimed at replicating in the country Mao Tse Tung's communist revolution. It started in the Naxalbari region of West Bengal and, according to S.K. Paul, “the movement began as a rural revolt of landless workers and tribal people against landlords and

moneylenders. In urban centers, this movement attracted participation from student groups” (222), and that is, therefore, the case of Subhash's brother, Udayan, who joins the Naxalite movement when he is a college student in Jadavpur. Both brothers listen to the news of the movement on the radio. Subhash is suspicious of the movement, and when he asks Udayan whether it would change anything, Udayan talks about the importance of people taking action against government oppression: “[o]f course it was worth it. They rose up. They risked everything. People with nothing. People those in power do nothing to protect” (Lahiri 21).

During this period in India's history, women rights had not essentially increased, in spite of the laws which had passed since independence. In 1974, the Indian Committee on the Status of Women reported that “since 1911 the condition of Indian women (especially poor women) had worsened in a variety of conventional measures of well being: gender disparities had widened in employment, health, education, and political participation” (Sen 25).

It is in this context that while describing the detachment of the two brothers because of Udayan's involvement with the Naxalite movement Lahiri also tells the story of two women: Subhash and Udayan's mother, Bijoli, and Udayan's girlfriend, Gauri.

Bijoli and her family live in the south of Calcutta, in the neighborhood of Tollygunge. Although the reader does not hear Bijoli's voice until the very end of the novel, I believe that in the first part of the novel, she is the example of the traditional woman, that is, the one who stays at home, and not only takes care of the house and the family, but she is the one who is supposed to maintain the cultural traditions of the family. One of the traditions she thought she would follow with her two sons was to choose their wives. However, she is not able to do that for neither of them. In the two cases, she tries to regain some control of the situation. When Udayan returns home after marrying Gauri, “her mother-in-law asked Udayan if he objected to a few abbreviated rituals. He objected, but she ignored him” (Lahiri 288). A

similar situation happens when Subhash tells Bijoli that he wants to marry Gauri after Udayan dies: “she'd told him, when he announced that he was going to marry Gauri, that the decision was not his to make. When he insisted, she told him that he was risking everything, and that they were never to enter the house as husband and wife” (Lahiri 186). So, in both cases, when her sons go against her will, she wants to have the last word as if to maintain her dignity and to make clear to her sons her position and beliefs.

Gauri is portrayed as an antithesis of Bijoli. When Gauri thinks about marrying Udayan without telling her family, she considers that “she did not care what their aunts and uncles, her sisters, would think of what she was doing. This would serve to put them behind her” (Lahiri 287). Throughout the novel, this side of Gauri, that is, of a woman that does not care either about traditions or about the opinion of others, is observed. Nevertheless, as it was noticed in the first chapter, the Indian society and cultural traditions establish limits to her apparent freedom.

Udayan meets Gauri when he is a college student. When he describes her to Subhash, he writes “she is finishing a degree in philosophy” and “she prefers books to jewels and saris. She believes as I do” (Lahiri 46). In his description Udayan distances Gauri from his mother because, differently from Bijoli, Gauri seems not to care about ordinary things and to be an educated girl who does not care about tradition. Gauri acknowledges that “the unremarkable journey of her life thus far was fascinating to him: her birth in the countryside, her willingness to live apart from her parents, her estrangement from most of her family, her independence in this regard” (Lahiri 57). She is also aware that it is her education that fascinates Udayan: “She saw that she impressed him, not only by reading what he gave her, but by talking to him about it. They exchanged opinions about the limits of political freedom, and whether freedom and power meant the same thing” (Lahiri 58).

After running off and marrying secretly, they go back to Tollygunge to live with his parents. It is important to notice that although Udayan goes against his parents' wishes and traditions, he returns to his parents' house to live there with his wife. He wants to break with tradition since he does not ask his parents' permission to marry Gauri, but because he does not have money to support both of them, he does not hesitate to live with his parents after getting married, as it is the tradition.

The same behavior is observed by Gauri when she remarks that "Udayan had wanted a revolution, but at home he'd expected to be served, his only contribution to his meal was to sit and wait for Gauri or her mother-in-law to put a plate before him" (Lahiri 126). Therefore, if we consider that Udayan does not represent the typical Indian man of the 1960s since he is part of a revolutionary armed movement, we observe that he still acts as if women are subjected to men. In other words, as far as gender roles are concerned, Udayan follows the Indian traditions of the time, that is, he takes Gauri to live under his mother's rules and expects her to serve him at home.

The particularities of Gauri's attitudes in India might hint to the fact that she would change despite the place she inhabits, but her marriage to Udayan demonstrates that she does not have much agency against the cultural and patriarchal society she lives in.

3.2 – Gender and Trauma: Diasporic Characters in Lahiri's *The Lowland*

[T]he traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time.

(Caruth 8)

The main character from Lahiri's *The Lowland* arrives in The United States in the

1970s. In the beginning of that decade, American women were fighting to have the Equal Right Amendment (ERA) pass on the Senate. This amendment was introduced to Congress in 1923 but had not passed since then. Gloria Steinem, on an article on Time magazine, advocated for the amendment with the following argument:

In Women's Lib Utopia, there will be free access to good jobs -- and decent pay for the bad ones women have been performing all along, including housework. Increased skilled labor might lead to a four-hour workday, and higher wages would encourage further mechanization of repetitive jobs now kept alive by cheap labor. ... Schools and universities will help to break down traditional sex roles, even when parents will not. Half the teachers will be men, a rarity now at preschool and elementary levels; girls will not necessarily serve cookies or boys hoist up the flag.

ERA passed on the Senate in 1972, but it needed to be ratified by three-fourths of the American States. Although it was not ratified and therefore not approved, in this decade women actively held demonstrations and conferences to demand equal rights in the country. This period is acknowledged as the time of the second-wave feminism in the US. Therefore, the contrast between women conditions in the US. and in India were significant at the time period in which the women characters portrayed in *The Lowland* arrive in the US. In other words, the approval of ERA granted rights to women that were far from the rights women experienced in India.

One of Gauri's outstanding characteristic is that she seems not to adjust to several of the roles attributed to her throughout the novel. When she is first introduced to the reader, she has left her family and she is described as if she were different from most girls her age. When she marries Udayan, and moves to her in-laws' house, it is evident how uncomfortable she is

to perform the role of a daughter-in-law, and how frustrated she is when she needs to obey her mother-in-law. When she marries Subhash and becomes a wife for the second time, she does not fit in her new role once again:

Subhash and Gauri shared a bed at night, they had a child in common. Almost five years ago they had begun their journey as husband and wife, but he was still waiting to arrive somewhere with her. A place where he could no longer question the reasons of what they'd done. (Lahiri 159).

Subhash fears that with him Gauri is not as happy as he considers that she was with Udayan. He recognizes that “the smiling, carefree girl in the photograph Udayan had sent, that had been Subhash's first impression of her, that he had also hoped to draw out, that part of her he'd never seen” (Lahiri 159). It is implicit in Subhash's observations that he believes that he has made an effort to make their marriage work. He has given her time and space during the first months and he has never been a demanding husband. So, it is Gauri's displacement that calls my attention. In Lahiri's fiction, she usually portrays marriage between first generations as being constructed through time. Since the marriages are usually arranged, they are not usually based on love. But, as far as her marriage to Subhash is concerned, he later claims that although it “had been their own choice, [it] had become a forced arrangement day after day” (Lahiri 212). So, although it was based on choice, it ended as an arrangement.

As it was mentioned before, her decision to marry Subhash is an attempt to leave her past behind. However, as she carries Udayan's child when she travels, her daughter is a reminder of her past, of what she has lived with Udayan. Despite all her efforts, Bela makes it all unattainable. It is in the understanding of the traumatic events that she lives in India that her gender roles are reconfigured in the diasporic space. In tune with the epigraph that opens this section, I argue here that the traumas experienced in India mediate the experiences Gauri

has in the US since her traumas become “fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (Caruth 8). Cathy Caruth also argues that to “be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (3-4). Therefore, the events that happened in India are inscribed in such a way in Gauri’s memory that they become a part of who she is and it is through the traumas, which become evident in her life abroad, that her transformation is observed.

Along the same lines, Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer claim that “we must presume rather that the psychological trauma- or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work” (6) Gauri’s trauma unfolds in different experiences as she cannot separate her experiences and her roles from the memories she holds from India. It is, then, through the memories of her traumas that she faces her life abroad. It is also undeniable that it is through the lenses of her traumas that her gender roles are reconfigured.

Gauri’s pregnancy is one of the reasons that explains her displacement, her inability to fit the roles she plays in her first years abroad. During her pregnancy, Gauri considers that she “felt as if she contained a ghost, as Udayan was. The child was a version of him, in that it was both present and absent. Both within her and remote” (Lahiri 124). Although Gauri compares the baby inside her to a ghost, it is Gauri that, as a mother, might be seen as a ghost, both present and absent.

Subhash is probably the first to notice that there is something peculiar in the relationship between mother and daughter. He considers that “[t]hough she cared for Bela capably, though she kept her clean and combed and fed, she seemed distracted. Rarely did Subhash see her smiling when she looked at Bela’s face. Rarely did he see Gauri kissing Bela spontaneously” (Lahiri 159). Gauri provides for Bela’s physical necessities, but she cannot

create emotional attachments to her daughter. According to Izard et al., “emotions are the keystone of adaptation. They are viewed as the motivational component of personality and social relationships, and they are expected to play a key role in the development of infant-mother attachment” (906). The bonds created by Gauri and Bela are not based on affection and, because of that, it is possible to observe Gauri's emotional absence in her daughter's life. After some years, Gauri realizes she does not even love her own daughter:

But it was not turning up; after five years, in spite of all the time, all the hours she and Bela spent together, the love she'd once felt for Udayan refused to reconstitute itself. Instead there was a growing numbness that inhabited her, that impaired her. (Lahiri 164)

Comparing Gauri's relationship with Bela with the one Bijoli had with her two sons, Subhash and Udayan provides an interesting parallel. After Udayan's death, Bijoli considers that “she was unable to love one without the other” (Lahiri 186). Bijoli even explains that her love for Subhash has been replaced by rage: “[r]age at Subhash for reminding her so strongly of Udayan, for sounding like him, for remaining a spare version of him” (Lahiri 186). I believe Gauri, like her mother-in-law, cannot create bonds with her daughter without Udayan. His death is so traumatic for both Bijoli and Gauri that they cannot love the ones who remind them of Udayan. As a result, Bela considers her mother's apathy her own fault:

Here was the source of the compunction that had always been in her, of being unable to bring pleasure to her mother. Of feeling unique among children, being a child that was incapable of this.

Around Bela her mother had never pretended. She had transmitted an unhappiness that was steady, an ambivalent signal that was fixed. It was transmitted without words. And yet Bela was aware of it, as one is aware of a

mountain, insurmountable. (Lahiri 268)

Vijay Mishra contends that diasporic people are “precariously lodged within an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile; they are haunted by spectres, by ghosts arising from within that encourage irredentist or separatist movements” (1). As it is shown in the second chapter, the feeling of displacement is normally experienced by diasporic subjects. Gauri is the character whose displacement comes mostly from within and not from the society as it is observed in the other novels.

After some years, Gauri decides to abandon both Subhash and Bela while the two of them are on a trip to India. When she explains the fact that she left her own daughter, she calls attention to her own failure as a mother:

She knew the errors she'd made during the first years of Bela's life were not things she could go back and fix. Her attempts kept collapsing because the foundation was not there. Over time this feeling ate away at her, exposing only her self-interest, her ineptitude. Her inability to abide herself. (Lahiri 231-32)

Gauri's decision is probably the result of her search for her own identity as well as an attempt to overcome her traumas. Her role as a mother and wife does not bring her fulfillment which makes her consider that she should once again move to another location to try to start another phase in her life where nobody would remind her of her past, a place “where she knew she would be conventionally lost” (Lahiri 232). It is important to notice again that the contradictory presence-absence is a constant in Gauri's life. She needs to be in a place where her presence is not recognizable by others, in order to try to find her place in the world:

She entered a new dimension, a place where a fresh life was given to her. The three hours on her watch that separated her from Bela and Subhash were like a physical barrier, as massive as the mountains she'd flown to get there. She'd

done it, the worst thing she could think of doing. (Lahiri 232)

Lahiri, in *The Lowland*, portrays an immigrant woman different from the other characters from her previous novels. It is not the exterior that brings her unhappiness and displacement. Her displacement is not caused by the movement to a foreign land, but it is caused because she is unable to deal with her traumas: “[s]carcely two years of her life, begun as a wife, concluded as a widow, an expectant mother. An accomplice of a crime” (Lahiri 320). Being Udayan's eyes, giving him the information needed to plan the murder of a policeman makes Gauri feel responsible for the crime. Gauri is imprisoned by both her unhappiness and guilt. However, it does not mean that the diasporic space is ineffective to foster changes in Gauri's life. Gauri has the perception that she is not compelled, by culture, to be the obedient wife or the devoted mother. She does not feel coerced to live a life of misery, but she feels free to change and try a different course in life. In fact, it is this freedom that Gauri experiences in the diasporic space that connects her to the other women characters pictured in the four novel studied here.

Gauri's life in California is devoted to her career as a university professor. There, she is responsible for the students arriving from India. Gauri's new life is marked by loneliness, but she does not consider it as something to be overcome, but rather as “something upon which she'd come to depend, with which she'd entered by now into a relationship, more satisfying and enduring than the relationships she'd experienced in either of her marriages” (Lahiri 237). Returning to Freud and Breuer's statement, through an analysis of Gauri it is possible to see that her traumas work like a foreign body that inhabits her and that becomes more present in her life than the people she tried to share a life with. Despite her desire to be alone, Gauri meets Lorna. It is important to observe that in the new space where she is trying to discover who she is that she permits herself to become close to Lorna:

Images of Lorna, fragments of their exchanges, began to distract her. When they met in person she began to dress with care. She had no recollection of crossing a line that drove her to desire a woman's body. With Lorna she found herself already in the other side of it. (Lahiri 238)

The affair with Lorna is a clear sign of the barriers Gauri crosses as far as gender roles are concerned. Although she claims that she had never felt any desires for another woman, she does not feel any constraints which would stop her from being with Lorna. In old age, when she tries to connect with her daughter again, she realizes that the barriers between them are not likely to be crossed: “[s]he'd come seeking Bela, and here she was. Three feet away, unattainable” (Lahiri 310). This episode with Bela makes Gauri decide to go back to India in an attempt to come to terms with her past, as it was discussed in the first chapter.

The analysis of Gauri shows that she is characterized similarly to common representations of diasporic subjects, that is, she is a character who feels dislocated, lonely and connected to her past in India through traumatic experiences. The major distinction between her and other diasporic characters is that the cause of her feelings is not her movement to another country, but the traumatic events she experienced. The change of spaces seems to have a positive effect on Gauri since she claims that the new space gives her new possibilities. Gauri is a remarkable character whose analysis shows the importance of the foreign space to foster changes in the diasporic subjects. She moves to different spaces throughout the narrative in search of her own identity. She seems to have learned when she moved from India to the US that the new space does not limit her way of dressing or her role as a wife. Similarly, when she is unhappy with her life with Subhash and Bela, she moves again and discovers new parts of her identity. She becomes an independent woman, a university professor and Lorna's lover. Friedman claims that identity “shifts fluidly from

setting to setting” (*Mappings* 23) and that is exactly what is observed with Gauri.

Bela is not a typical second-generation character. The consequences of her mother's departure when she was a child are palpable on her life. She believes that “[t]hey were a family of solitaries. They had collided and dispersed. This was her legacy. If nothing else, she had inherited that impulse from them” (Lahiri 262). Although Bela claims that she is, like her parents, a person who has difficulty making bonds, I believe it is a result of her mother's departure during her childhood. Bela explains that “her mother's absence was like another language she'd had to learn, its full complexity and nuance emerging only after years of study, and even then, because it was foreign, a language never fully absorbed” (Lahiri 256). This comparison shows that Bela never fully accepts her mother's decision to leave. In fact, when she meets her again, she tells Gauri that “[she] is as dead to her as [Udayan] is. The only difference is that [she] left her by choice” (Lahiri 312-13).

Bela is aware that she is free to choose and to decide the course of her life and that she does not have any impositions from her father. She disdains the academic achievements both her parents had during their life abroad and decides not to attend university as a rejection to how “both he and Gauri lived” (Lahiri 221). Instead she works in the field, “[p]utting in irrigation lines, weeding and harvesting, cleaning out animal pens” (Lahiri 221). Among all possibilities that the country where she lives offers her, she is able to choose what she likes and not what is expected from her.

Bela and Gauri are the two main women characters who are portrayed in *The Lowland*. It may be argued that their gender roles are not determined by the place they inhabit. Instead, the space they live offer them the possibility to discover who they are.

3.3 *Americanah*: Women Characters Portrayed in Nigeria

Ifemelu had grown up in the
shadow of her mother's hair.

(Adichie 49)

Nigerian feminism has a very different history from that of Indian feminism. While in India women and men had very distinct roles in pre-colonial times and, at that time, women were completely subjugated by men, feminism in Nigeria has a contrasting past. Because Adiche's *Americanah* tells the story of an Igbo woman, one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, it is important to learn the story of these women so that we can understand the women that are portrayed in such novel.

In pre-colonial times “Nigerian women participated actively in the private and public spheres”(Abdul et al, 6). At that time, the economy was basically of subsistence and women participated actively in the process. Salome Nnoromele contends that a Igbo woman “knew herself and her worth and often claimed equality with men in the community” (10). To exemplify the participation of women, Abdul et al cites the example of Queen Amina of Zazzau: “[i]n 1576, she became the undisputed ruler of Zazzau, a Hausa city in Northern Nigeria. Distinguished as a soldier and an empire builder, she led campaigns within months of becoming ruler” (6). My point in showing this example is to demonstrate how much the condition of women changed later during the British rule of Nigeria.

At colonial times, the influence of women decreased in in the country because the British, in their indirect governance, indicated male chiefs, which were called Warrant Chiefs to rule over their communities. Because of that, the whole structure of the society changed since women were denied their saying in the decisions. Felix Ekechi claims that “colonization

changed the democratic nature of the economic, religious, social, and political institutions in Igboland. It enforced policies that diminished the roles and status of Igbo women, making them second class citizens” (115).

However, Igbo women did not remain silent for long as they were well organized. In 1929, they rose against the British in the Women's War. According to Abdul, et al,

The Women's War of 1929 (also known as the Aba Women's Riots), in which Igbo market women protested British taxation, was a notable example of women using their traditional power against colonial rulers. Grounded in their roles as mothers and providers of the family, women collectively defended their complementary sphere of authority within the extended family and wider community. (7)

The Women's War is substantial evidence of the strength Igbo women had during colonial times. They also fought against other important issues as girls' early marriage which, in turn, restricted their education, and the “denial of inheritance and property rights to women” (Ngakwe 146). After Nigeria's independence, the country lived under a military dictatorship for twenty-nine years. According to Joy Ngakwe, during this time, “Nigeria was plunged into abysmal social and economic decline, which ultimately led to the impoverishment of large numbers of the nation's populace” (145). Despite the dictatorial government, women's organizations continued to be formed to fight gender discrimination.

It is in this time period that the beginning of the story in Adichie's *Americanah* is set. It shows the main character, Ifemelu, as a teenager living in Nigeria during the military dictatorship. Ifemelu starts telling us of her early years in Nigeria. The first episode narrated is the conversion of her mother from Catholicism to a Bible-believing church, and then to other different churches. With each change of church a different behavior of Ifemelu's mother is

observed: “after that afternoon, her God changed. He became exacting. Relaxed hair offended Him. Dancing offended Him, She bartered with Him, offering starvation in exchange of prosperity, for a job promotion, for good health” (Adichie 51). Between the lines, Ifemelu's mother's conversions show us two important things. First, that Ifemelu's father does not intervene in his wife's constant change of behavior. The narrator tells us: “Ifemelu's father once said the prayers were delusional battles with imaginary traducers, yet he insisted that Ifemelu always wake up early to pray. 'It keeps your mother happy,' he told her” (Adichie 53). He respects her and he does not deny her the right to think and believe differently from the other members of the family. Second, Ifemelu soon learns that she can use her mother's faith to have her own way: “[h]er new church absorbed her but did not destroy her. It made her predictable and easy to lie to” (Adichie 53-54).

Ifemelu is described by her family as an intelligent, but defiant girl. After an incident at church, her father reprimands her, saying:

You must refrain from your natural proclivity towards provocation, Ifemelu. You have singled yourself out at school where you are known for insubordination and I have told you that it has already sullied your singular academic record. There is no need to create a similar pattern in church. (Adichie 63)

Although her father warns her that her behavior is not correct, it is her mother who claims that her attitude is not suitable for a girl: “[w]hy must this girl be a troublemaker? I have been saying it since, that it would be better if she was a boy, behaving like this” (Adichie 64). Her attitude is also discussed when she first meets Obinze. He explains to her that he had asked a friend in common to introduce them and he had warned him saying that “Ifemelu is a fine babe but she is too much trouble. She can argue. She can talk. She never agrees. But

Ginika is just a sweet girl” (Adichie 73). In Obinze's friend's opinion it is clear that Ifemelu's characteristics are not the ones that impress boys. It might be inferred from the description that it is her ability to argue and talk that makes her “too much trouble.” Ifemelu thinks the opposite as she “had always liked [that] image of herself as too much trouble, as different, and sometimes thought of it as a carapace that kept her safe” (Adichie 73). It is Obinze who assures her that it is fine to be the way she is: “I thought you were the kind of person who will do something because you want to, and not because everyone else is doing it” (Adichie 73). Another passage calls the reader’s attention during her first talk to Obinze:

“Aren't we going to kiss?” She asked.

He seemed startled. “Where did that come from?”

“I'm just asking. We've been sitting here for too long.”

“I don't want you to think that is all I want.”

“What about what I want?” (Adichie 75)

Ifemelu is not afraid of standing up for what she believes to be important. This passage tells much about Ifemelu's attitude towards women's roles because she is not there as an object of his desires, but she posits herself as a woman who also has desires. No matter how obvious this may seem, it is not what is observed in the other novels studied. At least not in relation to the women characters during their youth.

Other women are also presented in this first part of the novel set in Nigeria. Two important women characters are Aunty Uju and Obinze's mother. Aunty Uju is a significant character in the novel as she also moves to the United States and because of that she can also be analyzed inhabiting two different spaces, that is, her homeland and in the diaspora. She is the daughter of Ifemelu's father's brother, but her father acknowledges her as his younger sister. Ifemelu’s father believes Aunty Uju is a good influence on her and the narrator explains

that “he seemed to see, in [Aunty Uju and Ifemelu] closeness, proof of his own good choice, as though he had knowingly brought a gift to his family, a buffer between his wife and daughter” (Adichie 65). However, in one of the first episodes Aunty Uju appears, the reader knows that she is having an affair with The General and that he is married and a father of four children. At the time she is introduced to the reader, Nigeria is under a military government and because of that “only weeks before, [Aunty Uju] had been a new graduate and all her classmates were talking about going abroad to take the American or the British exams, because the other choice was to tumble into a parched wasteland of joblessness” (Adichie 55). The General becomes Aunty Uju's lover and for this reason she has a “new job as a consultant at the military hospital on Victoria Island, and a new house in Dolphin Estate” (Adichie 55). Although Ifemelu admires her aunt and looks for her every time she needs advice, she does not agree with her aunt's situation and her complete dependence on The General.

After her father loses his job, Ifemelu tells her aunt that her father owes rent to the landlord who is constantly embarrassing the family in front of the neighbors. It is then that Ifemelu realizes that her aunt does not have anything. When she tells Ifemelu that she will ask The General for the money, Ifemelu stops and asks her if she does not have money. Aunty Uju explains:

-“My account is almost empty. But Oga will give it to me. And do you know I have not been paid a salary since I started work? Every day, there is a new story from the accounts people. The trouble started with my position that does not officially exist, even though I see patients every day.” (...)

“Ahn-ahn, Aunty, but how can you not have money?”

- “Oga never gives me big money. He pays all the bills and he wants me to ask for everything I need. Some men are like that.” (Adichie 92)

Ifemelu is mesmerized because she realizes how much her aunt depends on The General. In the conversation above, it is also possible to infer that The General does not do anything about his lover not being paid in the military hospital and the reason for this attitude is, probably, because he wants to disempower Aunt Uju, making her totally submissive to him. Her job does not officially exist and she does not have any money to support herself in case her affair with him ends. Besides, Aunt Uju's submission is not observed only in regard to her financial situation. The narrator tells us that “[d]uring the week, Aunt Uju hurried home to shower and wait for The General” (Adichie 89), that she wore creams to keep her complexion lighter, and that she often listened to his jokes about women in Lagos. On one occasion Ifemelu is in their house, listening to his stories and she thought “it undignified and irresponsible, this old married man telling her stories; it was like showing her his unclean underwear” (Adichie 96).

The more Ifemelu learns about her aunt's affair, the more she is worried about the situation. Once talking to Ifemelu about the situation of Nigeria, Aunt Uju says:

The big problem in this country is not corruption. The problem is that there are many qualified people who are not where they are supposed to be because they won't lick anybody's ass, or they don't know which ass to lick or they don't even know how to lick an ass. I'm lucky to be licking the right ass... I slept with him the first night but I did not ask for anything, which was stupid of me now that I think of it, but I did not sleep with him because I wanted something. I was attracted to his power. (Adichie 93)

Ifemelu's aunt does not romanticize her story with The General. She does not pretend, at least to Ifemelu, that she cares about him. Besides, not even Aunt Uju considers her own behavior acceptable. This can be inferred by another conversation she has with her niece.

Ifemelu tells her that “If somebody else was doing this, you would say she was stupid.” Her aunt’s answer shows that she disapproves her own choices: “I would not even advise you to do what I’m doing.” (Adichie 95)

Although Aunty Uju is not proud of her affair, she does not do anything to confront The General. She does not do anything to change her relationship with him.

Another important woman character portrayed in Nigeria is Obinze's mother. She is a professor at the Nsukka University in Nigeria. She has raised her son alone after her husband died when Obinze was seven years old. The first time Ifemelu meets her, she realizes that she is different from the other women she knows:

Ifemelu stood there mesmerized. Obinze's mother, her beautiful face, her air of sophistication, her wearing a white apron in the kitchen, was not like any other mother Ifemelu knew. Here, her father would seem crass, with his unnecessary big words, and her mother provincial and small. (Adichie 85)

In the example above, it is possible to observe that Ifemelu admires her not only because of her beauty and sophistication, but because Obinze's mother does not fit the traditional model Ifemelu has of mothers and women. First, Ifemelu realizes that she is the reason why Obinze is different from the other boys she knows: “[s]he had taught him the ability to be, even in the middle of a crowd, somehow comfortably inside himself” (Adichie 84). But it is the kind of woman she is that, I believe, has the most striking influence in Ifemelu.

Obinze once tells Ifemelu that before they moved to Lagos his mother had been slapped by another professor. Obinze then explains that when people started saying “why did you slap her when she's a widow, that annoyed her even more. She said she should not have been slapped because she is a full human being, not because she doesn't have a husband to

speak for her” (Adichie 71). In this episode, it is also relevant to notice that even being a professor at a respectable university, she is a victim of a society where unmarried women are seen as unprotected. However, the episode also shows that Obinze’s mother has a voice in the society as she demands an apology from him. After that she also “wrote circulars and articles about it” and she finds support at the university as “the student union got involved” (Adichie 71).

On one occasion, Obinze's mother advises Ifemelu about pregnancy warning her that if “anything happens between [her] and Obinze, [they] are both responsible. But Nature is unfair to women. An act is done by two people, but if there are any consequences, one person carries it alone” (Adichie 87). Although Ifemelu's mother and aunt had already talked to Ifemelu about getting pregnant, it is this conversation with her boyfriend's mother that strikes her. Obinze's mother continues and also tells her that she should “wait until [she] own[s] [her]self a little more” (Adichie 87). Although Ifemelu does not quite understand her at the moment, she considers what has been said to her as she waits until later to have sex with Obinze.

A few days after Ifemelu and Obinze have sex, Ifemelu is sick. She suspects she is pregnant. When her mother-in-law is taking her to see a doctor, Ifemelu tells her she had sex with her son. During the conversation that they have, she tells Ifemelu that she should be conscious that she is responsible for what happens with her own body:

Ifemelu, you too. It is not my concern if you are embarrassed. You should go into the pharmacy and buy them. You should never ever let the boy be in charge of your own protection. If he does not want to use it, then he does not care enough for you and you should not be there. (Adichie 118).

Although the narrator does not tell us directly the effect all these conversations have on Ifemelu, it is reasonable to say that Obinze's mother have a great influence on the adult

Ifemelu, as later in the narrative, when Obinze's mother dies, Ifemelu tells him that "she was everything [she] wanted to be" (Adichie 459). It is possible to observe that the two other important women in Ifemelu's life, that is, her mother and her aunt, do not serve as role models for her. It is Obinze's mother that seems to become Ifemelu's role model and the one who influences her attitude in adult life as far as gender is concerned.

The analysis of these women characters in Nigeria shows that there are different levels of agency in their stories. It also calls my attention that the situation of these women is slightly different from the other women characters portrayed in their homeland in the three other selected novels. They seem to have more agency than the others and I believe that the historical participation of Igbo women in the society, as it is shown the beginning of this section, is responsible for this difference.

3.4 Gender and Race in Adichie's *Americanah*

She liked, most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty.

(Adichie 3)

Although Ifemelu speaks English fluently when she moves to the US, she discovers that her accent will always render her as a foreigner. At the registration office, when the secretary tells her "I. Need. You. To. Fill. Out. A. Couple. Of. Forms. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. These. Out?" Ifemelu realizes that the woman was speaking to her like that

“because of *her*, her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling.” She feels that her accent creates assumptions about her and she “cowered and shrunk” (Adichie 163-64). As a consequence, Ifemelu starts practicing an American accent.

I understand Ifemelu's attempt to perfect an American accent as an act of translation. Homi Bhabha claims that “[t]ranslation is the performative nature of cultural communication” (*Location* 326), that is, translation occurs in the contact zone between different cultures and it has as one of its aspects, the necessity to be accepted. The translation of cultures might be related to Bhabha's idea of mimicry, in which he claims that the colonial subject who can be considered an “Other” in relation to the once colonizer subject tries to be recognized through a process of translation of cultures to become “almost the same” (*Location* 86).

In Ifemelu's case, her accent accentuates her visibility as she is easily recognized as a foreigner because of the way she speaks. Therefore, Ifemelu's imitation can be related to Jacques Lacan's idea of mimicry that emphasizes a camouflage aspect (Lacan 99). It implies that the subjects living in the diaspora try to camouflage themselves into the dominant culture through the act of translation. Once Ifemelu hears Aunt Uju's American accent and notices that it is used mostly with Americans:

'Dike, put it back.' Aunt Uju said, with the nasal, sliding accent she out on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. *Pooh-reet-back*. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing. (Adichie 133)

Aunt Uju uses her accent in order to be accepted as an American. Besides, as it is possible to observe in the quotation above, this process of translation is also related to the process of identity construction in the diaspora space. Spivak discusses the importance of language in the translation process, stating that “[m]aking sense of ourselves is what produces

identity” (“The Politics” 179). Therefore, it is possible to say that through the act of translating oneself, the subject is able to assert his or her identity in the diasporic space, in an attempt to create what Hall calls “temporary attachments”(6).

Ifemelu is soon aware of another aspect of translation, that is, that through the act of translation something is lost. Paul Ricoeur understands that in translation “work is advanced with some salvaging and some acceptance of loss” (3), that is, in the act of translating one language into another, there is always something that will be lost. As a consequence, the translator is always in a dilemma between fidelity and betrayal. Although Ricoeur is examining the translation of languages, his theory seems to apply to Ifemelu's feeling when she is able to sound American. At the end of a phone call with a telemarketer, he asks her if her name is French and when she answers that it is Nigerian, the man concludes that her parents are from Nigeria but that she was probably raised in the US:

I grew up there.

Oh, really? How long have you been in the US?

Three years.

Wow. Cool. You sound totally American.

Thank you.

Only after she hung up did she begin to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thanking him, for crafting his words 'You sound American' into a garland that she hung around her own neck. (Adichie 215)

Ifemelu feels for the first time a tension between the desire to be faithful to her background and the necessity she has to belong to America. She remembers the incident at the registration office and considers that she “had won, indeed, but her triumph was full of air. Her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast echoing space, because she had taken on, for

too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers” (Adichie 215-16). Ifemelu realizes that through her use of English she has enacted a part of her identity that it is not truly hers. At this moment, she is aware that, as in Ricoeur's definition of translation, she cannot accept what she has lost in the process. As a consequence, Ifemelu decides to stop using her American accent: “‘Could I have a round-trip to Haverhill, please? Returning Sunday afternoon. I have a Student Advantage card,’ she said, and felt a rush of pleasure from giving the *t* its full due in ‘advantage,’ from not rolling her *r* in ‘Haverhill.’ This was truly her” (Adichie 216). Her decision is a process of accepting her Nigerian identity.

The intersectionality between race and gender is another important issue that is observed in *Americanah*. According to William Darity and Patrick Mason, “discrimination by race has diminished somewhat, and discrimination by gender has diminished substantially. However, neither employment discrimination by race or by gender is close to ending” (65). Adichie portrays the difficulty a Black immigrant woman has to find a job in the US After many interviews and many negative responses, and with her bank account empty, Ifemelu decides to accept a tennis coach offer to help him “relax” for a hundred dollars. When she arrives home, she “curled on her bed and cried, wishing she could reach into herself and yank out the memory of what had just happened” (Adichie 190). This part of the narrative reflects the lack of alternatives a Black immigrant woman has in the job market. Irene Browne and Joya Misra state that a large number of these immigrant women end up in domestic jobs which are devalued and represent the “underside of the U.S. labor market” (506), and that is exactly the kind of job Ifemelu gets. She starts working as a babysitter for a rich white family.

An episode in which a carpet cleaner arrives in the house Ifemelu works, and assumes that she is the owner reflects another side of the prejudice Blacks face in America. When Ifemelu opens the door, she is not “what he had expected to see in this grand stone house with

the white pillars” and because of that he “stiffed when he saw her. First surprise flitted over his features, then it ossified to hostility” (Adichie 204). When she tells him that she is not the owner, his “face sank into a grin. She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be” (Adichie 205). Ifemelu's conclusion makes clear the assumptions the carpet cleaner has about the relation between gender and race, that is, that Blacks are not supposed or expected to be above the poor whites.

When Ifemelu starts dating her employer's brother, a white rich man, her position in society changes, but it does not mean that she is fully accepted. When Ifemelu describes the people's look when she is with Curt, it can easily be related to the carpet cleaner disbelief when he thought Ifemelu was rich:

They looked at her with surprise, a surprise that some of them shielded and some of them not, and in their expressions was the question 'why her?' ... She had seen that look before, on the faces of white women, strangers on the street, who could see her hand clasped in Curt's and instantly cloud their faces with that look. The look of people confronting a great tribal loss. (Adichie 362)

Despite the prejudice Ifemelu faces with Curt, she is happy with her new role: “she was lighter and leaner, she was Curt's girlfriend, a role she slipped into as into a favorite, flattering dress” (Adichie 241-42). Again, similarly to what had happened when she decides to fake an American accent, Ifemelu feels she has “slipped out of her old skin” (Adichie 247). As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, new parts of her identity are highlighted when she has a different position in society. But even when she is with Curt, her identity as a Black immigrant continues to be highlighted since the American society portrayed in the novel does not fully accept her relationship with a handsome white man.

As far as Aunty Uju is concerned, the relation between race and class needs to be

approached differently. When she becomes a doctor and starts practicing medicine, Aunty Uju's financial situation improves, but her visibility as a Black woman also accentuates. She tells Ifemelu that “she walked into an examining room and a patient asked 'Is the doctor coming?' and when she said she was the doctor the patient's face changed to fired clay,” and as a result “she called to transfer her file to another doctor's office” (Adichie 225). This episode reveals the blatant prejudice against Blacks may not decrease just because they are better financially. Jennifer Richeson and Nalini Ambady contend that “the most likely situational power arrangement for members of stigmatized and nonstigmatized groups during intergroup interactions serves to reinforce racial prejudice” (182). That is Aunty Uju's case, as in the relation doctor-patient she is in such a position that reinforces the racial prejudice against her. Therefore, the relation between race and class analyzed through situational power relations shows that a change of class does not always mask the prejudices of whites against Blacks.

Gender is the last issue I want to analyze in this section. While in Nigeria, Aunty Uju's relationship with The General shows that she is submissive and financially dependable of him. In America, only when she passes her exams and starts her practice, does her financial condition improve. It is then that she meets Bartholomew, a Nigerian accountant who Ifemelu considered “jarringly unsuited for her” (Adichie 142). At a dinner Aunty Uju shows that she still acts as if the role of a wife is to please a man:

Aunty Uju laughed and in her laugh was a certain assent, because his words 'let me see if this is any good' were about her being a good cook, and therefore a good wife. She had slipped into the rituals, smiling a smile that promised to be demure to him but not to the world, lunging to pick up his fork when it slipped from his hand, serving him more beer” (Adichie 142).

In this passage, it is possible to observe that there is little change between her relationship with The General and Bartholomew as, in both, she seeks a man's protection and is submissive. The change in her behavior only happens with time when Aunt Uju realizes that she has been used by him: "He wants me to give him my salary. Imagine! He said that it is how marriages are since he is the head of the family, that I should not send money to brother without his permission, that we should have his car payments from my salary" (Adichie 270). The fact that she ends the marriage with Bartholomew is proof that she might be reconsidering her role as a wife, that she will not stay in abusive relationships just to have a man at her side. Therefore, for Aunt Uju, it is not just a change of places that makes her reconsider her gender roles as she repeats the pattern of an abusive and submissive relationship in the diaspora space. The time spent in the new place needs to be taken into account as it is not only a shift of location that promotes changes, but the length of time she spends there.

After years living abroad, Ifemelu claims that her "blog was doing well, with thousands of unique visitors each month, and she was earning good speaking fees, and she had a fellowship in Princeton" (Adichie 7). In the diaspora space, Ifemelu has a successful career and financial stability. Her relationships with Curt and Blaine show that she challenges the conventional roles as far as gender is concerned. She ends both relationships thinking "of other lives she could be living" (Adichie 7). She cheats on Curt with a neighbor she barely knows and then she tells him what she has done:

'You gave him what he wanted,' Curt said. The planes of his face were hardening. It was an odd thing for Curt to say, the sort of thing Aunt Uju, who thought of sex as something a woman gave a man at a loss to herself, would say.

In a sudden giddy fit of recklessness, she corrected Curt. 'I took what I wanted.

If I gave anything, then it was incidental. (Adichie 357)

This episode shows that Curt's view on sex is as traditional as Auntie Uju's and, that Ifemelu is certain of what she wants as a woman. When she breaks up with Blaine, she contends that “her relationship with him was like being content in a house but always sitting by the window and looking out” (Adichie 9). Contrary to the marriages that are described in the first part of the novel when Ifemelu lives in Nigeria, she does not feel constrained to be in a relationship she is not completely fulfilled.

3.5 A Returnee: Ifemelu Returns Home

She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss... They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots.

(Adichie 7)

When Ifemelu gets back to Nigeria, she stays with her friend Ranyinudo for a few weeks before she rents her own flat. Analyzing her friend's life, she reasons:

Ifemelu ... wondered if this would have been her life if she had not left. If she would be like Ranyinudo, working for an advertising company, living in a one-bedroom flat whose rent her salary could not pay, attending a Pentecostal church she was an usher, and dating a married chief executive who bought her business-class tickets to London (Adichie 480).

The first point that this quotation elicits is that Ifemelu relates Ranyinudo's experience to the one her aunt had with The General. She believes that for her friend "men existed only as a source of things" (Adichie 488) and she writes on her blog that she worries that her friend "will end up like many women in Lagos who define their lives by men they can never fully have, crippled by their culture of dependence, with desperation in their eyes and designer handbags on their wrists" (Adichie 521). Thus, she is criticizing a kind of culture that is based on the dependence and subjugation of women who define their lives by the men they have.

The second point is that Ifemelu believes that she might be like Ranyinudo if she had not left since her friend's life reminds her of the role models she had before traveling that is from her mother and her aunt. Ifemelu's questioning is fundamental to understand the importance of the diaspora space on the reconfiguration of gender roles. Ifemelu reasons about that because she considers that her experience in another country had detached her from roles she has while growing up and because she returns as an independent mature woman. The question is if Ifemelu, and also all the other women characters from the other three novels, would have the agency they acquire in the diaspora space if they had stayed in their home countries. I believe that it is not possible to analyze what is not written, but the analysis of Ifemelu and of the other characters hint to the fact that all the diasporic characters reconfigure their gender roles in diaspora while an analysis of the ones who have stayed in their country of origin does not hold the same meaning.

An analysis of the two women represented in Ifemelu's return to Nigeria is an example of that. Ifemelu's relationship with Obinze may resemble the one Ranyinudo has with the executive, but Ifemelu, in one of the first times they meet and Obinze suggests that her blog needs investors, is quick to respond: "I don't want your money" (Adichie 539). Still, the most striking differences are observed in relation to Obinze's wife, Kosi.

Kosi is described by Obinze as a woman who believes that certain roles are for men and others for women. Because of that Obinze cannot cook at home: “She has really basic, mainstream ideas of what a wife should be and she thought my wanting of cooking was an indictment of her, which I found silly. So I stopped, just to have peace” (Adichie 555).

In the first time they meet, Obinze says “it’s just refreshing to have an intelligent person to talk to” (Adichie 539) and later he tells Ifemelu that when their daughter is born, Kosi is ready to tell Obinze that “[they]’ll have a boy next time” (Adichie 55) and he explains that at that moment he realizes that

She did not know him. She did not know him at all. She did not know he was indifferent about the gender of their child because although they exchanged pleasant sounds and were good friends and shared comfortable silences, they did not really talk. But he never tried, because he knew that the questions he asked of life were entirely different from her. (Adichie 565)

While he loves talking to Ifemelu, he believes that his wife does not know him because they do not usually talk like he does with Ifemelu. Besides, it is important to point out that the fact that Obinze does not hold the same beliefs as his wife is probably because of the way he was raised by a woman who has different beliefs from the other ones Ifemelu knew when she was young, as it is shown in the analysis of his mother.

Differently from Ifemelu who is demanding as far as sex is concerned (Adichie 569), Kosi believes that her role is to please and satisfy her husband. Obinze reasons about that:

[Ifemelu] expects to be satisfied, but Kosi did not. Kosi always met his touch with complaisance, and sometimes he would imagine her pastor telling her that a wife should have sex with her husband, even if she didn’t feel like it, otherwise the husband would find solace in a Jezebel. (Adichie 569)

Ifemelu seems much more independent and self-aware as a woman than Kosi is, and because of that, in Obinze's considerations, they are portrayed as opposites. Although it may seem that Obinze is the one who decides which woman he wants to be with, Ifemelu also has to take a decision if she wants to accept or not the idea of dating a married man. She is always reasoning about the kind of relationship she has with Obinze:

she was angry, furious that he would drop her off and go home to his other life, his real life ... She had, since she began to gaze at her past, imagined a relationship with him, but only in faded images and faint lines. Now, faced with reality of him, and of the silver ring on his finger, she was frightened of becoming used to him. (Adichie 549)

Ifemelu is unsatisfied with the relationship, and she is always confronting him and accusing him of being a coward (Adichie 562). However, when Obinze tells Kosi that he wants a divorce because he is in love with Ifemelu, Kosi asks him to reconsider as she believes it is "not about another woman... It's about keeping this family together! You took a vow before God. I am a good wife" (Adichie 572). Kosi's idea that the marriage should be maintained is shared by Obinze's friend:

You can keep seeing her, but no need for this kind of white-people behavior. If your wife has a child for somebody else or if you beat her, that is a reason for divorce. But to get up and say you have no problem with your wife but you are leaving for another woman? *Haba*. We don't behave like that, please. (Adichie 582)

Obinze's friend's argument is based on his assumptions about their culture since what Obinze is doing is white-people behavior, and not how they, Nigerians, behave. In his words, it is implicit what is acceptable or the common expected behavior from men of their society.

Accordingly, the same can be said about Ranyinudo and Kosi. The perspective of what they are doing, that is, accepting a relationship for the benefits she receives, as in Ranyinudo's case, or staying married in a relationship even when her husband tells her that he is in love with another person, in Kosi's case, are according to their culture an acceptable situation. Therefore, the novel portrays that their beliefs and behavior as being somewhat supported by their cultural background.

Ifemelu, on the other hand, does not accept Obinze's indecision and they stop seeing each other. When she starts dating another man, she wonders: "[a]ll naked on her bed, all pleasant and all warm, she wished it were different. If only she could feel what she wanted to feel" (Adichie 587). Comparing her decision of not staying in a relationship with Obinze while he is still married despite her feelings for him shows that she does not behave as it is acceptable in her society, but rather as she believes it is acceptable for herself.

The analysis of the two novels and the comparison between the lives of the women characters in the homeland and in the diaspora indicate how the intersectionality of different identity constituents affects the characters' gender construction. Although it is undeniable that the space and the time spent in the diasporic space are favorable for the reconfiguration of gender roles, the analysis of Lahiri's *The Lowland* and of Adichie's *Americanah* demonstrate that the condition of women in their homeland will affect the reconfiguration of gender roles in the new space.

Gauri is, since youth, a character who does not have traditional views about women roles. In India, she is not able to do as she likes as the impositions of tradition, that as far as women are concerned, restricts her choices. When the cultural constraints are removed, she is able to make her own decisions and become an independent woman who can decide

everything, from the clothes she wears to the roles she plays.

The limits imposed by society to Ifemelu are rather permissive if compared to the ones Gauri has. However, Ifemelu has to reconfigure her gender through different lenses. When she moves abroad, her freedom seems to be limited by the prejudices she faces because of racism. In relation to Gauri, the reconfiguration of gender roles for Ifemelu is not so drastic. The most relevant change in Ifemelu is that she has to learn what it means to be a Black woman in America.

Therefore, I believe that the reconfiguration of gender roles is related to the specificity of each diasporic movement. In other words, it is through the specificity that gender is reconfigured in the diaspora space.

Chapter Four

Gender Relations and Religion

Veiling is a lived experience
full of contradictions and
multiple meanings.
(Hoodfar 421)

This chapter deals with the intersectionality between gender and religion in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, as the novels portray the lives of two Muslim diasporic women. While Ali's *Brick Lane* portrays Bangladeshi diasporic subjects living in London, the plot of Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* goes around a Syrian family living in the US. Although there are important differences in the two novels, they both bring to the foreground an issue that is absent from the two other novels studied in the previous chapter, that is, the subject of religion. Because gender patterns are usually a concern in religious beliefs and practices, I believe that the reconfiguration of gender roles must be analyzed in these two novels alongside with religion.

It is not my objective here to focus on the religious practices of the subjects represented in the novels, but to understand how religion shapes the gender roles of the women characters as well as how the religious practices have impact on the reconfiguration of gender roles in the diaspora space. I understand that these two issues, religion and gender, are in such a way interconnected that the Muslim women represented in the novels situate themselves under the power relation established by these religious forces, which are patriarchal in nature, and because of that they have to break with the gender roles established by their cultural background as well as by their religious beliefs.

Elizabeth Castelli claims that “[r]eligion’ as a category often cuts across the other categories by which identities are framed (gender, race, class, etc.), and it often complicates these other categories rather than simply reinscribing them” (5). Besides, Ursula King acknowledges that “the relationship between gender and religion is made more complex still through the presence of diversity” (3). From these two statements, it is possible to understand that religion cannot be seen as just another identity constituent as it is theorized by Friedman, since it does not only intersect with the other identity constituents, which means that more attention is needed in analyzing the intersection of gender and religion. Furthermore, the already complex relation between gender and religion can be still more complicated because of the presence of diversity. It is then, this complicated relation, that is, the reconfiguration of gender roles for Muslim characters in diaspora that is of my interest here.

As far as Muslims are concerned, there is a general assumption that it forms a concise group that holds and practices the same beliefs. However, Haideh Moghissi claims that “Muslims, like other people, include in their ranks orthodox believers, practicing individuals, non-practicing skeptics, secular and laic members” (4). This is exactly what is observed in both novels studied here.

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen and Chanu show different commitment to their faith. Nazneen covers herself with her sari and does her prayers. The five mandatory prayers are considered one of the pillars of Islam and many believe that whoever gives up the prayers is considered a disbeliever. Despite her knowledge about the importance of the prayers, Nazneen sometimes forgets to do her prayers, but she does not seem to be upset by her negligence:

She had missed morning prayers again today. Yesterday she missed both the fajr and zuhr prayers. But Raqib had needed her. The day before that he was napping and she was looking at a magazine. There was no excuse for that day.

Except that her mind walked off on its own sometimes. (Ali 71)

Chanu, on the other hand, does not seem to pray at all as Nazneen states that “Chanu never to her knowledge prayed” (Ali 27). Besides, in their house, the holy book is kept out of reach as it is possible to see in the following passage: “[s]tanding on the sofa to reach, [Nazneen] picked up the Holy Qur'an from the high shelf” (Ali 8). So, although both characters are Muslims, they seem to give more attention to the observances of Islam as far as gender is concerned than to the faith itself.

Most Muslims portrayed in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* are part of the same community. However, it does not mean that they behave or believe in the same way. Because the story is told from the point of view of Khadra, whose parents helped to create the Muslim community in which they congregate, she has a standard of what a Muslim is supposed to be. The following dialogue when the young Khadra questions another Muslim about her conversion exemplifies it well:

- Was it when you became a real Muslim? ... Or were you still that Elijah thing. The fake Muslims where it's only for black people?
- What is a real Muslim, Khadra?
- When you do the Five Pillars ... you know, and follow the Quran and the Prophet and wear *hijab* and follow the Islamic way of life and -
- Shahada. That's all. Belief that God is One. When that enters your heart and you surrender to it, you are a Muslim. (Kahf 24)¹²

Khadra seems to separate real Muslims from fake ones. The real ones are the Muslims who not only believe but also behave exactly like she has been taught. Similar passages are found throughout the novel since it takes time for Khadra to realize the diversity of her own congregation. Another example of the diversity of Muslims in the novel, which is previously

¹² Parts of this dialogue are suppressed. Here I only quote the most relevant lines because of its extension.

mentioned in the second chapter, is the portrayal of other Muslim communities as it is the case of the Mishwaka Muslims who “had mixed American things in with real Islam” and therefore “needed a refresher course in real Islam” (Kahf 103).

The two novels portray Muslims as a heterogeneous group in accordance with Moghissi’s claims. However, there is a similarity in the two novels studied that holds Muslims together: the two novels represent Muslim characters who have been marginalized and victimized due to several stereotypes. While in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* the prejudice against Muslims is represented as a constant in the main character’s life, in *Brick Lane* it is particularly evident after September 11.

In her childhood, Khadra divides Americans in two groups: nice and nasty Americans. In the first group she only mentions Mrs. Moore, who “belonged to a church called the Friends and they invited the Muslims over for pancake breakfast” (Kahf 67). The other group she lists “Orvil Hubbard and his cronies, Vaughn Lott, his sons Brian and Brent, and Mindy Oberholtzer and Curt Stephenson and all the other kids at school who tormented the Muslim kids daily while the teachers looked the other way” (Kahf 67). In her list, Khadra not only names those who provoke her more frequently, but she also states that the suffering is extended to the other Muslim kids and that there is nothing they can do since the teachers omit themselves.

In *Brick Lane*, before September 11, Chanu relates the prejudice he suffers to his foreignness and not because he is a Muslim since he claims that “[t]hese people here didn’t know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on the head” (Ali 21). However, after September 11, “some of the parents were telling their daughters to leave their headscarves at home” (Ali 313) and Chanu “stopped objecting to the tightness of [his

daughter] jeans” (Ali 307). After the terrorist attacks in the United States, the community feels the prejudice is not directed to them because of their nationality, but mostly because they are Muslims.

Another point that is elicited from the passage above regards the visibility of the veil, the sari or the *hijab* which makes women a usual target of the prejudice against Muslims. Clothes become a mark of otherness and the veil single women out in non-Muslim countries where the novels take place. Lucine Endelstein and Louise Ryan claim that “[t]hrough her clothing, [the] female figure is used to illustrate the ‘abnormal,’ a ‘stranger among us’” (253). The veil not only conveys difference, but most importantly, in western societies it is regarded as a symbol of gender oppression of Muslim women.

Along the same lines, it is possible to say that pictures of Muslim women in their *hijabs* are usually used in the media to represent the oppression of these women, and to show the relation between their condition as women and the religion they practice. Gayatri Spivak discusses the practice of *sati* in pre-colonial India arguing that the interference of the British in this Indian tradition is criticized as an example of “white men saving brown women from brown men” (“Can the Subaltern” 92). While Spivak's criticism reveals the intervention of one culture in another, it also shows that gender oppression was used to justify the British presence in the country. The same pattern of thought is not commonly accepted as far as Muslims are concerned because the common knowledge asserts that Muslim women do need to be saved from Muslim men.

Spivak's most important point in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is relevant in the context of both novels studied in this chapter. It is possible to ask, can the subaltern Muslim woman's voice be heard in the discussion of the veiling and unveling issue? In her poetry book, *Emails from Scheherazad*, Mohja Kahf points out that it is important to consider Muslim women's

body and they are the ones who should have a say about it:

Untangle your hands from my hair
 so I can comb and delight in it,
 so I can honor and anoint it,
 so I can spill it over the chest of my sweet love. (Kahf, *Emails* 58)

Therefore, it is important to voice the concerns Arab women have about their own body and their right to veil and unveil. I believe that both *Brick Lane* and *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* give another view of the veil, the *hijab* and of the Muslim community and because of that they are important instruments in the analysis of what the Muslim women think about veiling and unveiling. When Khadra tells her friend that she does not want to take the usual photos of Muslims for the magazine she works for, her friend accuses her: “the sort of Muslims you are defending would never allow me and Veejay to be together” (Kahf 334). But Khadra’s explanation reflects the necessity to provide another perspective of Muslims: “I’m not defending their *views*. I’m defending their right to have their views. There’s a difference” (Kahf 334).

The act of veiling has two different perspectives. On the one side, Helen Watson claims that a common perception of the veil is that it is “as an overt symbol of the oppression of women under Islam” (153). Along the same lines, Fatima Mernissi, an Arab feminist, asserts that the *hijab* is a political instrument of female subjugation that is perpetuated by patriarchy. She states that “[i]f women’s rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor, the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite”(ix). While Watson is mainly describing the perception westerners have about the veil, Mernissi is stating, from inside, that she believes the *hijab* is an instrument of oppression. However, she relates this oppression to the

patriarchal society rather than to religion.

On the other hand, there are those who defend the right women have to use the veil.

Along these lines, Noemí Pereira-Ares observes:

Most empirical and interview-based studies suggest that, within the Muslim world, the veil is perceived rather positively. In contradiction to prevailing Western views of the veil as a symbol of women's oppression, Muslims tend to regard it as an element of cultural identification which even transcends the mere religious sphere. (202)

A passage from *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* exemplifies very well the quotation above. Khadra, at a moment of rediscovery in her life, takes off her headscarf while in Syria, but in the plane back home, she puts on her tangerine scarf because she “wanted them to know at Customs, at the reentry checkpoint ... that she was coming in under one of the many signs of her heritage” (Kahf 313). Although Khadra enters the plane without the scarf, that is, she does not wear it out of obligation in Syria, she decides to wear it when she returns the US to show a part of her own identity.

Another point regarding veiling is also shown in the same novel. When Khadra wears the *hijab* for the first time, the narrator says that “the sensation to be hijabed was a thrill. Khadra had acquired vestments of a higher order. Hijab was a crown on her head. She went forth lightly and went forth heavily into the world, carrying the weight of a new grace” (Kahf 112). Khadra's feelings may seem contradictory. If, without *hijab*, she suffers prejudice from her schoolmates and neighbors, wearing the traditional Muslim clothes would only worsen the situation. However, the weight she mentions is related to positive words, such as crown, higher order and grace. Khadra is honored to wear the *hijab* for the first time, despite the fact that it increases her visibility as a Muslim woman. Later, Khadra says that “hijab soon grew to

feel as natural to her as a second skin, without which if she ventured into the outside world she felt naked” (Kahf 113). The veil is not felt as an imposition, but rather as a protection to Khadra when she wears it. Zahra Rahnavard explains that for some Muslim women, veiling prevents them from being “an object whose value lies solely in their bodies” (9).

Another important episode about clothing is shown during Khadra’s family trip to Mecca. During their stay there, Ebtehaj talks about the American way of dressing and makes a relation between clothes and modesty. She tells her friend about one of Khadra’s friends saying that “to look at the way she dresses, you might think she was a streetwalker” but that in fact “she is a very good girl. A *moral* girl. She just doesn’t know how to dress” (Kahf, 171, emphasis from the original). Ebtehaj hints to the fact that moral and appropriated dressing code should be inseparable and she explains what she believes is the reason for such dissociation:

So you really have to pity them, more than condemn ... They don’t have the *teachings* of modesty. Their mothers don’t teach it to them. And everything else in their culture kills the natural instinct of a woman for modesty, and teaches her instead to expose herself. To please men. (Kahf 171, emphasis from the original)

I believe this quotation illustrates a pattern of thought that Muslims have about the veil that is very similar to the one against the veil. Here Ebtehaj is saying that those who do not cover themselves but, on the contrary, expose themselves do it in order to please men. So while the ones against the veil claim that veiling is a form of patriarchal control of women’s bodies, the quotation above shows that the exposition of the body serves the same purpose.

I am not saying that Muslim women are not oppressed, but that it is necessary to be careful because in the common assumptions held about Muslim women, the source of their

oppression is believed to come mostly from their religious beliefs and not from the patriarchal societies they live in. The use of the veil is very contradictory and I believe that the question to be asked is if veiled women have a voice despite covering themselves. The following analysis of gender issues in *Brick Lane* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* addresses this question as far as the novels characters are concerned.

My intention with the above discussion is to bring these stereotypes to the foreground. It is necessary to be careful when analyzing the relation between gender and religion as it is not my intention to generalize or construct my argument on the common assumptions we often have in relation to Muslim women. My focus in this chapter is not the merits of religion or the imperialist discourse of the salvation of Muslim women from Muslim men. My focus rather lies on the condition of women and on the construction of gender patterns in the home country and on how a change of settings might affect the reconfiguration of gender roles in the two novels mentioned.

Consequently, in both *Brick Lane* and *The Girl from the Tangerine Scarf* the label Muslim in both the US and London, where Kahf's and Ali's novels are set respectively, makes the relation between gender and religion very complex. The two novels represent communities that are constructed around the same religious beliefs that not only serve for the purpose of teaching and maintaining the religious practice in the diaspora, but which also informs its members of the acceptable gender patterns to be followed.

Ursula King claims that gender and religion are “closely interwoven, for dynamic patterns of gendering are deeply embedded in all religions and suffuse all religion worlds and experiences” (8). Besides, as mentioned in the first chapter, religious spaces are usually gendered, establishing and assigning different roles for men and women in the congregational places. In this chapter, I first analyze how Muslim women are represented in the beginning of

the novels as well as the intersectionality of gender and religion. Secondly, I analyze the reconfiguration of gender relations of the two main characters in the diaspora space and the impact of religion in this reconfiguration.

4.1. Gender Issues in Bangladesh: Rupban and Hasina

Anyone say anything they like
because I am woman alone. I put
here on earth to suffer.

(Ali 120)

The history of Bangladesh starts with the Partition of India, which was based on religious criteria. India's population was composed of a majority of Hindus while Pakistan of a Muslim majority. The new country Pakistan was then known as West Pakistan and East Pakistan because it was a country geographically separated by India. Besides having economic differences, West Pakistan's population was 97% Muslim, while East Pakistan had an average of 15% of non-Muslims. With the War of Independence in 1971 West Pakistan became Pakistan and East Pakistan became Bangladesh. In 1977, general Ziaur Rahman adopts Islam in the Pakistan constitution and in 1988, Islam becomes the state religion.

Thus, the debate around gender and religion can reveal to be even more complicated because of the connection between religion and politics. The situation of Bangladesh is a good example of the relation between religion and politics. Naseem Hussain claims that “whereas in modern secular states there is institutional separation of the moral order from the political order, the situation of Bangladesh is not the same” since the “ruling elite is bringing the

country closer to Islamic identification” (325). Hussain explains the reason for such an approximation stating that in “the post liberation period, religion was used as a political weapon by the rulers for the sake of legitimization of their rulers” (325). Therefore, the relation between religion and the patriarchal culture of the country is so interconnected that it is difficult to separate one thing from the other. I believe that in the case of Bangladesh, religion reinforces the patriarchal values of the society and vice-versa. In the following analysis of two women characters, it is possible to observe that the oppression of these women come from men and that it is supported by the society the characters live in, which is both patriarchal and Muslim.

Brick Lane starts with Nazneen's birth in 1967, that is, four years before the independence of Bangladesh. Although the constitution grants “equal rights for man and women in every sphere of the state and public life” (Hashmi 2), the situation of women did not improve. On the contrary, Taj Hashmi claims that the violence against women had a substantial rise (2) after independence.

Ali focuses on the story of two women in Bangladesh, that is, Nazneen’s mother and sister. The story of her mother, Rupban, is told in fragments. An analysis of this character is important because of the advice she gives Nazneen and also because of her death. Rupban’s advice to Nazneen shows how oppressed by her husband and society she felt and her suicide shows she did not have any agency to change her situation as a woman.

Her mother’s advice is based on an important ground: acceptance. Women are likely to suffer, but should “suffer in silence” (Ali 79). One piece of advice Nazneen always remembers is “*just wait and see, that’s all we can do*¹³” (Ali 31, emphasis from the original). Implicit in the advice is the idea that a woman is a passive observer and that acceptance is needed in all situations. Nazneen says that her mother “cried because crying was called for,

¹³ Italics from the original.

but she accepted it, whatever it was” (Ali 31). Another piece of advice that goes along the same line is “if God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men” (Ali 60).

Therefore, women should not ask questions, but rather accept all things.

When Rupban dies, her husband tells his daughters that she had fallen on a spear in the store hut. At first, there are only suspicions about her death as Nazneen’s aunt remarks that it was strange she “was wearing her best sari” because “it wasn’t a special day after all” (Ali 31). Many years later, Hasina tells Nazneen the real story in a letter: “He go to other women. He want to take other wife but she give threat to kill own self [*sic*]” (Ali 124). Rupban’s suicide illustrates the condition of a woman who feels throughout her life that she is supposed to accept everything. She is a woman who does not have any agency to go against the oppression of her husband and a society that does not grant any rights for a divorced woman. Suicide seems to become the only solution when acceptance is not bearable any more.

Sidney Schuler states that in Bangladesh, “existing laws ... favor husbands in cases of divorce” (329) and that many women continue in the relationships despite the violence they suffer because of the lack of legal guarantees they have:

Domestic violence is often concealed and ... women often remain in abusive relationships out of shame, fear of negative consequences such as retaliation or separation from their children, lack of support from family and friends, or lack of economic alternatives. (328)

Hasina is an example of a woman who does not remain in a violent marriage but who suffers all the negative consequences because the society she lives in does not give her any kind of legal support. At the age of sixteen, she runs away with a boy from the village and in a letter to Nazneen, Hasina writes “I pray Maleks [*sic*] mother forgive [*sic*] the ‘crime’ of our marriage” (Ali 13). She writes this letter when she is in love and happy with Malek, but she

knows that her actions are against the norms of the society she lives in, and her belief that what she has done is seen by others as a crime will make her blame herself for the consequences later on.

Contrary to the example she had from her own mother, when her husband starts beating her, Hasina decides to leave him and she tells Nazneen in a letter:

Our landlady Mrs. Kashem is only person who know *[sic]* about it. She say *[sic]* it is not good decision but she help anyway *[sic]*. She say *[sic]* it is better get beaten by own husband than beating *[sic]* by stranger *[sic]*. But those stranger *[sic]* not saying at same time they love me *[sic]*. If they beat they do in all honesty. (Ali 41)

Because Hasina does not have a husband or a father to support her, she starts working. Although Nazneen does not consider it appropriated for a woman to be working she considers that “Hasina had no choice” (Ali 98). When Hasina gets fired because she is in a relationship with a man at work, she reasons: “which way I turn any way it is dark *[sic]*” (Ali 131). And because she cannot find work, Hasina becomes a prostitute. She explains to Nazneen:

They put me out from factory for untrue reason and due to they put me out the reason have come now as actual truth. ... Hussain still looking out for me. He the one making sure I get the money. If he not look out anyone take what they like and not pay *[sic]*. (Ali 134)

Abbas Bhuiya and Mushtaque Chowdhury explain that in “a patriarchal society where women are specially vulnerable, divorce can increase their vulnerability in the absence of institutional social support” (57). That is what is observed in Hasina’s life because of the lack of legal support and because of the discrimination she suffers from the society where the divorce is not commonly accepted. The feeling of being protected is synthesized by Hasina

when she is married again: “Sister I know how you enjoy to leave your flat. But I have come inside now. How I love the walls keep me here [*sic*]” (Ali 137). This analogy Hasina makes between being married and being inside with walls protecting her is very meaningful. Besides emphasizing the vulnerability of a divorced woman, it also highlights her condition as a woman that is only respected and protected in the presence of a man.

Besides, Hasina does not blame society or the men who have oppressed her for the sufferings she has gone through. Instead, she believes that she is the only one responsible for what has happened to her. Nazneen ponders about that:

Fate, it seemed, had turned Hasina’s life around and around, tossed and twisted it like a baby rat, naked and blind, in the jaws of a dog. And yet Hasina did not see it. She examined the bite marks on her body, and for each one she held herself accountable. *This is where I savaged myself, here and here and here.*
(Ali 282, emphasis from the original)

In this passage, Nazneen compares Hasina to a baby rat that is naked and blind. The comparison she makes shows Hasina unprotected and unable to see the reasons of her own suffering. Besides, when she states that she is a rat in the jaws of a dog, I believe Nazneen uses the perfect metaphor to describe Hasina’s condition as she is imprisoned by something that is dangerous and much bigger than herself. Because the rat is blind, it looks at its own body and holds itself accountable for the bites. In other words, this image shows how Hasina is so blind regarding her own condition as a woman in a patriarchal society where she does not have any agency to fight it back that she ends up believing that her misery is her own fault.

Another episode that is mentioned in Hasina’s letters is acid throwing. According to Syed Haque and Habibul Ahsan, acid violence is one of the most serious kinds of violence

against women. They add that this kind of violence “has been endemic in Bangladesh for decades” (216). Hasina tells Nazneen about Monju whose husband wants to sell their seven-day-old child. She explains that “Monju refuse to give up child and man throw acid on baby of seven only days [*sic*]” (Ali 276). Because Monju started collecting money for the baby’s operation and refuses to give it to her husband, he burns her (Ali 276-77). Hasina tells Nazneen that she uses the money her sister has sent her in Monju’s treatment: “[d]o not be angry I took to the hospital and pay for Monju for clean dressing on the body. It hurt the nose to smell her. It hurt the eye to see her. Most it hurt the heart to know her” [*sic*].

Hasina’s letters demonstrate not only her own suffering but also the misfortunes of other women caused by the unequal rights granted by society to men and women. Hasina’s letters also give the reader a comparison between her life and Nazneen’s who inhabits another space. While Nazneen seems to gain agency during the years she spends in the new country, the opposite is observed about her sister who lives all her life surrounded by a society where women do not really have a voice.

4.2 Gender and Religion in London: Nazneen’s gender reconfiguration

The village was leaving her.

(Ali 176)

The first lines of *Brick Lane* give the tone of Nazneen first years in the country where she moves after having an arranged marriage with Chanu. The narrator states that “Nazneen life began – began as it would proceed for quite some time, that is to say uncertainly” (Ali 1). The uncertainty mentioned by the narrator comes from the belief that Nazneen has that fate governs life and that one should learn to accept everything that happens. Although Muslims

do not believe in fate, but in destiny, the meaning of these words is often interchangeably used. Besides, there is a passage in the Quran that states that everything is already written on a book, which can be directly associated to Nazneen's belief that nothing can be changed:

And with Him are the keys of the unseen – no one knows them but He. And He knows what is in the land and the sea. And there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor is there a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green or dry, but (it is all) in a clear book. (89)

Therefore, Nazneen's belief that fate rules her life might be read as her conviction that everything is already written and therefore nothing can be changed. For Nazneen this is true, mainly if you are a woman. In the first years of her marriage, it is possible to observe that she believes that nothing can be changed as it is already decided. She only needs to wait so that things can be revealed to her. Although she accepts everything, changes are eventually observed in Nazneen's life.

The first episode concerning her marriage that strikes Nazneen is when she hears her husband talking about her on the phone. Three points are relevant regarding Chanu's words. The first point relates to his wife's appearance. At this regard, Chanu states that "she is not beautiful, but not ugly either" and that her "[h]ips are a bit narrow but wide enough, I think, to carry children" (Ali 11). Although he does not pay her any compliments about her features, he does say that her body is good enough to bear children. The second point is that he says that she is "an unspoilt girl. From the village" (Ali 10). Therefore, she would be the ideal person for teaching their children their home tradition. The third and last point that Chanu states is that "a blind uncle is better than no uncle. I waited too long to get a wife" (Ali 11). This is the point that shocks Nazneen the most. Nazneen knows she is expected to be a mother and to teach her children the traditions of their culture. However, she did not expect to be considered

no better than any other wife. She reasons:

Any wife is better than no wife. Something is better than nothing. What had she imagined? That he was in love with her? That he was grateful because she, young and graceful, had accepted him? That in sacrificing herself to him, she was owed something? Yes. Yes. She realized in a stinging rush she had imagined all these things. Such a foolish girl. Such high notions. What self-regard. (Ali 11)

Two things call my attention in this quotation. First, it is her feeling that she sacrificed herself to him and, second, the feeling that she is the one to be blamed for her feelings. Her mother's teachings tell Nazneen that a woman should not have wishes, desires or dreams to be fulfilled. As a consequence, a woman should annul herself for the well being of a man. Second, when she realizes that she believed that her husband would be grateful because she is sacrificing herself to him, she blames herself for thinking too much of herself. Therefore, in Nazneen's perspective, it is not Chanu that is wrong in denying her dreams but she is the one who is wrong because she wishes things were different. She often considers when she opens her eyes in the morning "if I were the wishing type, I know what I would wish" (Ali 7). She knows she wishes, but implied in her sentence is her awareness that she should not be a wishing type of person. Besides, Nazneen does not consider that she is entitled to do anything to change her situation. It is a complete absence of agency and a certainty similar to the one she has when she leaves her neighborhood alone in London and gets lost:

But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more that she could see God. They knew that she existed (just as she knew that He existed) but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her. (Ali 40)

Nazneen has the certainty that there is little she can do to have her own voice. However, she slowly starts being aware of her own situation through her questionings and reasoning. When we observe Nazneen's feelings towards Chanu as well as about having an arranged marriage, it is possible to observe that, through the passing of time, she starts questioning and transforming herself. First she acts as an obedient daughter and tells her father that she does not want to see the photograph of the man she will marry: "Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife" (Ali 5). However, a few years later, she considers "[w]hy did her father marry her to this man?" (Ali 78) and she reasons: "[h]e just wanted to be rid of me... He wanted me to go far away, so that I would not be any trouble for him. He did not care who would took me off his hands" (Ali 78). In this passage, it is possible to observe that although she does not complain about it to anybody, she starts questioning where her acceptance and obedience is taking her.

Along the same lines, in the beginning she acts as an obedient wife who believes her husband is the authority in the house. For instance, when she asks her husband to go out, he refuses to allow her to do this because "he will look like a fool" (Ali 30) if he permits and when she asks him to attend the same English lessons her friend Razia is taking, but Chanu replies "[w]here is the need anyway?" (Ali 23). In this scene we observe that Nazneen makes the request, it is denied and there is not a discussion about it, but only a silent acceptance. It is interesting to observe here that Nazneen's submission comes from her knowledge and acceptance of the patriarchal society she comes from.

Nazneen's situation only actually changes when she considers that she needs to help her sister. In other words, her motivation to go against her husband's will is her sister's situation as well as Chanu's decision that nothing could be done to help her. In Nazneen's words: "[h]e cannot accept one single thing in his life but this: that my sister should be left to

her fate. Everything else may be altered, but not that” (Ali 51). This understanding is important because although we can observe that Nazneen does not rely completely on fate anymore, but that she believes that one should - and could - do something to change a fact. In Nazneen’s opinion the only way to change the course of things is to have her own money:

If she had a job, she would be able to save. And if she saved then she would have enough money to go to Dhaka. Or if they didn’t go to Dhaka, she would save enough to send to Hasina. Chanu would not know how many linings she had sewn or how many jackets she had buttonholed. He would not know how much money there should be, and she would be able to put some aside. (Ali 150)

Chanu’s desire to go back to Bangladesh and his awareness that he will not alone be able to save enough money for the trip make him allow Nazneen to start working. Besides, his motivation lies in the fact that he is afraid his daughters will become westernized: Shahana “is only a child, and already the rot is beginning. That’s why we must go” (Ali 153). When he buys the sewing machine, he tells his daughters: “she is the boss women now. Anything she says, your father goes running off and does it” (Ali 153).

Nazneen’s empowerment starts when she begins saving her own money, which she hides from her husband. Because of her sewing job at home, she meets Karim. He is the man who takes and picks the clothes she has to sew. In her first description of Karim, Nazneen pays close attention at his hair cut, his arms and his confidence (Ali 170). The first time he enters her house and sits on the sofa, she observes that “she had forgotten to cover her hair” (Ali 171). She is aware that she is not covered but there is no indication that she covers herself afterwards. Soon after, Nazneen realizes that “he excited her” (Ali 198) and Karim starts spending more time in her house while Chanu is out working: “[h]e would walk around and

fill up the space. He would walk around as if he were learning to fill the space. Each time he came now he inhabited the flat a little more” (Ali 235). This passage is interesting as it contrast with Nazneen’s feelings after she marries Chanu: “[i]n all her eighteen years, she could scarcely remember a moment she had spent alone. Until she married. And came to London to sit day after day in this large box with ... the muffled sounds of private lives sealed way above, below, and around her” (Ali 12). The loneliness and the emptiness Nazneen feels after marrying Chanu is the opposite of what she experiences with Karim as he fills and inhabits the space of the flat. Nazneen is slowly aware of the changes happening in her life, but she still credits it to fate:

Out of the bedroom, she was – in starts – afraid and defiant. If ever her life was out of her hands, it was now. She had submitted to her father and married her husband; she had submitted to her husband. And now she gave herself up to a power greater than these two, and she felt herself helpless before it. When the thought crept into her mind that the power was inside her, that she was its creator, she dismissed it as conceited. How could such a weak woman unleash a force so strong. She gave in to fate and not to herself. (Ali 247)

This quotation draws attention to the reconfiguration of gender and gender patterns as a process that happens over time. It is not just the diasporic space that favors the changes, but also the time Nazneen spends there. It takes time so that she can realize that power is inside herself and that she can take her own decisions. At this time in the narrative, it seems that she is not so submissive as far as her father and husband are concerned, but she is submissive to Karim.

With Karim, Nazneen crosses the barriers of gender established by society and religion: “[h]e was the first man to see her naked. It made her sick with shame. It made her

sick with desire. They committed a crime. It was a crime and the sentence was death” (Ali 246-47). Two points need to be addressed regarding this quotation. First, it is Nazneen’s statement that she believes that what she is doing is a crime. Adultery is a crime according to the Quran and that is probably what she is referring to, as some Muslims believe that adultery should be punished with stoning. So, this passage illustrates that religion makes it even harder for Nazneen to break gender patterns since she feels ashamed and condemned.

The second point regarding the quotation above that calls my attention is the fact that Nazneen is naked for the first time in front of a man and, that makes her “sick with desire.” I believe this is a new phase of her empowerment since she discovers her body. Later in the narrative, it is even more clear as her body is associated with the pleasure she has with Karim, indicating that she might have never had it with her husband. The narrator tells that Nazneen “was aware of her body, as though just now she had come to inhabit it for the first time and it was both strange and wonderful to have this new and physical expression (Ali 284). Moreover, she concludes her complete awareness of her own body saying that “still dressed, she was more than naked” (Ali 284).

Therefore, first she discovers that she can support herself with the sewing job, and now she discovers her body and desires for a man, something that she never mentions about Chanu. Another point that adds to her empowerment is that she acquires the language that Chanu has forbidden her to learn. The narrator says that “[a]lthough English words did not come easily from her mouth, Nazneen had long been able to follow conversation” (Ali 166).

When Chanu’s return to Bangladesh seems certain, Nazneen wonders that “[i]f she stayed [in London], then what alternative would she have but to marry Karim?” (Ali 339). Although Nazneen’s main concern about going back to Bangladesh is related to Shahana who refuses to go, she believes that if she stayed, she would have to marry Karim, that is, that it

would not be acceptable for her to stay alone. However, when she asks Karim the reason he likes her, she is taken aback to hear the same explanation that Chanu had given to a friend in the beginning of her marriage: “*You are the real thing*” (Ali 321, emphasis from the original). Again, Karim does not like her for the woman she is, but because she is the embodiment of Karim’s idea of home, and because of that Nazneen breaks up with him.

When Nazneen believes it is time to decide if she would return with Chanu, she tries to calm herself saying that fate will decide and that “she had only to wait for everything to be revealed” (Ali 339). But in a sudden understanding, she realizes that she can make her own decisions and that she would not let fate decide things for herself anymore: “*I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one.* A charge ran through her body and she cried out again, this time out of sheer exhilaration” (Ali 339 italics from the original). Nazneen’s words make it evident that she has changed from the submissive, obedient daughter and wife who used to sacrifice herself into a woman who has agency.

In Hasina’s last letter, she tells Nazneen about her mother’s suicide and she says: “*I am not like her. Waiting around. Suffering around. She wrong. So many ways. At the end only she act. She who think all path is closed for her. She take the only one forbidden [sic]*” and she finishes saying “*May Allah show His Mercy onto her. She see no other way [sic]*” (Ali 366, emphasis from the original). Hasina then prays to herself asking Allah “to put light in [her] heart so [she] see more clear the ways [sic]” (Ali 366). It is interesting to observe that their mother saw only one possible way out and Hasina knows that there are many possible ways to be followed, but she asks Allah to make them clearer as she believes that she is always taking the wrong one. However, Nazneen is aware that there is much more than clear ways for her since Razia tells her that “[t]his is England... [y]ou can do whatever you like” (Ali 415). Nazneen claims that it is the new space that makes it possible for her to decide her

own ways.

4.3. Gender and Religion in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*

Muslims didn't count

for much here.

(Kahf 32)

As discussed in the first two chapters, diasporic subjects are usually discriminated against because of their affiliations and their visibility as foreigners. The prejudice and intolerance against Muslims portrayed in Kahf's novel seems much stronger than those described in Ali's *Brick Lane*. An explanation for this difference is that the discourse against Arabs precedes the one against Muslims since it focuses on binary and essentialist differences between the Occident and the Orient. Carol Fadda-Conrey contends that:

derogatory and essentialist stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims, replete of lascivious Arab Sheikhs, villains, harem girls, and belly dancers, become the shared vocabulary used to reify the vast differences between a 'civilized' US culture on the one hand and a 'barbaric' and backward Arab and Muslim landscape on the other hand. (2)

This discourse is very similar to the one used during colonial times to define the colonial subject in opposition to the white European subject in binary terms. 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. Edward Said claims in *Orientalism* that the image of the Eastern subject was constructed in order to justify the political domination of the Orient, but

he argues that the dichotomies established were mere representations and, and not “natural depictions of the Orient” (21). Therefore, as far as Arabs are concerned, the same discourse is used to justify the superiority of one group over the other.

One of the characters in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Ebtehaj, Khadra’s mother, uses a discourse constructed in binary terms in order to teach her children that they are different from Americans. Her discourse, like the ones used by Americans, is also full of stereotypes:

Generally speaking, Americans cussed, smoke, and drank, and the Shamys had it on good authority that a fair number of them used drugs. Americans dated and fornicated and committed adultery. They had broken families and lots of divorces. Americans were not generous or hospitable like Uncle Abdulla and Aunt Fatma ... and [they] ate out wastefully often. (Kahf 68)

In establishing the conduct of Americans, she is determining the limits for Muslims. Besides, Khadra’s mother is clearly telling them what kind of behavior is not acceptable and that the difference should be maintained between one group and the other. Ebtehaj also establishes the differences in the values held by the two groups:

Americans believed the individual was more important than the family, and money was more important than anything. Khadra’s dad said Americans threw out their sons and daughters when they turned eighteen unless they could pay rent – to their own parents! And, at the other end, they threw their parents into nursing homes when they got old. This, although, they took slavish care of mere dogs. All in all, Americans led shallow, wasteful, materialistic lives.

Islam could solve many of their social ills, if they but knew. (Kahf 68)

The same stigmatization the Arabs are victims of in the novel, the Shamys create in

their house against Americans. I believe that the binary view created by both Americans and the Shamys in the novel, in association with the religious teachings Khadra and her brother Eyad have, help to explain the behavior of the second generation of immigrants portrayed by Mohja Kahf as it is analyzed later in this chapter.

4.4 Religion and Gender in the Muslim Countries

[Mecca] was the center of the world as
the heart was the center of the body.
(Kahf 163)

The novel *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* does not tell the story of any woman character who lives or lived in any Arab country in detail. But the fragments presented in the novel reveal important elements to establish a parallel with Khadra's gender renegotiation in diaspora. So, in this part of the chapter, I make a brief analysis of two episodes which happen in Mecca and in Syria and which I consider relevant passages that help Khadra reconsider her idea of a perfect home culture. Besides, they make her examine the rigid upbringing she has in the United States.

The first episode takes place during Khadra's trip to Mecca. She goes out with Afaaf, her mother's milk sister's daughter, who is a teenager like herself. Afaaf makes the driver drop them in a mall, but instead of staying there, they leave the mall and enter in a limousine full of young Saudis (Kahf 173-74). The first thing that Khadra notices is that her cousin unveils herself: "[s]he was shocked to see Afaaf throw off her veil and abaya¹⁴ inside the limo. She shook out her short, dark auburn curls. Her lips were full and glossy" (Kahf 174).

¹⁴ According to the Oxford dictionary, an abaya is "a full-length, sleeveless outer garment worn by some Muslim women."

The strictness of her upbringing makes Khadra uncomfortable and, when a boy wants to shake hands with her, she does not even consider the possibility: “Khadra shook her head. She didn’t even shake hands with men in America, just like her mother. She wasn’t going to start in the land of the Prophet” (Kahf 174). At the same time Khadra is shocked by the unexpected behavior of her Muslim cousin and friends, they are also surprised for they expected a different behavior from an American Muslim and keep saying “she doesn’t look American.” It is then that Khadra realizes that “she had never felt so far from home” (Kahf 176.77). The prejudice the two groups have about one another crash when they meet. However, the point that calls my attention is that Khadra is much more rigid, as far as the religious laws and behaviors are concerned, than the young people she meets in Mecca. R. Stephen Warner discusses the relation between religion and diaspora and he contends that “[i]n a Muslim country one is naturally a Muslim, whether or not one takes seriously the practice of Islam. In North America, Islam becomes a conscious element in the sense of identity” (17). If we compare Khadra and the other young Muslims from the quotation above, it is clear that Khadra is raised in such a way that her identity as a Muslim is exacerbated as it is the core of who she is.

The second episode I would like to comment on happens in Syria when Khadra is staying with Téta. She is considered to be Khadra’s grandmother as she is the one who took care of her father after his mother’s early death (Kahf 68-9). In Khadra’s second trip to Syria, she learns a part of her grandmother’s story that surprises her. She tells Khadra: “we were absolutely in love, there was no telling us no. And then we eloped to Haifa” (Kahf 272) and she explains that “Circassians do it all the time ... and that [h]is aunt was with us all the time, and as soon as we got to Haifa, we married properly, with witness” (Kahf 273). She also mentions that “it was ages before [her parents] talked to [her] again” (Kahf 273). So, her

grandmother married the man she loved and, in other to do it she elopes and goes against her parents' will.

In Khadra's upbringing going against her parents' will is not a possibility. The passage above contrasts with the one that portrays Khadra's oldest brother telling their parents that he is in love and wants to marry a Black Muslim. Even though Eyad is dazed because his parents react so negatively to the thought of having a Black daughter-in-law, he does not have the courage to insist: "He was never going to marry anyone to whom his parents' first reaction was so negative. So that was that. He lowered his gaze to what would please his parents, believing their approval to be next to God's" (Kahf 139).

Besides, Khadra's grandmother questions the religious beliefs she has been taught about marriage when she asks:

What was such a crime? Had I gone against God and the Prophet? Not I. They were the ones in violation. They were the ones. Doesn't the Prophet say if you find a good god-loving man, accept him? Does the Prophet say unless he's Circassian? Does the Prophet say he must be from your people? (Kahf 273)

Eyad, on the other hand, does not question them even if the "gulf between what they'd taught him and what was happening ... was overwhelming" (Kahf 139). It is interesting to observe that, inside the same family, the second-generation Eyad, born in the United States, seems much more resilient than his grandmother who lives in Syria. What is observed here is the opposite of what is usually perceived in second generation immigrants who are usually described as having double affiliations, that is, they usually keep traces of the home culture but also traces of the culture of the place they live. They are in this sense hybrid subjects in Bhabha's use of the word, as they transit between two different worlds and therefore they are usually not strict as their parents about their home culture.

However, if we analyze the two episodes together, that is, the one that happens when Khadra is in Mecca and the last one with Eyad, it may be argued that the identities of the diasporic subjects in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* are forged based on religion and any negotiation of any other part of their identity constituents depends on the reconsideration of what being a Muslim means to them. Warner claims that religion is “among other things, an instrument of cultural conservation” (20) and in the novel it is observed that religion is used as a mechanism to separate them from the American culture.

The separation between Muslims and Americans is also observed in the following passage when Khadra and her brother arrive at home later than expected because they were trapped by American kids. Their mother shouts: “[d]o you think we are Americans? Do you think we have no limits? Do you think we leave our children wandering in the streets? Is that what we think we are? (Kahf 66) and the sobbing Khadra with “her face twisted in grief” answers “We are not Americans” (Kahf 67). Khadra uses “we” not as a reference to her and her brother but to the fact that they are Muslims.

I believe that it is possible to say that one of the fundamental differences is related to gender roles. It is necessary to observe how the main character in this novel deconstructs her beliefs, which makes it possible for her to reconfigure her gender roles in diaspora.

4.5 Religion and Gender Reconfiguration: Khadra

Here was an exposure, her soul an unmarked
sheet shadowing into distinct shapes under
the fluids. Fresh film. Her self, developing.

(Kahf 309)

Khadra's identity is formed not only at home but also at the mosque she attends with her family. As a child Khadra learns about Islam in the weekend Islamic school she attends. It is through the lenses of religion that gender roles are taught to her.

One of the first passages related to gender happens at Sunday school. The teacher says that "only one God created everyone, so all men are equal" (Kahf 35), and because a classmate wanders about women, he answers that "man includes women" and therefore "God don't care whether you a man or woman, anymore than He look at black or white" (Kahf 35). So, although they are equal, they soon learn that gender segregation is the norm because "past a certain age, girls in their community didn't hang out with boys" (Kahf 136-37).

Gender inequality is first noticed in relation to the rights granted to her oldest brother by her parents. Khadra wants to take a course on classical Islamic scholarship her brother had already taken in Cairo. Although her parents "were glad to oblige" as far as Eyad is concerned, when Khadra is willing to take the same course the narrator explains that "Khadra hadn't had the opportunities afforded to Eyad. Travel abroad, a girl alone? For the Shamys, it was out of question" (Kahf 153). Although their Sunday school teacher explains that men and women are equal to God, they soon realize that they do not share the same rights. The same pattern of thought is observed when Khadra goes to university since "Eyad could dorm on campus, but it was not acceptable by the Shamys' highly conservative standards for Khadra, as a young unmarried girl, to live out on her own" (Kahf 207). Once again, it is possible to notice that the behavior of the second generation is not in tune with what is commonly expected from the generation born or raised in the diaspora. Avtar Brah contends that:

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)

It is expected that their identities would be “a combination of the local and the global” (Brah191), but that it is not what is observed in Eyad and Khadra’s case. I believe that the reason for such a difference is that religion is at the heart of their upbringing. Besides, they are inserted in a community that reinforces their identity as a group in opposition to the culture of the place in which they live.

A curious fact about the equality of rights is that it goes beyond the restraints of the home space or the authority of the Imam in the mosque. Even when Khadra and her brother are at university, gender inequality is still observed among Muslims in an environment that has much more freedom than the other ones mentioned. At one point Khadra is invited to be the first woman to recite the Quran in a students’ meeting she attends with her brother. On the way back home, her brother tells her that “[t]here were some objections to a woman reciting the Quran in front of men” (Kahf 203), and he explains “I heard some of the guys talking about it. Talking about *you*. It’s almost like, if some girl’s singing in a sultry voice” (Kahf 204). It is interesting to notice that even covered with the *hijab*, the role Khadra assumes in the meeting is sufficient to elicit a sexist response from the young Muslims. Although her brother claims that the problem is her voice, it makes one wonder if the issue presented in this situation is not the position she occupies in the meeting. The division of roles within the Muslim congregations is so rigid that the transgression of these limits may have caused the men to be uncomfortable.

Sexism is also observed as far as marriages are concerned. When Eyad’s friend from

university considers proposing to Khadra, the reasons he considers to propose are very similar to the ones that Chanu considers important in Nazneen:

She had a pure Arabic accent – even though she spoke English with a regular American accent too. She wore perfect hijab, even a little conservatively for his taste, but that was okay, better that she erred on that side than the other way, he thought.

And he'd seen her get passionate about Palestine and other Arab causes. He liked that she had not lost her Arab identity despite being raised entirely in America. Juma didn't know personally any other girls who combined all those qualities. (Kahf 201)

The qualities Juma mentions about Khadra are also related to values that are linked to their Arab or religious background. Similarly to what is observed in *Brick Lane*, the desired woman is an embodiment of the home culture. The difference between Khadra and Nazneen is that the former has the option to accept or refuse the proposal while the latter does not. However, her mother warns her “if you don't marry this one, ... you should think about marrying in the next few years, anyway. A girl's window of opportunity narrows after that” (Kahf 207). Marriage is not only sexist because the man is the one who chooses the woman that best fits his needs, but in Khadra's mother's words, as an opportunity that narrows after youth.

If we examine Khadra's reason to accept the proposal, it is possible to observe that her main reason to marry him is also based on religious criteria:

‘Well, I guess he's as good as any other guy I'd end up marrying, so why not?’
She saw Téta's face furrow. She went on hastily. ‘He is a good Muslim – you know, a *practicing* Muslim – and an active student in CMC, and he's

intelligent, and a decent person and all. Everybody says he is.’ (Kahf 208)

The reasons she gives are similar to the ones Juma gives in order to propose to her, that is, based on the fact that he is a good Muslim. Another point that calls my attention in the passage is her grandmother’s reaction to Khadra’s explanation. It points to the strength religion has in the life of these diasporic second generation Muslim, as Khadra’s reasons seem disturbing even to her grandmother.

It is in her marriage that Khadra becomes more conscious of her gender submission and the limits imposed on her by her husband. The first issue in their marriage is over Khadra’s habit of riding a bike. At Khadra’s insistence on riding the bike to the grocery store make Juma perplexed: “‘But-’ he looked puzzled. She was an Arab girl, familiar with Arab customs. He hadn’t expected her to be doing things that would embarrass him. If he’d wanted to have to explain every limit of proper behavior, he’d have married an American” (Kahf 227-28). In their discussion over the bike, Juma claims that she should not do it because it is not an Arab custom. When she insists, he uses religion as an argument, saying that “It’s unslamic. It displays your body” (Kahf 228). The interesting point in their discussion is that Khadra does not submit herself easily to her husband’s wishes. I believe that the reason for such a behavior is that Khadra’s discernment of right and wrong comes mostly from the Quran and since she has studied it, she is ready to confront her husband: “She laid a copy of the Quran in front of him ... ‘show me where in the Quran it says women can’t ride bikes in public?’” (Kahf 229). She is ready to confront him because the situation is not according to her beliefs, and not because she believes that her husband should not tell her what not to do. A proof of that is that after many arguments, Juma uses the Quran in his favor, saying that she should submit to him:

Finally, Juma pulled rank. “I forbid you,” he said, laying his hand on the bike seat. “As your husband, I forbid you.”

Khadra recoiled. She couldn't believe he would out and out say that, even if it was Islamically valid. Her father never said things like that to her mother. It was alien to everything she felt and knew. (Kahf 230)

Khadra's feelings are contradictory because despite acknowledging that Juma's speech is Islamic, she reasons that she was not raised that way. She believes that she does not have any patriarchal model of submission from her parents' s marriage. However, the most important point in the argument over the bike is that Kadra is distressed by a situation concerning gender that is sustained by the teachings of Islam. Because it is Islamic she obeys and she reasons that "[i]n the overall picture of a marriage, what was a bike?," but the narrator adds that "[t]he gears rusted and the tires lost air. Something inside her rusted a little, too" (Kahf 230), indicating that the total acceptance of what was taught to her is not so simple anymore.

The greatest change, as far as religion is concerned, comes from an episode about a course she takes at university. During the course she realizes that all "the Islam she knew before, she'd looked at from the inside. In Professor Eschenbach's class, she began to see what her belief looked like if you stepped away and observed it from a distance" (Kahf 231). It is during this course that Khadra experiences the necessary distance from the religious spaces she attends, the Dawah Center, to have a critical view of her beliefs, and because of that she is able to start questioning them:

There were moments during Professor Eschenbach's class in which Khadra felt as if she were standing atop two earth plates grinding as they moved in different directions. The one directly under her was the view of Islam she'd grown up knowing. The other was what she was catching glimpses of. A rift occasionally opened beneath her feet, but she steadied herself against it.

Otherwise, suddenly, what she'd always thought was right appeared wrong, and what she'd always known was bad seemed, for an eye-blink moment, good. It was terrifying. (Kahf 234)

It is then in the space of a classroom that Khadra faces what second generation immigrants experience in their upbringing in diaspora, that is, she feels she is between two different worlds and she is not quite sure which one is right. Therefore, Khadra starts questioning her religious grounds that, in turn, reflect in the reconfiguration of gender roles.

When her husband insists that she should be the one cooking, a role generally associated with women in her community, Khadra does not accept his arguments. When Juma shouts at her "I'm not a woman – I don't know HOW to cook!" (Kahf 241), he emphasizes that cooking should not be expected from a man. Khadra's answer shows that she will not abide by his patriarchal upbringing: "[w]ell, it didn't come with my BOOBS!" (Kahf 241).

Although Khadra's behavior seems contradictory to what is expected from a Muslim wife, she explains that the "Prophet never asked his wives to do anything in the house for him" but that it would take a "Dawah Center man to appreciate that sort of thing" (Kahf 241). At this point in the narrative, Khadra believes that her conceptions of gender roles are supported by her community. However, she only realizes that there is a fissure between her beliefs and the ones shared by her community when she is pregnant.

When she discovers her pregnancy she considers "I can't have a baby now" (Kahf 244) and she realizes that "she had never known anything more clearly or more urgently" (Kahf). But when she tells her parents of her decision, they do not support her choice, which is based on a teaching that she received at the Dawah Center that abortion is permitted considering it is done before the fetus is a hundred and twenty days. It is important to highlight here, that the Muslim community Khadra is raised within is created with the help of

her own parents. So the institution of her family is mixed with the one of her religious beliefs. When her father confronts her, Khadra takes a position: “I am not going to kill myself to fit into the life you have all mapped out for me” (Kahf 246).

Like Nazneen from *Brick Lane*, whose process of gaining control of her life goes through an awareness of her own body, it is through her body and through an understanding that she cannot let others decide about her own body, that Khadra’s changes take place:

Her self was a meager thing, scuttling behind a toilet, what she hadn’t given over of it to Mama, to Juma. Too much, she had given away too much. She will not give the last inches of her body, will not let them fill her up with a life she does not want. Feral, it was not a word but a spasm, the snarl of a fanged thing gnawing at a trap: no. No, no, no, no, no, *no*. (Kahf 248)

Her decision to go against her community and her parents provide her with the necessary distance to review her own beliefs and she reasons that she “wanted to abort the Dawah Center and its entire community” (Kahf 261-62) since she needs to discern what she believes in and what she does not. Like Gauri, from *The Lowland*, Khadra also decides that she needs to be in another space to recreate herself. She considers: “[w]here do you go when the first part of your life is coming to an end, and you don’t know what is yet unborn inside you? Where do you go when you’re in a free fall, unmoored, safety net gone, and nothing nothing to anchor you?” (Kahf 265). She decides to go to Syria to be with Téta for her retreat. It is important to notice that although her rupture with her beliefs happens in the diaspora space, she needs to distance herself from the place in which her beliefs and gender roles were given to her.

As discussed in the first chapter, in Syria Khadra decides to unveil herself but on her return to the US., she starts wearing her headscarf again. Back at home, she moves to a big

city where “she’d make it on her own, carve a life that would manifest gratitude and modesty and love” (Kahf 315). When she starts dating again, she realizes that the sex barriers are still difficult for her to cross: “[s]he knew, all right, what it was she was holding back from. Still she made the choice” (Kahf 353) since she “was not prepared to go that far with her body” (Kahf 354). It is important to notice that although she relies on her religious beliefs, she concludes that she is the one choosing and it is not an imposition from her parents or from her community. The same line of thought is observed about covering herself:

She was beginning to see that, of the covered and uncovered modes, she preferred the covered, after all, and she wore it more than not. It was a habit – hah, she thought, no pun intended! She was never going back to being a stickler about hijab. But it was something her body felt at home in. She knew this now from letting her body speak to her, from the inside out – rather than having it handed to her as a given. (Kahf 373-74)

Khadra is able to redefine herself in the diaspora space through a deconstruction and then a reconstruction of her religious beliefs. At the end of the novel she is represented more similarly to second-generation immigrants since she distances herself from the representation of her parents. It is also important to mention that the gender configurations she accepts are now her decision and not an imposition. In like manner, the same is observed about covering, which happens out of her own judgment.

In both *Brick Lane* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* the reconfiguration of gender roles is mediated through a reconfiguration of religious beliefs. In *Brick Lane*, it is possible to observe that religion is not so central to the main character as it is to Khadra from *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. I believe the reason for such a difference is that what is highlighted in

Brick Lane is the patriarchal society which is supported by religion. In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* the opposite is observed. It is religion, which also has a patriarchal background that is highlighted. In both cases, however, the main characters have to reconsider their beliefs in order to break up with the gender patterns from their cultural background.

The importance of space and the time spent in the diaspora space is paramount for the gender reconfiguration of the main character in *Brick Lane* as it is possible to see if we compare the characters who stay put and the one who is part of a diasporic movement. Nazneen has to free herself from the patriarchal roles she learned while growing up in order to make herself anew in the new space.

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* it is possible to observe how a religious belief influences the construction of gender roles since it portrays the upbringing of a Muslim woman inside a community with rigid standards of behavior. However, even being raised with more restriction than some of the characters who live in Syria and Mecca, Khadra eventually questions her beliefs and the roles she has performed throughout her life. It is at this moment that the diasporic space provides Khadra with the possibilities to allow her to make her own choices.

In conclusion, it is possible to observe that in both novels, even if in different degrees, the religious beliefs of the characters become an even harder barrier to cross as far as gender is concerned.

Final Considerations

Space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation.

(Massey 265)

It is not that the interrelation between objects occur *in* space and time; it is these relationships themselves which *create/define* space and time.

(Massey 263)

This dissertation is based on two understandings of space. The first is that space is conceived as a location in which social relations are constructed over time, and in this sense, each space has a specificity because of the relations established there. In this sense it is possible to say that each space has an identity that contrasts with the identity of other spaces. Changes might be observed in each space with the passing of time as this notion of space supposes a fluidity of identity caused by the interrelation of that place with the social relations established there, as it is claimed by Massey (*Space* 168) and McDowell (7).

The other fundamental concept is that of diaspora space that Brah conceives as a place that emerges out of migratory movements of collectivities. In the concept of the diaspora space, Brah places the subject in the center of her theorization since it is in this space that the identity of subjects are contested and reconstructed (Brah 181-93). Therefore, this work tries to shed light on how diasporic subjects who inhabit the diaspora space contest and reconstruct

the way they socially interact, with a focus on gender negotiations in the characters represented in *Brick Lane*, *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*, *The Lowland* and in *Americanah*.

Many of the sections of the first two chapters of this dissertation are opened with epigraphs from Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*. Otsuka narrates in her novel the Japanese diaspora in the United States before World War I, and she does it in a very creative way since there are not specific characters whose stories are narrated. Instead, the story is told through the perspective of different women, but the stories are all told in the first person of the plural indicating that their story is shared by many. In like manner, the two first chapters of this dissertation talk about the similarities that affect the lives of diasporic subjects portrayed in the four novels mentioned above.

The common experiences shared by diasporic subjects are a consequence of the space they inhabit and of the time they spend there. An example of that is the comparison made in this dissertation between the characters who remain in their country of birth and the ones who migrate. The distinct portrayal of Subhash and Udayan, Nazneen and Hasina and Ifemelu, Ranyinudo and Kosi demonstrate that the lives of the ones who migrate are distanced from the representation of the ones who stay put. In the new space, some of the identity constituents take a new position as it is observed with several of the characters. Being Black is not a part of Ifemelu's identity that she has to deal with while living in Nigeria, but it is the identity constituent that is highlighted when she moves to the United States. The same is observed with Khadra. Being a Muslim in a Muslim country does not draw attention to this part of her identity, but living in the United States being a Muslim has a new meaning.

Returning to the examples of Ifemelu and Khadra, it is just in the new space that being Black or a Muslim becomes central in the lives of these characters. It is through these identity constituents that other parts of their identities are negotiated. The issue is not only of being a

woman in a country that grants them more rights than the ones they had in their country of origin. The analyses of the characters in this work show that it is through the intersectionality of the identity constituents that are highlighted in the diaspora space that other parts of the subjects' identity are negotiated. Ifemelu experiences everything during her period abroad through the lenses of race. First, she has to learn what it means to be Black in the United States. After that, to know what it means to be Black and a woman, then what it is to be a poor Black woman and later, she has to face different stereotypes for being Black and dating a rich white man.

The same is observed in the lives of the other characters as they renegotiate their social relations through identity constituents that were not highlighted while they were living in their homeland. Through the analysis of the characters in *Brick Lane*, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, *The Lowland* and in *Americanah* it is possible to notice that it is through the identity constituents that come to the foreground in the diaspora space that the subjects' social relations are reconfigured. For this reason, I believe that it is the diaspora space and the time the subjects spend in this space that are paramount to the changes observed in the characters portrayed in the novels.

Gauri is the only character that seems not to fit in the pattern observed above as trauma is not generally considered to be an identity constituent. However, Steven Berman considers that trauma "can be incorporated into one's identity serving not only as a turning point or a reference point, but also defining one's life and purpose" (1). Therefore, I believe that if we consider that the traumatic experiences Gauri experiences in India become part of her identity, she can be analyzed in the same way that the other characters are. Her experiences abroad are mediated through her traumas since they work as a reference point to Gauri, that is, as a part of who she is.

The analysis of the diasporic subjects in the four novels also reveal that despite the specificity of each diasporic movement, the subjects often face similar consequences in their movement to another country. This dissertation portrays subjects from four different diasporic countries, each related to different diasporic movements, that is, from India, Syria and Nigeria to the United States and, from Bangladesh to England, with the intention to analyze the relocation process of different cultures in the host land. Despite the different cultural background, the characters of the novels chosen are often similarly portrayed as dislocated, hybrid individuals, who are connected to their homeland by memories and for that reason they identify abroad with those who share similar experiences.

Most subjects portrayed in the novels feel dislocated and alienated in the host country because of a specificity of their identity that is highlighted in the diaspora space. The diasporic characters from *Americanah* feel that their belonging is denied because of their skin color. Nazneen from *Brick Lane* and Khadra from *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* share the same religious beliefs, but the different spaces the characters inhabit, that is, England and the US, accentuate the distinct identity constituents of these characters. Being a Muslim makes Khadra feel alienated, but Nazneen, on the other hand, does not feel particularly alienated because she is a Muslim, but rather because of the patriarchal beliefs held by her husband who limits her acts, refusing to let her leave the house and learn English. The life of diasporic subjects are affected similarly as Clifford claims, but they are affected by the identity constituents that are highlighted in the new space (247). In other words, the cause of the subjects' feelings of displacement is caused not simply because they are immigrants but because of the way a specific space interacts with the identity constituent of the diasporic subjects.

The reconfiguration of gender roles happens in like manner, as they are going to be

contested and reconfigured through the specificity of a certain identity constituent that is highlighted in the diaspora space. Religion is going to be the identity constituent through which Khadra negotiates her gender roles in the diaspora space, as it is through religion that patterns of gender are expressed to her. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen becomes aware of how submissive she is to a patriarchal culture that is endorsed by religious practices. Race works for Ifemelu in the same way that religion does for Khadra and Nazneen since it is through race that she has to renegotiated gender roles. Finally, Gauri's compliance or rejection of gender roles are also negotiated through a specificity of her identity, that is, through the traumatic experiences she lived in India.

In Brah's concept of diaspora space, she claims that this space includes the entanglement of dispersion with those that stay put, and she also argues that this diaspora space will also be responsible for the reconfiguration of social relations because "they will undergo transformations as they articulate in and through specific policies, institutions and modes of signification" (181-90). She states that the reconfiguration of social relations often affect the diasporic subjects who, in the new space, feel free or driven to address changes in the way they used to socially relate. In other words, the subjects are not under the direct influence of the cultural constraints from their country of origin and may reconfigure their subjectivity.

This research addresses an issue that sheds light on Brah's statements. Although the subjects are undoubtedly affected by the diaspora space which promotes the reconfiguration of social relations, I sustain here that as far as gender roles are concerned, the reconfiguration will vary according to the specificity of the diasporic movement or to a specificity related to one of the identity constituents of the subjects. Through an analysis of the diasporic women portrayed in the four novels, it is possible to state that the gender reconfiguration of those

characters is mediated through trauma, race and religion.

This work stresses the importance of space and time for gender reconfiguration since the identity constituents that mediate the changes are in evidence only in the diaspora space. It is in the new space that race and religion are tangible identity constituents for Ifemelu, Khadra and Nazneen. Therefore, it is in the space in which they become aware of these identity constituents that their gender roles are reconfigured. The same is true for Gauri since the traumas she experiences are part of her identity and in the same manner of the other characters, she feels free in the new space to contest the roles imposed on her in her country of origin.

The analysis of gender configuration in the diaspora space shows that identities are systematically contested and reconstructed through specific identity constituents with the passing of time.

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