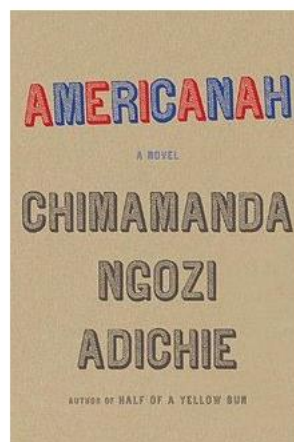
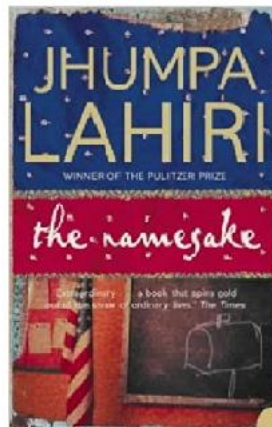
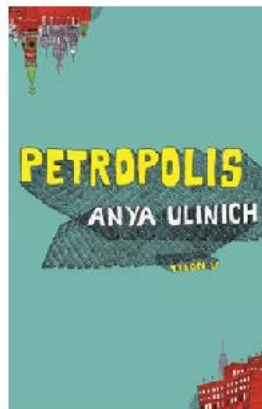


## *The Namesake, Americanah & Petropolis*

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The representation of hybridity in twenty-first century literature



### **Abstract**

This study examines in what ways hybridity is represented in twenty-first century literature, in the novels *The Namesake*, *Americanah* and *Petropolis*. The research uses these novels as a case study, considering them as individual aspects as well as in relation to each other.

Subsequently, the results of the research showed that hybridity is still present in recent migration literature. The ways that hybridity was represented were visible in the characters day to day life and were a part of the ongoing story of the novel. In these novels hybridity has been connected to a person's appearance, their language, religion, skin colour and even their names. Hybridity has not been limited a certain type of immigrant group, it has been present in cases of first-generation immigrants, immigrants with a colonial empire background or even second-generation immigrants. This has been visible from the small sample size given in this thesis.

**Keywords:** Hybridity, migration, diaspora, *The Namesake*, *Americanah*, *Petropolis*, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Anya Ulinich

## Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework	8
Chapter 2 – <i>The Namesake</i> by Jhumpa Lahiri	13
Chapter 3 – <i>Americanah</i> by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	19
Chapter 4 – <i>Petropolis</i> by Anya Ulinich	26
Conclusion	30
Bibliography	33
Appendices	
Appendix A	36
Appendix B	37
Appendix C	38

## Introduction

The theme of immigration is something that has been an growing topic of interest in literature over the years: “The increased significance of the migrant condition in contemporary society is, in fact, demonstrated not only by the exponential growth of texts produced by artists operating beyond national parameters but also by the flourishing tropes of dislocation as necessary to capture the fleeting momentum of the urban experience.”<sup>1</sup> However, the stories of migrants have been an important topic for the field of postcolonial literary studies since the beginning. In this field important critics and theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Néstor García Canclini and Gayatri Spivak have produced some of the most influential texts. Among those texts, hybridity has been a widely discussed term while gaining a lot of criticism. Postcolonialism is the recognition of material realities and discursive modes of representation established through colonialism still being present today, while challenging these colonial ways and ‘writing back’.<sup>2</sup> Within postcolonialism, Homi Bhabha was one of the principal theorists of the term ‘Hybridity’.<sup>3</sup> Migrants and the term hybridity is something that has a close connection as “the concept of hybridity [proved to be] very important for diaspora peoples, and indeed many others too, as a way of thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and cultural, racial and national purity.”<sup>4</sup>

Many novels and texts have been examined with this school and term in mind, because migration has continued to be a topic of interest for critic and reader.<sup>5</sup> It has been questioned why this appeals so much to readers and one of the reasons that has been given is that looking into migrant literature “tells us [...] what is happening in our own lives, mapping out where we come from and where we are going”.<sup>6</sup> I want to add to the discussion by looking at contemporary authors from different migrant backgrounds and their work, and look how these ideas have changed over the years and see if I am able to find a common ground in current works. The focus of my research will be on the novels *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri and *Petropolis* by Anya Ulinich. These novels have

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Ponzanesi, *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-colonial Europe* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 1.

<sup>2</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.253.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.253-254.

<sup>5</sup> Julie Mullaney, *Postcolonial Literatures in Context* (Chippenham: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

been selected mainly because of the background of the authors; they all have a migrant background but come from very different cultures. One author has a Russian background, another author immigrated from Nigeria, and the third author has connections to Bengali culture. By using not only authors from one specific background, but using different perspectives it should be possible to provide a better overview of the ideas of immigrants in America. It is clear to me that the voice of one person will not agree with an entire culture, that is why further research into each novel and its context will be done. *Americanah* has been a popular text for years now and the research that has been done on it will provide an interesting insight into the meaning of migration in the text. *The Namesake* has characters who are second generation immigrants who can provide a different perspective than the first-generation immigrant. The last novel *Petropolis* is written by a Russian Jewish author and it will be interesting to look for any elements of religion in the hybridity aspect of the novel. With the authors and main characters in the novels all being migrants, there will be elements of hybridity in their day to day lives. These elements should be explored and compared to each other and previous representations of hybridity. Therefore, my research question will be: In what ways is hybridity represented in *Americanah*, *The Namesake* and *Petropolis*? My hypothesis will be that hybridity is something that is very prominent in the lives of the characters and not something that can be easily fixed, but they may believe that it should not be an issue that has to be fixed. Although the characters will be from different backgrounds and cultures, the novels will show these characters with similar issues of identity and racism. Even though there might be similarities, I believe there will be differences in how the characters struggle with hybridity. Some characters will find it harder to connect with the culture of their background or parents, while other characters will find that not to be a problem and struggle with assimilation into a new culture instead.

Three chapters of this thesis will cover these novels and each chapter is going to attempt to contribute a general representation of hybridity by explaining my findings of postcolonial ideas in the text, with the focus on the idea of hybridity. The second chapter focusses on *Americanah*, the third chapter on *The Namesake*, and the fourth chapter on *Petropolis*. Each novel will be read and examined with ideas of postcolonialism and hybridity in mind. While doing this research, each author's background will be taken into consideration as well as the cultures they come from or feel a connection with. I will try to find ideas about immigration from each of these cultures and see if there are any significant differences or similarities with the authors' ideas and interpretations. These interpretations, in combination with ideas from other recent research related to the text should create a general

overview of current thoughts on hybridity. Before the discussion of the novels there will be a chapter on the theoretical framework of this project, which should create a clear overview of the theory briefly mentioned before and explain the ideas as they stand today. This overview will be created by looking into some of the most important texts on postcolonialism and do research on theories about this from the very start of postcolonialism and more recent work. Furthermore, the theorists and critics mention a difference between a culture's hybridity and an individual's identity. It will be very intriguing to look at these differences in general and look if there is something similar to a culture's hybridity in the chosen novels. If that is the case, I will compare this to the individual's hybridity to see if there are any differences that are of interest. This comparison will take place in the final chapter, which will bring everything together.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Hybridity and postcolonialism are connected and it is believed that “hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen to be the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial”.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, to understand hybridity and the concepts that are connected to it, it is important to explain postcolonialism. However, to get to the topic of postcolonialism we first have to discuss colonialism: “Colonialism was first and foremost a lucrative commercial operation, bringing wealth and riches to Western nations through the economic exploitation of others.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, colonialism was about the settlement of land, had economic aims at heart and enforced unequal relations of power which colonialism constructed between colonising and native peoples.<sup>9</sup> To go from colonialization to postcolonialism, decolonisation had to take place, which is “a process of overturning the dominant ways of seeing the world, and representing reality in ways which do not replicate colonialist values”.<sup>10</sup> Even though the colonial period has come to an end, there are still many consequences of colonial discourse. The former colonised people still went through injustice and challenging situations which no longer could be disregarded. These awful experiences and the cause of these situations were explained and written down in postcolonial works.

To explain the importance of postcolonialism to migrant literature the concept of diaspora has to be clarified. After all, not every migrant has a colonial background. Diasporas refer to “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions [and are] a central historical fact of colonization.”<sup>11</sup> Because of colonialism and its effects, enormous groups of people had to leave their place of birth and move to different countries. Studies of these movements and the consequences it has had on the many parties involved have been a development of postcolonial theories.<sup>12</sup> From the concept of diaspora emerged more ideas on migrants. Diaspora peoples often never culturally assimilated into their new country and the cultural practises and values they brought with them were discriminated against.<sup>13</sup> V. S. Naipaul, a writer of postcolonial works, came to the conclusion that migrants had a lot in common with diasporas peoples and that migration could change

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<sup>7</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 137.

<sup>8</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 46.

<sup>10</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 68.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.6.

<sup>13</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 239.

migrants' perception about their place of origin and the country they had settled in.<sup>14</sup>

Diasporas people are also migrants, but they often were forced to leave their country of origin. This is not always the case for migrants, they often leave on their own will. Naipaul however, found similarities between both of these groups' assimilation. Furthermore, recent research on diasporas discusses the idea of current migrations to still be considered as diasporas: "Many contemporary diasporas result from migration triggered by the global market economy rather than purely imperialist national ventures, although the latter are still a source of dispersal of peoples from throughout the formerly colonized world."<sup>15</sup> Both types of diasporas are still possible, and with those come problems with cultural assimilation that migrants can have. Being someone from a migrant background himself, Naipaul started to engage with "migrancy as constructing certain ways of seeing that impact upon *both migrants and their descendants* in a number of ways (although the response of different generations is not always the same)."<sup>16</sup> This impact sometimes has been forgotten by history, which makes it all the more important that it will be discussed by authors.

Some of the most influential works on postcolonialism are written by Homi K. Bhabha and he developed some of the principal concepts in this field. Homi K. Bhabha is an author of postcolonial texts and theories. *The Location of Culture* is one that is very relevant for this thesis and many of his ideas and thoughts from this piece of work will be used. The concepts of *ambivalence* and *mimicry* are the first to start with. Bhabha builds on the term ambivalence from Fredric Jameson, a literary theorist. Ambivalence is about the relationship between the colonizer and the colonial subject, with fluctuation in the complicity and resistance of that relationship.<sup>17</sup> In this relationship the colonizer does not want an equal partner but an obeying subject which requires this subject to follow and copy the colonizer's "assumptions, habits and values".<sup>18</sup> However, this is not attainable for the subject and will cause *mimicry*. "Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around *ambivalence*: in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."<sup>19</sup> Even though the colonised has the desire to succeed in copying the colonisers' habits, they often do not succeed, for example, when the subject will learn to act English but will never look

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.241.

<sup>15</sup> Ruediger Heinze, "A Diasporic Overcoat? Naming and affection in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43, no. 2 (2007): 193, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449850701430598>.

<sup>16</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 242.

<sup>17</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 311.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 122.

English and will not be accepted as English.<sup>20</sup> The process is incomplete. This is of course not solely the subject's responsibility. The coloniser is equally so, or even more so, to blame. The coloniser is trying to normalize its knowledge on the colonised often at the expense of the colonised own culture and language, Bhabha calls this effect "profound and disturbing"<sup>21</sup>.

The concept of *hybridity* is something that Bhabha was the one of the leading creators of in postcolonial studies. However, he was not the first one to discuss this concept, he further explained what hybridity was believed to be: "intermixing across boundaries of race, culture and language."<sup>22</sup> This 'hybrid' lives in the tense space of the 'in-between' which means they have difficulty in thinking about 'home' and 'belonging', they will be in a conflicted state because of this.<sup>23</sup> Migrants have many influences in their daily lives, they have the place they came from with its own cultures and norms and they have many experienced many surroundings on the way to their place of settlement: "His or her subjectivity is deemed to be composed from variable sources, different materials, many locations – demolishing forever the idea of subjectivity as stable, single, or 'pure'."<sup>24</sup> Once they have settled in their new country they undergo even more impressionable situations, all of these monumental circumstances together will influence the individual in such a colossal way they will be forever altered. While hybrid identities are considered to be unstable, Bhabha feels they have a 'stillness' about them which causes them to have a wandering image of the world and their own identity in this world.<sup>25</sup>

"Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves, like orderly pathways built from crazy-paving. Instead, they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription. They are border subjectivities, no longer reliant on fixed notions of home and identity to anchor them to a singular sense of self. Rather, the loss of these fixed ideas has been transformed into a hopeful new paradigm where motion, multiplicity, errancy, unpredictability, hybridity and impurity are gleefully welcomed."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 66.

<sup>21</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 123.

<sup>22</sup> Julie Mullaney, *Postcolonial Literatures in Context* (Chippenham: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 119.

<sup>23</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 252.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.253.

<sup>25</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 19.

<sup>26</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 254.

However, this state hybrids tend to be in does not constantly have to be a negative factor. Some have argued that this means that a hybrid is always in a creative flexible state.<sup>27</sup> Even though colonialism has ended, it still affects the world today with “hybrid identities and the multiplicity of cultural borders [being] permanent features of contemporary societies.”<sup>28</sup>

Identity is something that is closely linked to the idea of hybridity. But before that, the impact of Western dominance and oppression on the identity of people of colour, had been a topic of interest. Frantz Fanon a psychiatrist and philosopher wrote many influential texts in the field of postcolonialism. *Black Skins, White Masks* is one of these important text on the psychological effects of colonialism on the colonised.<sup>29</sup> The colonial system produced feelings of inferiority and paranoia in the colonised, which Fanon wanted them to resist.<sup>30</sup> One way the colonisers created these feelings was by the suppression of the colonised languages which ultimately impacted their identity “Therefore, to be cut off from a mother tongue implied a damaging loss of connection with one’s culture of origin”.<sup>31</sup> The loss of their own culture and the non-acceptance of the new country probably impacted the colonised identity and self-value monumentally. Furthermore, the on-going separation of the black people from the whites, and the persistent manifestation of superiority over these black people by the whites “generates a crisis of identification”.<sup>32</sup> When looking at more recent migrant research on this we find that the move from one’s country of birth to the place of settlement can make a big impact on someone’s identity. According to a research article on migrant ethnic identity and psychological distress the difficult adjustments a migrant has to make can be stressful to such an extent it will impact their identity.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, it states that the choices the migrant takes regarding whether or not they forget or maintain their own culture and whether or not they accept or reject the culture of the place of settlement, has a significant influence on their acculturation.<sup>34</sup> These decisions can influence issues like self-esteem or pride and eventually influence their identity.<sup>35</sup> Colonised and migrant people alike have

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.249.

<sup>28</sup> Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie, *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 188.

<sup>29</sup> Julie Mullaney, *Postcolonial Literatures in Context* (Chippenham: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 108.

<sup>30</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 173.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p.197-198.

<sup>32</sup> Julie Mullaney, *Postcolonial Literatures in Context* (Chippenham: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 108.

<sup>33</sup> Drew Nesdale, Rosanna Rooney and Leigh Smith, "Migrant Ethnic Identity and Psychological Distress," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 28, 5 (1997): 570, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022197285004>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.571

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

struggled and are still struggling with issues of identity and belonging because of their displacement.

In recent years research has been done on the topic of hybridity in migrant literature. In 2018 work on American women's writing related to liminality and hybridity was published. This focussed on the topic of American women's writing over the years, while looking at essays and novels.<sup>36</sup> However, the novels chosen for this thesis have not been researched yet which means there is still a lot to learn from the novels. Furthermore, this research has specifically been done on women's writing, and while the authors of the novels chosen for this thesis are all women, this was not the point to go from with my research. The notion of female writers will certainly be investigated, but at the same time the male characters and voices in and around the novels will most certainly be considered as well, previously these had not been highlighted in the research. Earlier research primarily focussed on migrants with a colonial background. It will be interesting to explore the novel *Petropolis*, which does not have an author of this same background. Studying this situation and searching for ideas of hybridity will be refreshing and hopefully insightful.

Additionally, research in relation to hybridity has either been focused on specific ethnic groups or has lacked a specific subject. With this thesis I aim to be somewhere in the middle. The research hopefully provides a representation of hybrids from different cultural combinations. By comparing these different representations, the idea is to find a more general idea of hybridity, which will (hopefully) be made clear by authors and characters from different backgrounds. Furthermore, it will be studied if characters are from a colonial background versus noncolonial or first-generation immigrants versus their descendants, and these features will be considered in relation to hybridity. This thesis should give a small sample size of a more overall sense of hybridity and the identity struggle among modern day immigrants and their descendants.

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<sup>36</sup> Kristin J. Jacobsen, *Liminality, Hybridity, and American Women's Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), accessed May 22, 2019. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-319-73851-2> abstract.

## Chapter 2: *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri<sup>37</sup>

*For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy - a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect.*<sup>38</sup>

Ashima Ganguli is the first narrator of the story and starts the novel by describing intense feelings of missing the place where she was born: Calcutta (now Kolkata), India. She is not conflicted about what she considers to be her home – it is most definitely Calcutta – and America is a strange and challenging place.<sup>39</sup> She creates a Bengali community within the Boston suburb they live in. Even though many neighbours do not see how the Ganguli family differs from any regular American family on the outside, the family feels very different, and the reader sees this in the way they eat, socialise and study for work or school. They plan regular trips back to India, to see family but also to feel at home again. The parents do not consider their house in America to be their home and they always feel like they left part of their life back in India. However, once they arrive in India with the children they do not fully fit in anymore either. They stand out from the locals and seem too Americanised.<sup>40</sup> This is an example of hybridity, they are not completely assimilated into the American culture and they are not considered to be Bengali anymore, they are believed to be Americans. In India they continue to live a very different life from the one they had in America. In America, Ashima was the perfect wife: cooking Indian food for days and preparing the best Indian social gathering. In India she forgets all of this, never cooks when they are there, and does not entertain a single time. They are tourists in their own country.<sup>41</sup> After this trip, the family seems to imagine America being home as well. Over the years, Ashima shifts between the places she considers to be home. She does not have great difficulty with it as a hybrid should

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<sup>37</sup> Summary of the novel in Appendix A

<sup>38</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 50.

<sup>39</sup> Tuire Valkeakari, "Railway Spine, Trains, Migration, and Mobility in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 28, no.3 (2016): 203, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2015.1114873>.

<sup>40</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 82.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p.84.

have according to Bhabha<sup>42</sup>, but she does shift between her definitions of home. At the end of the novel, however, she seems to be a real hybrid; she is splitting herself between two countries. She decides to live six months of the year in India and six months of the year in America. Not being able to choose one place as her true home, she embraces both and becomes a hybrid. This is one of the examples of hybridity in the novel. The remainder of the novel will be examined in the same way. This chapter investigate the meaning behind the issues the protagonist has with his name as well as the romantic relationships of the characters. The examples will be examined in relation to hybridity and will be and explained by extensive research and considerations on the topic.

Gogol differs from his mother Ashima Ganguli in many ways. In an article written on the novel, Natalie Friedman states that she does not believe Gogol to be a hybrid because he immediately declares America to be his home.<sup>43</sup> The idea of a hybrid was that the immigrant would not fit in with either culture, not in Indian culture nor the American one in this case. The main character Gogol believes himself to be completely assimilated into the American culture and feels completely at ease it is his heritage culture he has difficulties with. Subconsciously, he seems to still have problems with his heritage and does not know how to fit it into in his everyday life. Gogol does not feel part of his own family and his family's history, and for the entire novel he tries to construct his own identity. These identity issues deal with how he as an American born Indian fits into the American culture, but also how he fits into the Indian culture.

Gogol also finds issues with his heritage in the romantic relationships he has. In his relationship with Maxine he often contrasts the family life of Maxine with his own family's rituals and habits.<sup>44</sup> Also, he does not want Maxine to be introduced to his own family (he seems to be ashamed in one way or another) and while he is in this relationship he almost completely cuts himself off from his family, even going as far as not telling them he has moved. Furthermore, he practically becomes a part of her family, disconnecting from his own family and totally immersing into her family. And while he is part of this family, he notices how he and his family are different from her American family.<sup>45</sup> Once people know his heritage is not in America but another country they immediately begin to name the people

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<sup>42</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 252.

<sup>43</sup> Natalie Friedman, "From Hybrids to Tourists: Children of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *Critique; Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 50, no. 1 (2008): 114, accessed May 16, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.3200/CRIT.50.1.111-128>.

<sup>44</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 133.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p.140.

who went on vacation to India and they always would love to visit it. When Gogol mentions he is not from India but from a city in America (Boston) they are surprised. They believe him to have moved from India, not be born in America. When they talk about travelling to India they cannot believe he has to take medication before going there otherwise he would get sick, still not comprehending that he was born in America.

“‘But you’re Indian,’ Pamela says, frowning. ‘I’d think the climate wouldn’t affect you, given your heritage.’ ‘Pamela, Nick’s American,’ Lydia says. ‘He was born here.’”<sup>46</sup>

Gogol maybe accepts that he feels like a true American, but not everyone around him does. Only when his father dies he realises that Maxine and her family are not something he requires in his life. Maxine never understood his grief for his father, which is a difference in morals and values Gogol cannot overcome. Gogol did not understand his parents or felt a connection with them up until that point, with his father in particular. Gogol can only feel a connection between him and his father once his father has died.

In his early life Gogol seems to do everything he can to separate himself from his family. This is also part of being a teenager and finding your own independence in the world, but he takes it even further. Right before he leaves for college he decides to change his first name from Gogol to Nikhil. Up until that moment in his life he always felt his name did not fit him properly.<sup>47</sup> It is significant that Gogol continues to struggle with his name throughout the story: “Gogol is the protagonist and, beyond addressing obvious questions of personal identity, telling his story through a focus on his name reflects crucial issues of cultural identity, diaspora and multiculturalism.”<sup>48</sup> These issues that Gogol has are noteworthy for the discussion about hybridity and will be mentioned later on. When Gogol was growing up people always questioned his name, from kindergarten to high school. Gogol feels that with him being away for college in a couple of weeks this means he will be separate from his parents and he can change his name. Before he changed his name, he discussed it with his parents what the reason for his name was and why it is so ridiculous. His parents explained that Bengali people have ‘pet names’ they give to their children which they will be called by

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<sup>46</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 157.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.68.

<sup>48</sup> Ruediger Heinze, "A Diasporic Overcoat? Naming and affection in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43, no. 2 (2007): 193, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449850701430598>.

and formal names that will be on official documents. By accident, however, Gogol's 'pet name' has become his good name as well. This happened because there was a difference between the name giving in India compared to America: "Names can wait. In India parents take their time. It wasn't unusual for years to pass before the right name, the best possible name, was determined."<sup>49</sup> Gogol believes this does not fit, but when he asks his mother about this she tells him "'It's our way, Gogol,' [...]. 'It's what Bengalis do.'"<sup>50</sup> Gogol does not comprehend this and asks his parents again why he has been named like this. Gogol is in fact named after a Russian writer his father has admired during his lifetime. Gogol thinks this is the sole reason he has gotten this name but that is actually not the case. It is possible that him changing his name is not him going away from his heritage culture, but him trying to get closer to it. I argued that he wants to attempt to follow the original process his parents should have taken but were forced not to follow because of American procedures where you cannot leave the hospital without a name on the birth certificate.

It is significant that he has such immense troubles with his name. A name is one of the most crucial parts of someone's identity.<sup>51</sup> It appears Gogol thinks he can solidify who he is by changing his name and living up to that identity. Having trouble with his name can suggest that Gogol is struggling with his parts of his identity.<sup>52</sup> Also, it can be something that immigrants and their children do more often than Americans without a migrant background. After doing some research, Gogol found out that slaves often changed their names once they were emancipated.<sup>53</sup> While it seems rather excessive to compare Gogol's struggles to that of a slave, it is possible to find a comparison with him feeling like the name given to him does not fit his identity. Slaves often got their names from the masters who owned them and not their parents, so once they were emancipated they wanted a name that either suited them better or did not remind them of a horrible past. Gogol felt like the name his parents chose for him did not suit him. Because of this it is possible that he feels conflicted. So, he chooses a name that does fit him. Gogol also mentions that many immigrants changed their name at Ellis Island so why would he do it?<sup>54</sup> According to an article written for the Smithsonian museum website,

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<sup>49</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 25.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.99.

<sup>51</sup> Carole Hough and Emilia Aldrin, "Names and Identity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming*. : Oxford University Press, 2016: 4, <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199656431-e-24>.

<sup>52</sup> Ruediger Heinze, "A Diasporic Overcoat? Naming and affection in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43, no. 2 (2007): 192, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449850701430598>.

<sup>53</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 97.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

the reason for doing this was that the immigrants wanted to sound more American or believed it would help them to integrate into the local community more quickly and more easily.<sup>55</sup> Gogol did not do it to sound more American, because he chose an Indian name, but it could be possible he did this to simplify his position in the community. He had many issues with his name because, for example, the people at school never understood it. It did not sound Indian to them and neither was it an American name. Names have been closely linked to the shaping of one's identity.<sup>56</sup> In general it could be suggested that when your name is constantly questioned it will influence your identity. Furthermore, it possibly has something to do with his community "in cases of name-change, identity is communicated both towards the self, towards groups of which the person is a member (such as an ethnic group), and towards society as a whole"<sup>57</sup>. Gogol's name has always been questioned by his American community, but not by his Bengali community. It is possible that this last community understood his name in a different way: "Several studies have shown that the naming of children among immigrants and couples of 'mixed' cultural backgrounds is often handled through mixing names (or name components) from different cultural spheres in order to create a complex and flexible identity, or through the use of international names."<sup>58</sup> The Bengali community could see this in combination with their understanding of the nicknames Bengali parents give their children and accept Gogol's name without any problems.

Throughout the novel, Gogol remains Gogol to the reader. It might be said that this was deliberately done by the author: "Names and naming are some of the most significant parts of the strategy used by an author to present a literary character as a particular individual."<sup>59</sup> Gogol continues to struggle with his name. Because he only changed his name at the age of eighteen, many people still know him as Gogol and not as Nikhil, his new chosen name. Half the time people call him Gogol and the other half he is recognized as Nikhil, which he admits is confusing and something he is still not used to. Only after his father's

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<sup>55</sup> "Did Ellis Island Officials Really Change the Names of Immigrants?," Smithsonian, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/ask-smithsonian-did-ellis-island-officials-really-change-names-immigrants-180961544/>.

<sup>56</sup> Carole Hough and Emilia Aldrin, "Names and Identity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming*. : Oxford University Press, 2016: 4, <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199656431-e-24>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Carole Hough and Emilia Aldrin, "Names and Identity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming*. : Oxford University Press, 2016: 7, <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199656431-e-24>.

<sup>59</sup> Benedicta Windt-Val, "Personal Names and Identity in Literary Context," *Names and Identity* 4, no. 2 (2012): 283, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/osla/article/view/324>.

death and his marriage to Moushumi does Gogol become more comfortable with his names. Gogol states that he believes children should name themselves at eighteen years old, which confirms his belief in his own chosen name Nikhil. However, after this he also accepts his name Gogol. He finds a book by the author he is named after, something he always avoided up until then. Because of this book he starts to wonder about the people around him who call him Gogol leaving and pondering over his name.

“Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli, will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all.”<sup>60</sup>

At the end of the novel he has fought so long for people to forget his name Gogol and only call him Nikhil, but once he realises this might happen he is not content at all. He seems to finally accept this part of his identity, that he is not only American but also Indian. He accepts that he is both. Gogol has to come to terms with his Bengali background, while his mother Ashami has to accept America. Both these characters deal with their hybrid identity which is evident from the examples given in the text. They do this in ways that are different from each other, but in the end both of them accept their hybrid status.

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<sup>60</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 289.

### Chapter 3: *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie<sup>61</sup>

Ifemelu is a complex character, but one way to define her is as a confusing and contradictory character. The term confusing is used here in relation to her definition of home. As will be evident from this chapter, Ifemelu attempts to assimilate into American society by changing parts of her identity. These adjustments are going to be considered in the light of hybridity and will be explained accordingly. Regarding her home situation, it is not the case that Ifemelu cannot choose, or that Ifemelu herself is confused, but that she chooses America as her home for a while and after, without giving good reasons, she states that she believes Nigeria is her home. All the while she does not seem conflicted. She has no trouble declaring a home, she can just not stick with one. This is different from the definition given of hybridity in chapter one in a key aspect: a hybrid is supposed to feel they do not belong in either her heritage culture or her new culture. How confusing it may seem, Ifemelu feels that she does belong in those cultures, however she does not feel that she belongs there at the same time. Ifemelu tends to accept each place as her home whereas the people around her do not recognise her as being part of their culture, which links the story back to the idea of hybridity. They consider her to be a foreigner and not a part of the group she believes she has integrated into. This is evident in the case of the black community in America where she is not seen as black, but she is believed to be African.<sup>62</sup> Another good example is when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria and her friends see her not as Nigerian but call her 'Americanah'. The novel explains that an Americanah is "a girl in the form below them, who had come back from a short trip to America with odd affectations, pretending she no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurred *r* to every English word she spoke"<sup>63</sup>. This term is (slightly) reminiscent of the use of the term 'Paki' in *You Will Always Be a Paki* by Hanif Kureishi. In that story, Kureishi explains that the word Paki is used by a Pakistani about someone from both Pakistani and British descent to indicate that they do not belong to the original Pakistani population, because they live in Britain now. However, they do not fit in with the British either because the British use it as a rather derogatory way of speaking about immigrants from Pakistan. About the story that has biographical elements, Kureishi admitted that when people used this term about him he felt that he could not call either place home.<sup>64</sup> Not being able to fit in with the crowd from

<sup>61</sup> Summary of the novel in Appendix B

<sup>62</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 336.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p.65.

<sup>64</sup> Hanif Kureishi, "The Rainbowsign," *My Beautiful Laundrette and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996): p.81.

Pakistan and not with the British indicates a hybrid. In an interview with a French independent book chain, Adichie explains that the term *Americanah* is not used to talk negatively about Nigerians who have left the country.<sup>65</sup> She wants to make clear that she uses the term in the novel to emphasise the discussion about whether or not it is possible to come home after you have left the country.<sup>66</sup> It suggests that the novel means that the Nigerians do not feel that Ifemelu is 100% Nigerian anymore because she has lived in America for a while and now has different habits than before. When she does feel at home somewhere, it is because she has connections in a community with people that are similar to her/other migrants (possible hybrids). But as said before, the overall society does not accept her as their own.

Similar to the writer's own experience, Ifemelu also mentions that only once she had arrived in America did she notice that she was black, something American society made her aware of.<sup>67</sup> She of course knew before that she had a black skin colour, but it never defined her. In America the colour of your skin colour so important that her skin colour suddenly becomes part of her identity there. This is one of the factors that led her to start a blog: *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. She does this to understand what her skin colour means in this country and to figure out the best way to manage it. In the blog she writes her observations about the influence of her skin colour has on her day to day life and how she can accept it. Because of her skin colour Ifemelu has to deal with situations she never had to deal with before, often racist experiences.<sup>68</sup> Another reason for writing it is so she can comprehend what her blackness means compared to American black people and her relationship with them, because she soon notices that they consider her to be different from them and that she is not accepted as being the same. When she returns to Nigeria, she soon realises that skin colour does not matter the same way it does in America: "I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black"<sup>69</sup>.

Another example of hybridity can be seen in the way Ifemelu tries to change her hair and language in order to assimilate into American culture. These two things are considered to be part of your identity and changing them can be significant. A research article by Elena

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<sup>65</sup> librairie mollat (2015) *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rh5qNYU-jI> (Accessed: 7 June 2019).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu, "Transculturalism, Otherness, Exile, and Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*," *Matatu* 49, no.2 (2017): 390, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/18757421-04902008>.

<sup>68</sup> Chinenye Amonyze, "Writing a New Reputation: Liminality and Bicultural Identity in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*," *SAGE Open* 7, no.2 (2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017712773>.

<sup>69</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 476.

Rodríguez Murphy states: “Another image of the diaspora that can be found in Adichie’s narrative is that of a place where many of her Nigerian characters feel the need to try and erase their Nigerian identity in order to fit into American society.”<sup>70</sup> It is believed that Nigerians feel like they have to modify themselves for it to be easier to fit into American society. Ifemelu does this by attempting to modify her use of language and how she wears her hair in her everyday life. In the case of her use of language she decides to alter the way she speaks.

“‘I speak English,’ she said. ‘I bet you do,’ Christina Tomas said. ‘I just don’t know how *well*.’ Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Christina Tomas’s before she took the forms, she shrank. She shrank like a dried leaf. She had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate; she should not have cowered and shrunk, but she did. And in the following weeks, as autumn’s coolness descended, she began to practise an American accent.”<sup>71</sup>

After a meeting with an American student for an intake she notices how people judge her for her accent and makes a conscious decision to adjust this. Over the course of the novel, language and her accent are something that continue to appear and remain important issues. Repeatedly, she tries to alter the way she uses language to best fit the situation. An article written by Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu states that the use of language in the immigrants in novel “reveals their yearning for assimilation into the new culture”.<sup>72</sup> When she is in America she needs to sound as American as possible, but when she is in contact with people from back home or her family she adapts and uses language closely related to them, adapting her Nigerian voice and Nigerian self.<sup>73</sup> It is only after some years in America that she does not take on her Nigerian accent or personality anymore, and often she realises how American she sounds. Ifemelu trying to be more American by sounding more American could be a case of mimicry, the term from Bhabha discussed in the first chapter. In this case it is not the people

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<sup>70</sup> Elena Rodríguez Murphy, "New Transatlantic African Writing: Translation, Transculturation and Diasporic Images in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *Americanah*," *Prague Journal of English Studies* 6, no.1: 96, <https://doi.org/10.1515/pjes-2017-0006>

<sup>71</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 134.

<sup>72</sup> Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu, "Transculturalism, Otherness, Exile, and Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*," *Matawu* 49, no.2 (2017): 393, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/18757421-04902008>.

<sup>73</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 222.

around Ifemelu who made her aware of her failing attempt to reproduce the accent, she knows she has perfected it. It is Ifemelu herself who knows that what she is doing is not the truth, that it is all just an act. Despite the fact she tried to fit in more, she knows that it is a replica and not her real accent, so she decides to stop. After being in America for years Ifemelu decides that she will no longer express herself in the American accent:

“It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the *t*, the creamy roll of the *r*, the sentences starting with “So”, and the sliding response of “Oh really”, but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of lop, the curling of tongue. If she were in a panic, or terrified, or jerked away during a fire, she would not remember how to produce those American sounds.”<sup>74</sup>

She tells the reader that this is her real voice and it was truly her that was talking when she did not use the American accent. Even though she is still conscious of the fact that people might look at her differently when they hear her speak, or will treat her differently, she chooses not to compromise her language. This will have an impact on her later when she returns to Nigeria as well. However, a few years later when she starts a relationship with a black American man she decides to pick the accent back up. Ifemelu feels the need to speak like a real American when she is with this man which might indicate her having difficulty with choosing an identity. As previously stated, people call her Americanah when she returns to Nigeria, however, they comment on her language, finding her to not have an American accent.<sup>75</sup> It is not fitting for a true Americanah to not have the typical American accent once they return to Nigeria.

Another way Ifemelu tries to become more American is through her hair. Hair of people with a black skin colour can be different from people with a white skin colour. Before Ifemelu begins applying for jobs in America she has always had her hair in braids. Ifemelu’s friends advise her to stop doing this if she wants to get the job:

““Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 173.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.385.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.202.

It seems to be the case that in America people do not like braided hair, and to improve her chances of getting the position she starts to do her hair differently from what she has done previously. She begins using relaxer on her hair which will make it very straight and sleek, and according to her hairdresser she now has “the white-girl swing”<sup>77</sup>. After this she gets the job but feels this has only happened because she has changed her hair. She is still the same, but she believes that people will see her differently now. As time progresses, Ifemelu becomes extremely attached to her straight relaxed hair. However, one of the negative effects of relaxing your hair is that it can damage your hair badly. Her hairdresser tells her it is damaged so badly that she must cut it all off and let her hair go natural, so this is what Ifemelu does.

“Ifemelu was still staring at her hair. What had she done? She looked unfinished, as though the hair itself, short and stubby, was asking for attention, for something to be done to it, for *more*.”<sup>78</sup>

She finds her new hair to be awful and cannot even go to her work anymore, only when she finds an online community page where people encourage each other about black people wearing their hair naturally is when she dares to go outside again. According to an article written by Dina Yerima, Ifemelu eventually chooses her natural hair over what the norm is set by society around her:

“It is the adverse effect the relaxer has on her hair that opens her eyes to the new world of asserting her African identity through her hair in spite of challenges. Thus, she opts for the second option of foregrounding her indigenous culture in her expression of aesthetics, over Western culture.”<sup>79</sup>

However, back in Nigeria, natural hair is not something that the women often have. It seems that in neither place the way Ifemelu wears her hair is accepted.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p.203.

<sup>78</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 208.

<sup>79</sup> Dina Yerima, “Regimentation or Hybridity? Western Beauty Practices by Black Women in Adichie’s *Americanah*,” *Journal of Black Studies* 48, no.7 (2017): 645, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934717712711>.

Ifemelu also continuously talks about moments that fit her new skin or her new self (American or Nigerian). There are moments she feels completely American, for example when Barack Obama is elected to be president and she has followed his entire campaign. But there are also moments she feels herself to be completely Nigerian. This Nigerian self is questioned by herself when she returns to Nigeria after having been living in America for a number of years. She does not understand the environment in which she was born and does not believe this to be the real city, when she mentions this to people they tell her:

“You are looking at things with American eyes. But the problem is that you are not even a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!”<sup>80</sup>

Again, there is mention of her not being a real Americanah, but also that she still maintains her American point of view when she looks at the Nigerian city. However, when she starts to think about the different points of view she has, she realises that she cannot easily switch between them. She tries her best to change it, but she is uncertain about herself: “Of her jumble of feelings, she recognized only confusion.”<sup>81</sup> Over the course of her return to Nigeria people continue to call her Americanah after they hear her speak or react to something, or even call her “a real American”<sup>82</sup>. It is only when she is invited to a club she begins to feel like she is back in the right place again: “It’s called the Nigerpolitan Club and it’s just a bunch of people who have recently moved back, some from England, but mostly from the US.”<sup>83</sup> In this club of people who are just like her, she starts to feel at home again. Yet, again, new problems arise. In this club she notices that they are all magnetized towards restaurants and places in the city that remind them of America, which is something that Ifemelu does not want and was worried about. She cannot let America go but she starts to feel more and more comfortable in Nigeria again. Even though Ifemelu does not accept everything the group stands for, it seems to be the case that the only time Ifemelu feels like she belongs in either America or Nigeria, is when she finds a group of people who are immigrants or have emigrated just like her. In these communities Ifemelu’s characteristics are not questioned like

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<sup>80</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 385.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p.386.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p.393.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p.205.

they are when she tries to assimilate into American culture or tries to go back to her Nigerian friends and family. She remains a hybrid, but is accepted.

## Chapter 4: *Petropolis* by Anya Ulinich<sup>84</sup>

In an immigration novel it can be expected that difficulties with identity would start once the character left their country of origin; *Petropolis* is different from this in a number of important ways. These difficulties start already in Russia, the country of origin, because the protagonist Sasha is of mixed heritage. Her father is black with unknown biological parents, according to the novel probably of Russian and unknown African descent. Her father never knew his biological parents because he was adopted by Russians, and because of them he inherits a Jewish surname and heritage which he passes onto Sasha. Sasha's parents decide that Sasha should stick with the Jewish name even though at that time in Russia it was still dangerous and challenging to be Jewish. They did this to attempt to distract people from her black skin colour because according to Sasha "there were, after all, degrees of undesirable nationalities."<sup>85</sup> Early on in the novel it is clear that it is problematic for Sasha to fit into Russian society. The people around Sasha are not distracted by her surname and still notice her skin colour. They do not accept her as Russian and make this clear by calling her a foreigner, which Sasha tries to dispute.<sup>86</sup> She does this by telling people around her that she is just a very dark Jew, because as she has learned before being a Jew is better than being a person of dark skin colour in Russia.<sup>87</sup> In examining *Petropolis*, I hope to find more examples of hybridity and experiences of immigration and cultural assimilation. I attempt to do this by analysing the text and looking for an explanation of these words. With the help of secondary sources, I hope to present a clear picture of the situations the characters in this novel have experience because they are immigrants.

As said before, Sasha does not know where part of her family comes from and after her father leaves her and her mother, she decides to find him and figure out if he can tell her more about her family. Where you come from is a part of your identity and if you do not know where that is it is difficult to connect to that part of yourself.<sup>88</sup> Sasha looking for her father is her attempting to find a part of herself and learn more about her heritage. Sasha has to manoeuvre herself through several new situations and locations, which according to an

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<sup>84</sup> Summary of the novel in Appendix C

<sup>85</sup> Anya Ulinich, *Petropolis* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2007), 31.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p.30.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p.305.

<sup>88</sup> Joaquín Ibáñez-Alfonos, "The Influence of Family Context of Identity Processing," *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 10, no.3 (2015): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1017/prp.2015.6>.

article by Tintti Klapur is of importance to the hybridity discussion: “the continual shifting between various geographical, cultural, and linguistic spaces by contemporary Russian-American authors (particularly the work of Ulinich and Shteyngart), stresses the hybridity of the protagonists’ identity.”<sup>89</sup> She chases her father all the way to America but once she is there she realises she does not care for knowing him and his background anymore, she has gone through so many ordeal that she realises that she does not need him, “what she needed was legal residency, work and money”.<sup>90</sup> Later on however, she admits to feeling guilty for being someone of black heritage.<sup>91</sup> In America, people express their lack of respect for black people towards her which makes her feel bad about who she is.

While Sasha is coping with issues of racism, she also struggles with feeling at home in America. This leads her to save her money to be able to return to Russia. The people or the place itself are not the reason she does not feel at home (in America), but her longing for Russia and her home there.<sup>92</sup> However, once she returns to Russia she is again considered to be a foreigner, not because of her skin colour this time, but because people consider her to be an American now.<sup>93</sup> She is hurt when they no longer regard her to be part of them, but she still cares how American they believe her to be.<sup>94</sup> Her contradictory feelings signal her not being able to connect to one certain identity and show us her hybridity.

In the early years of her life Sasha did not feel the need to connect with the Jewish part of herself, she tried to ignore it and saw it as only being something that was her last name. The only things that made her Jewish were her last name and dark features, it was not because she felt a strong association with the religion.<sup>95</sup> In America she stays with an American Jewish family for a while and she believes that if she learns to practice the Jewish religion she will fit into that family and their community.<sup>96</sup> She does this by mimicking the family and calling herself Jewish, but she does not succeed: “While Sasha had settled for an imaginary Soviet-Jewish ethnicity, the attempts to turn her into a “real Jew” in the US prove futile.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Tintti Klapur, "Literary St. Petersburg in Contemporary Russian Transnational Writing: Anya Ulinich, Gary Shteyngart, and Zinaida Lindén," *Scando-Slavica* 62, no.2 (2016): 247, accessed June 11, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2016.1257771>.

<sup>90</sup> Anya Ulinich, *Petropolis* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2007), 239.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.235.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p.237.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p.281.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p.282.

<sup>95</sup> Sasha Senderovich, "Scenes of Encounter: The “Soviet Jew” in Fiction by Russian Jewish Writers in America," *Prooftexts* 35, no. 1 (2015): 116, doi:10.2979/prooftexts.35.1.07.

<sup>96</sup> Anya Ulinich, *Petropolis* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2007), 173.

<sup>97</sup> Adrian Wanner, "Russian Jews as American Writers: A New Paradigm for Jewish Multiculturalism?" *MELUS* 37, no. 2 (2012): 163, <http://www.jstor.org/bathspa.idm.oclc.org/stable/23273780>.

Religion is another part that can make up someone's identity and should not be ignored, even if it may not be part of country immigration:

“Rather, religion has to be accepted and integrated into the fabric of our whole identity. Only then would we have a glimpse of the whole of who we really are, individually and corporately.”<sup>98</sup>

However, according to research the idea of being of mixed background, or feeling mixed can affect someone's understanding of religion and, with religion being important to a person's identity, eventually someone's notion of identity being just one thing.<sup>99</sup> Sasha mimics the prayers and at one point in the novel calls herself a Jew but other Jewish people in her life do not consider her to be a Jew.<sup>100</sup> Sasha does not accept this because she feels that being Jewish is “the core of [her] identity”.<sup>101</sup> However, an article by Adrian Wanner about the novel states “the partially autobiographical protagonist seems to lose rather than gain a sense of Jewish identity through her relocation from Russia to the US.”<sup>102</sup> This arguably shows Sasha's struggle with her identity.

Another example of Sasha struggling with her sense of home and where she belongs is when she talks with her friend Jake about taking her daughter to America. Sasha explains that she is scared that her daughter will turn American which will mean she will lose her.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Sasha struggles with the idea of Asbestos 2 being destroyed and not existing anymore. It could be her realising that something she has considered to be home is now lost forever. Later on in the novel Sasha realises however, that she should not be worried about it, even though it might get destroyed or she will never return to the place, she will not need to because “Sasha herself is made of it”.<sup>104</sup>

As mentioned in the first chapter, the subjectivity of a hybrid can be made up of different sources and location. This is exactly what seems to be the case with Sasha. During her trip through America to find her father and eventually settle in New York, she meets a lot of new people, experiences many new situations and discovers many different places. This is

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<sup>98</sup> Julius Kei-Kato, *Religious Language and Asian American Hybridity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), accessed June 6, 2016. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/978-1-137-58215-7#about>, p.64.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p.65.

<sup>100</sup> Anya Ulinich, *Petropolis* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2007), 294.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Adrian Wanner, "Russian Jews as American Writers: A New Paradigm for Jewish Multiculturalism?" *MELUS* 37, no. 2 (2012): 163, <http://www.jstor.org.bathspa.idm.oclc.org/stable/23273780>.

<sup>103</sup> Anya Ulinich, *Petropolis* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2007), 309.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p.318.

possibly what influences Sasha identity and makes her into the woman she eventually is at the end of the novel. All these experiences lead Sasha to make her own family and settle in New York: "The emergence of a new hybrid cultural identity is manifested in Sasha's new family, in which cultural barriers are finally overcome and marginal creatures are able to find each other: the family consists of Sasha and her daughter, both Russian-African-Americans, and Sasha's disabled American Jewish lover."<sup>105</sup> In the end, Sasha knows that she is not like the average American or Russian, but she accepts that part of herself. She has come a long way to get where she is and struggled with racism and cultural differences. She now has her own new American family to feel a part of and has realised that Russia will always be a part of her even though Russia might have changed or not accept her anymore.

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<sup>105</sup> Tintti Klapur, "Literary St. Petersburg in Contemporary Russian Transnational Writing: Anya Ulinich, Gary Shteyngart, and Zinaida Lindén," *Scando-Slavica* 62, no.2 (2016): 240, accessed June 11, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2016.1257771>.

## Conclusion

There have been similarities and differences in the novels that have been discussed. In certain cases, the immigrants had to deal with racism while in other cases they were admired for their skin colour. In almost all experiences there was a form of trouble with language and accents. When someone did not speak the perfect accepted form of English they were judged for this and it made them stand out. Not being able to have this accepted form of English hindered their assimilation into the culture. Furthermore, it was interesting that once they did learn the accepted form English it impacted their acceptance into the culture back home. Their language made them stand out. Not only the language gave them issues, but also their newly formed habits and cultural norms. The immigrants bringing their own cultural practices with them did not limit their assimilation significantly, but them bringing back their 'westernized' habits was always noticed. Often immigrants tried to assimilate into the new culture by attempts of mimicry. The characters in the novels describe how they mimicked the people around them in speech and habits. They reproduced the way people spoke on tv or remembered how they themselves were addressed in a conversation and tried to mimic this, which made them feel a better part of the society.

While mimicry might be something that can be expected in a text with hybridity representation, there also have been some surprises. It was unexpected that would be so much emphasis on people's appearances, and it was not something that I had found much information. The emphasis that the novel *Americanah* (and to some extent *Petropolis*) puts on how important hair is, is something that suggests that there are many ways people can feel left out by a society. Furthermore, longing for their country of origin is something that could be found in all three novels, the immigrants struggled with the life and family they left behind and experienced strong emotions because of this. However, interestingly, even this feeling changed over a period of time. In *The Namesake* and *Petropolis*, the characters temporarily went back to the home they longed for, and while in *The Namesake* the first-generation immigrant characters found a home to come back to, in *Petropolis* this was not the case. In both these novels and *Americanah* the idea of home changed after a while. They either realised they would find a place to come back to in either the country of origin or America, or they knew that they had found a new home, not exactly in the country itself, but in the people they surrounded themselves with. This last example was present in *Americanah* and *Petropolis* where the protagonist made either a new hybrid family or looked for communities

that had done the same thing (the journey) as they had. These communities were the only place they felt they belonged. It was also the case in both these novels that the characters did not feel they had returned to an unchanged country of origin, that the country had been the same as when they had left it. Their countries had changed and not always for the better in their eyes. The ways that hybridity has been presented in the novels are significant. Hybridity has been connected to a person's appearance, their language, religion, skin colour and even their names. Hybridity has been present in many everyday activities and practices, and in more ways than a non-immigrant might even realise. It showed that a person's identity was influenced by different locations they visited, the people they met and what they considered to be their home.

In that sense the way hybridity has been presented does not differ significantly from the previous research that has been done in the first chapter of this thesis. The novels showed that most characters at one point struggled with what they believed to be their home. Their subjectivity seemed to be composed from variable sources and they often felt different from the people around them. However, they did not seem to be as unstable and conflicted as Bhabha made them out to be. Of course, they often felt out of place or misunderstood by the society they were living in, but it was not a constant state as Bhabha explained. The characters in the novels had moments where they were at peace with the situation and they understood what was going on.

While the three novels chosen for this thesis might seem as a small sample size, it does show that hybridity is still very present in everyday life and literature. Authors sharing their own or family's experiences provides the readers to be able to experience part of the struggles many immigrants had to go through. Hybridity has not been limited a certain type of immigrant group, it has been present in cases of first-generation immigrants, immigrants with a colonial empire background or even second-generation immigrants.

This research clearly illustrates the ways hybridity is presented in these novels, but it also raises the question of this being similar to all immigrants' stories. While *Americanah* is a novel that has been discussed to some extent before, *The Namesake* and *Petropolis* had not received that much attention. Based on the conclusions from this research, further research could be done on a wider group of immigrant writers, because this sample size does not represent every immigrant writer. It is important to hear as many different voices as possible and look for similarities and differences. Even though there might be things that many immigrants have in common, there are also enough examples of how people who come from different countries experience situations differently. This might be because of their skin

colour, the language they speak (or do not speak) or the cultural habits they are used to. It is important to look at all these stories.

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## Appendix A

### Summary of *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri:

Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli are a Bengali couple that move to Cambridge, America after they are married in Calcutta, India. The story starts with the birth of their first child, Gogol Ganguli. However, this was not supposed to be his name. It is Bengali custom to have the name chosen by a family elder who will chooses a proper name for the child, while the parents choose a private, or pet name to call the child at home. While the Gangulis wait to receive a letter from a grandmother with the child's name Ashoke chooses the baby's pet name to put on the birth certificate. They never receive the letter and the child's pet name is now also his good name. He chooses to call his son Gogol, after the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, because he credits a book of short stories by Gogol with saving his life. When he was younger and living in Calcutta, Ashoke was on a train that derailed, throwing the train car he was in into a nearby field. He had been reading a book by Nikolai Gogol at the time, and was only able to get the medics' attention by using pages from the book to make noise. As Gogol grows up, he does not like his name and he continues to struggle with it throughout the novel. Gogol attends university when he decides to legally change his first name to Nikhil. Before Gogol finishes university his father tells him the story of why he has been given the name Gogol, and Gogol begins to regret his decision to change his name. After completing university, he moves to New York to become an architect. He starts a serious relationship with Maxine, a girl from a wealthy family and he feels right at home with her. He spends more and more time with her family and starts to ignore his own, until he learns his father has unexpectedly died. After his father's funeral he decides to break up with Maxine and a year after his father's death his mother suggests Gogol should go on a date with a Bengali family friend, Moushumi. Gogol and Moushumi start a relationship and soon marry, but the marriage fails as Gogol and Moushumi are different types of people and Moushumi has an affair with another man. The novel ends with Gogol packing up his childhood room, because his mother is leaving for Calcutta. While he is packing he finds a book written by the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, given to him by his father many years ago. It is in this moment Gogol fully accepts his name and begins to read the book.

## Appendix B

### Summary of *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie:

The story begins with the protagonist Ifemelu in America, preparing to return to Nigeria after having been in America for around fifteen years. Ifemelu looks back on her time in high school in Lagos, Nigeria where she met Obinze. The two teenagers fall in love and continue their relationship throughout their time at university. The universities in Nigeria seem to be on strike constantly, which is a reason for Ifemelu to go to America to continue her studies there. She is able to receive a visa while Obinze stays in Nigeria, and Ifemelu decides to move in with her aunt Uju in Brooklyn who has come to live there a few years earlier and continue her university education. While Obinze and Ifemelu try to continue their relationship, Ifemelu has trouble earning money and eventually has to perform sexual acts in return for money. She is ashamed of this and immediately ignores Obinze, breaking all contact. After a while she finds work as a nanny, and through this job she meets a wealthy white man named Curt and they start dating. They are together for a while, but Ifemelu is bothered by his inability to understand her racial and identity struggles in America which lead her to cheat on him and they break up. Ifemelu starts to write her blog: *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Black (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. Her blog is very popular, and she is invited to speak at many events and at one of these events she meets Blaine and they start dating. While this is happening Ifemelu also receives a fellowship at Princeton which leads her to move there. After some time there, she decides to move back to Nigeria, breaks up with Blaine and tries to get in contact with Obinze again. Obinze and Ifemelu keep in contact while Ifemelu returns to Lagos and gets a job at a local women's magazine. However, Obinze has been married since his break from Ifemelu and his new contact with her leads them to start an affair. Ifemelu wants him to end his marriage to his wife which is not something Obinze wants to do since he has a child to consider. This disagreement causes Obinze and Ifemelu to lose contact for several months. After this time Obinze shows up at Ifemelu's apartment and tells her he has left his wife and wants to start a relationship with her again. The novel ends with her letting him inside.

## Appendix C

### Summary of *Petropolis* by Anya Ulinich:

Sasha Goldberg lives with her mother Lubov in Asbestos 2, Russia. At the age of ten her father left her and her mother to go to America and chase better job opportunities. Sasha's mother has pretended that her father never existed and insisted on Sasha excelling in either a sports or art form. Sadly, Sasha is not gifted like that, and she does not take her schooling seriously, leading her to spend a lot of time with her friend's brother during school hours. They start a romantic relationship and Sasha falls pregnant with his baby at the age of fourteen. Her mother makes her give the baby to her to raise Sasha's new-born daughter as her sister while she tries to send Sasha away to school in Moscow. This does not succeed, because Sasha sees an advertisement about Russian mail brides and she applies for this to go to America, to find her father. Without telling anyone Sasha ends up in Arizona, America and lives with her fiancée Neal. Before they get married Sasha leaves him and ends up in Chicago with Russian acquaintances she has made. There, she tries to get a green card which leads her to end up with the Tarakan family, a Jewish American family who will let her live with them while they help her get the green card. However, Sasha learns from the Tarakan's youngest son Jake, that his parents have no intention of letting her go. Jake helps Sasha find his father, who turns out to be in New York, and Sasha is able to escape, leaving Jake behind. In New York she finds her father who now has a new wife, Heidi and a young son. She lives with them for a while but is not happy. Sasha struggles to find a connection with her father and decides to move out while she has found a new job. While this is happening Sasha also wants to return to Russia to get her daughter. She visits Russia a couple of times but while her mother is alive she will not be able to take her daughter with her back to America. After a while Sasha tries to get into contact with Jake again who happens to be living in New York as well, they start a romantic relationship. Suddenly Sasha receives the news that her mother has died and once again she returns to Russia, but this time to bring her daughter to America. Back in America Sasha lives with her daughter and Jake. She is no longer in contact with her father but often meets with Heidi and her son, Sasha's half-brother.