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1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to analyse hybrid identities on the basis of two books, respectively entitled *Wife* and *No No Boy*. The first one is centred on a young Japanese American trying to sort out where he belongs to, while the other is about an Indian woman moving to the United States. Both novels demonstrate how difficult it is to be torn between two identities and how it is not possible to talk about having a stable and fixed identity.

The second chapter of this thesis provides a brief insight into how cultural identities have, historically, come to be seen as something that is indefinite, and how America is a nation made up of many different nations and identities. Furthermore, the chapter also summarises, briefly, how Japanese and Indian Americans have settled down in the USA.

The third chapter and fourth analyse the aforementioned books *Wife* by Bharati Mukherjee, and *No No Boy* by John Okada, showing just how complex cultural identities can be. Both books demonstrate that cultural identities are determined by factors such as personal experiences, surroundings and changes in society -- and not by something like race alone; just because a person is born into a particular culture does not necessarily mean that they shall feel closer to it. Both characters face hardships because they cannot do not torn between the culture they were brought up in, and the influence America has on them. The fifth chapter deals with the differences and similarities in the two books.

2.1 Concepts of Identity

For centuries people believed that culture as well as identities were stable and fixed. Thus, they were not subject to change and anything that did not fit into the picture was shunned as different or not belonging to it. Because culture was viewed as stable and fixed, people believed that everyone was the same, that everyone shared a mono-cultural identity and that, if you were to be viewed as part of that community, you had to belong to that culture. Culture in this sense did not only mean sharing the same religious beliefs or behaving in a specific way, but also sharing the same background and not having as fluent physical attributes. For example, even though Native

Americans had lived in America for centuries, they were -- essentially -- not viewed as Americans because they looked different, spoke differently and did not adhere to the same customs.

So, for a long time, anyone who did not fit in was shunned and ostracised or -- if you could not chase the 'other' away -- made to live in ghettos, where they did not present a threat to what was viewed as 'American'. American in this case being white, educated and believing in Christian morals, ignoring the fact that the first Americans had been a mixture of various national identities. While Americans were viewed as good and civilised, the other -- be it Native American, Asian or African American -- was viewed as sinful, filthy and something that should be frowned upon.

Any intermingling between the cultures was -- if existing -- a total taboo topic and -- if discussed openly -- seen as something of a 'freak of nature', an abnormality. Carmen Birkle, for example, points out that miscegenated children were viewed as being inferior to other children due to being frailer in constitution and prone to die more quickly. However, changes in society and the rise of immigration led to a crisis in the late nineteenth century, forcing people to reevaluate their opinions.

It was not only because immigrants were aiming to be recognised as Americans, but because there was an upheaval going on in the social world: there were mixed marriages and mixed children were not, as expected, becoming a rarity, but commonness. They might have been criticised and treated badly, but it was no longer something that only happened because of rape. Actually, Carmen Birkle points out that a large number of early American writers were aware of the fact that the world was changing and that miscegenation or hybridisation were among these changes.

On the one hand, people tried to stick to old beliefs -- holding onto them desperately like to logs during a flood -- but, on the other, some were starting to embrace the changes and firmly believed the world could become a better place if, instead of running away from those problems, they were accepted. Indeed, during this time period, a new movement was called into being that

tried to find a solution between what was seen as a loss of self and the discovery that identity is not something fixed, but made up of various particles. This movement, unlike the ones that tried to stick to old beliefs, sought to include all human beings into its study, less interested in preserving but finding out what the core of human existence was, and aimed to create a new self that was made up of those various particles.

This movement was called 'modernism' and can be, in terms of historical context, roughly placed around the time between 1880 till the 1920s; it includes a lot of disciplines, ranging from literature, philosophy, psychology to ethnology. As already mentioned, the aim of this movement was to cope with the changes in the world. Carmen Birkle says

All the modernist groups shared the real experience of discrepancy between fragmentation and the desire of wholeness which was reflected in literary representation and new approaches in the human sciences. The basic idea of the fragmentation of a formerly stable and unified self into various parts in Freudian or Jamesian psychology was always accompanied by the utopian hope to reverse this process (Birkle 20).

Human fragmentation or, better said, cultural pluralism as opposed to monoculturalism was, in the United States, first discussed by the philosopher and psychologist William James in his lecture "The One and the Many" taking place from 1906 to 1907. Unlike monoculturalists who emphasised that culture and identity were fixed and unchangeable, James suggested that the world was made up of many identities that existed at the same time and often interacted, but could never be dissolved into one whole.

In terms of psychology, as shown in his work *The Principles of Philosophy* published in 1890, he defined the human self as something that is a stream of consciousness. He believed that thought changed unalterably and could never be regained once lost. However, despite that, he believed that -- because the various selves are unified by one organising unity, referred to as a 'common whole'-- thoughts feel continuous, and thus, the consciousness remains stable. As to what he considered the common whole, Carmen Birkle states

Thus, he recognizes an organizing authority, the "common whole", behind the different parts; he sees the self as fragmented but held together by the experience of continuity or the common whole. (...) James's theory of psychology shows that in the same way he sees the body of a country as divided into different parts, he also perceives the individual self as divided into different parts, he also perceives the individual self as divided (into

material, social, and spiritual selves, and the pure ego). In both his philosophy and psychology, William James describes the tension between pluralism or fragmentation and the human desire for and illusion of unity (Birkle 22).

His European counterpart was Sigmund Freud with his theory of the id, ego and superego. Freud also believed that the self was made out of separate and conflicting parts or fragments; they could not operate on their own, however, because Freud believed that all those fragments were all 'within one'. Freud was of the opinion that those selves were in balance, and -- according to his theory -- monoculturalism is a myth because its believers ignore that they are only part of a whole.

In his work *Das Unheimliche* published in 1919, Freud described that part of the self that is being ignored or repressed as the 'uncanny'. This means that the human being has two selves -- one that he or she sees as familiar and accepts because it is non-threatening, and the other self, which is viewed as unfamiliar and, because of that, rejected. Sigmund Freud maintains that while the other is always part of one's self, one fears it because it is unknown and can only be made familiar by confronting it. In the case of dealing with foreigners -- who are often viewed as the uncanny, though they are, in fact, just another part of the self (i.e. humankind) -- can be made familiar in two ways. Either you reject them through the means of segregation, or embrace them -- which can be achieved through assimilation.

Further undermining the ideas of monoculturalism, Carl Gustav Jung pointed out that all people shared a 'collective unconsciousness'. For him, this collective unconsciousness was something that transcended all individuals; he believed that what all people shared in common were specific ways of behaviour that were applicable everywhere. According to him archetypes and instinct were part of this collective unconsciousness.

Jung's belief that human beings all shared the same unconsciousness paved the way for literary modernists to attempt to analyse this "sameness" of humanity by showing that myths are the same in all cultures. Furthermore, it made ethnologist James Frazer with his multi-study *Golden Bough*, published from 1890 to 1936, pinpoint that human behaviour originated from rituals, taboos and myths. Despite the fact that he considered myths to be unscientific, Frazer pointed out

that myths were, more or less, existing at the same time and that these primitive cultures shared similarities in their myths as well as sexual impulses. This made his work the equivalent to Freud's concern with human sexuality in psychology.

Other scholars such as Ernest Cassirer or Roland Barthes also viewed myths as a representation of the unconscious, as something that is the same everywhere and created by the human mind, according to the same ideas. To sum up why myths are important, the Carmen Birkle says

The universal qualities of myths and archetypes reveal that American nationalist or monoculturalist myth-making at the turn of the century was not unique but a manifestation of the human desire for oneness, shared by people world-wide but based on the discrepancy between the ideal and various realities and the rejection of the other. Aesthetic modernism used myths to connect to cultures worldwide. Additionally, ethnic modernists (...) evoked ancient myths to expose otherness as a monocultural construct, and to emphasize the ultimate equality and difference of all human beings (Birkle 26).

Other ideas that ran counter to monoculturalism were philosophical ideals such as the 'universal' and the Hegelian 'concrete universal'. The 'concrete universal' can be defined as something that aims to achieve universality through the depiction of the particular. For example, Birkle states that all elements of a poem are a contribution to this universal idea.

However, Birkle also claims that universalism runs the risk of being used for tyrannical purposes, when -- for example -- a certain idea is considered to be the absolute truth, and she also questions who has the power to decide what is universal or not. According to her, monoculturalism is nothing but an attempt to make one idea seem universal, in other words seem like the unimpeachable truth. Yet, the Birkle maintains that there is a difference between philosophical and political notions of universalism; philosophers, unlike politicians, do not reflect on political issues, but their ideas transcend them. This means that their ideas go beyond issues such as ethnicity, gender or class. Instead, their ideas are intended for all humans.

As a summary, one can say that some people saw modernism, as opposed to monoculturalism with its belief in fixed and stable identities, as capable of changing the world. Indeed, the demand for newness in this time period can be best seen in Ezra Pound's declaration of "Make it

New!” And novelty was achieved -- not only in literature, but also in philosophy and many other areas (Birkle 9-28).

2.2 *The Melting Pot*

Among women, African Americans and Native Americans who tried to re-shape their cultural identity by breaking away from hitherto established ones, there were also other people who actively defied the notions of monoculturalism. One of them was the British-Jewish Israel Zangwill who wrote a play entitled *The Melting Pot* published in 1905; the play deals with a Jewish family living in New York and how some of its members view America as a melting pot of all nations and races. However, in the long run, it is revealed that immigrants only mingle with each other and not with people who are typically considered American -- namely white Anglo-Saxon Americans. In the end, this melting pot is mainly about new immigrants intermingling and mixing so much with old ones that, lastly, all cultural differences disappear.

The Jewish American philosopher Horace Kallen opposed this idea. In his work *Democracy versus the Melting-Pot* that was published in 1915, he supported cultural pluralism, affirming it was a human right to be different, and not to be forced to give up one's identity. He also thought that being part of a certain ethnic group was something an individual belonged to and could not distance him- or herself from all that easily. According to him, Americanisation was not about assimilation or miscegenation, but something that enabled various national cultures to live together in cooperation.

Another person who thought about the changing society in America was the African American scholar W.E.B Du Bois. He was one of the first to realise that African Americans as well as other ethnic groups had a double consciousness. Unlike other African American scholars of his time, he rejected the idea that African Americans had to go back to Africa, claiming that African Americans were, more or less, nothing but black foreigners there, and that they had nothing to do with that country. In the year 1903, he published a book, in which he defined his theory of double consciousness; his theory was influenced by William James, under whom he had studied at Harvard, and he also believed that the self is fragmented, but kept together by a self-organising

unity. Du Bois saw the self as a hybrid being, as a self and the other -- he described this phenomenon as “two warring souls in one dark body”, in which he means that Africans Americans were torn between being African and American. In his own words, Du Bois describes double consciousness as follows

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (quoted from Du Bois, 1903).

Du Bois believed that this problem of being torn asunder by two conflicting ideals could only be solved through merging. However, merging for him was not about giving up on being African or becoming totally American, but to merge so that it was possible for an African American to remain loyal to his roots without becoming a laughing stock.

In other words, he believed that it was necessary for African Americans to realise that their roots were important and that these roots conveyed an important message for the rest of the world, but also to become American because America also had an important mission -- too important to be ignored. This means that he desired transculturation, which he saw as a co-operation between what was seen as being American and ethnic groups. He saw that America was important and that ethnic groups were American because they were so by their birth, citizenship and language, but also stressed the importance of not giving up one's origins. His vision of America was one that was multi-faceted, made up of various ethnicities, but bound together by the leading principles of being Americans.

The concept of the melting pot was not only criticised by Horace Kallen, but also by the Jewish cultural critic Randolph S. Bourne. In an essay entitled *Trans-National America* that was published in 1916, he maintained that, while Americans were surprised how easily immigrants were becoming Americans by being assimilated, this did not mean that they were giving up on their culture. On the contrary, he pointed out that the more American these immigrants became, the more distinctly German, Polish or Bohemian they became as well. The simple act of assimilation did not wipe out their origins, but only made them cling to their national customs

even more. Furthermore, he stated that America would be shaped by those immigrants as well, and that they would redefine what being an American meant. For Bourne the concept of transculturation meant that various cultures intermingled and exchanged ideas without having anyone losing sense of where they came from.

Moreover, Bourne did not make any distinctions between various groups of immigrants because, as he pointed out, most Americans were the descendants of foreign citizens. Also, he was less concerned with Native or African Americans than his colleagues, but the role new immigrants would play in the shaping of America. He pleaded against monoculturism because he believed that, otherwise, America would become bland and colourless; he felt it was important to preserve one's culture, so that people could live together in peace and harmony.

He also pointed out that America did not have one unique culture, but was -- in fact -- a federation of various cultures. Therefore, he believed that America, because of its having so many immigrants coming from so many different countries, should play the leading role in a new world, where people were mobile and everyone was simply a citizen of the world. He pleaded for dual citizenship, so that immigrants could, while being Americans, still maintain ties with their native land. With theories such as this, one could say that Bourne certainly was among the first to initiate a discussion about the globalisation of the world.

In his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* published in 1993, Stuart Hall defines diaspora as something that can only exist through hybridity. In order to survive, one has to maintain some ties to an (imaginary) homeland, but also constantly transform one's identity. The homeland itself has to be reproduced too -- through memory, history and constant interpretation. An imaginary homeland is not something that simply exists, but -- in order to be a meaningful part of one's identity -- has to be made into something that people can relate to.

Diaspora is a term that has undergone a lot of shifts in meaning. Originally, it referred to a positive experience: the word derived its origins from Greek, and included the verb 'to sow'. So diaspora was seen as a form of migration that was profit-orientated and beneficial for people. However, beginning with the forced displacement of Jewish people from their homeland, the

term came to be associated with negative connotations; it came to be understood as something that tore people away from their homeland, forcing them to live in new surroundings while still trying to maintain ties to their home (and wishing to be there, instead of being forced to live in exile). Of course, it not only refers to Jews, but also to African Americans, Armenians and even Native Americans, despite James Clifford's claims that they have not lost their roots, and can, thus, not be counted as being victims of diaspora. Lastly, as Salman Rushdie says, all victims of diaspora share an imaginary homeland -- which they dream of, but have lost.

According to Robin Cohen, cultural diaspora exists as well. It exists, for example, in the case of Chinese immigrants in America and their creation of Chinatown. Chinatown is a place where the Chinese can be themselves without becoming part of American society. Cultural diaspora is a term explaining migration that happened for reasons other than displacement, expulsion or economic grounds. For example, sometimes immigrants settled in the USA for religious reasons. These immigrants resisted intermingling with other groups, thus keeping to themselves and making it easier for them to dream of their homeland.

Postethnicity is a term that does away with defined categories of race and ethnicity. In his work *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995), David Hollinger saw postethnicity as something that was voluntary, that understood that communities were based on common descent, but was also appreciative of new communities which incorporated people from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. Moreover, it defied the claim that traditions and shared values were formed through familial ties and common history, but also understood that specific traditions were not universal, but culture specific. In other words, as Carmen Birkle says

Therefore, postethnicity with its emphasis on voluntary affiliation and openness of ethnic identities does not do away with cultural difference, but emphasizes the right of each individual to choose his/her identities and the interdependence and interaction of different cultures in the sense of mutual enrichment (Birkle 45).

Furthermore, Hollinger believed that, while races did not exist, racial prejudices did. In order to protect oneself against racism, Stuart Hall claimed that ethnicity is necessary because it enables people to speak about their identity. He believed that it is necessary to belong to some collective identity -- a collective identity forms a wall of defence against a racist society, so to speak. Thus,

ethnic identity can be seen as a construct that enables a specific group of people to defend themselves against mainstream culture.

Thirdspace is a term that was brought into being by the geographer Edward Soja in the year 1996. It describes space as something of a social construct, i.e. Thirdspace describes the interaction between human beings and space. It is a product of the imagination and yet real, it is not simply the equation of realities and imaginations of the First and Second Space. It is, in fact, the product of their interactions. Moreover Soja points out that, while Thirdspace is the product of the interactions between First and Second Space, the original spaces are not left behind, but their structures are simply altered, i.e. made into something new. This re-structuring happens selectively, and opens up new alternatives from two opposing fractions. Edward Soja likens it to the fictional Aleph, a place of harmony where all places are.

The Third Space allows for conflicting ideas to meet because geographical boundaries are extended, so that identities that have been considered opposing and incompatible can merge and exchange ideas. It is a space where clashing ideas can interact without one being considered superior to the other. One can be a lot of things at the same time without provoking a storm of scorn or even persecution. Third Space opposes monoculturalism.

In cultural-linguistic theory, Third Space is nothing but a process of hybridity. Homi Bhabha claims that all forms of culture are part of this process. He believes that hybridity displaces any claim of the original cultures being untouchable or fixed in meaning; that one can only gather new meaning or new positions from this process of intermingling (Birkle 32-48).

2.3 American Exceptionalism

In her essay entitled “Exceptionalism, Authenticity, and Cultural Difference” published in 2007, Deborah L Madsen examines the issue of American Exceptionalism. American Exceptionalism can be defined as a term that identifies all Americans as being the same -- namely, a group of people that are elect, disciplined and play a formative role as the world’s leading power. America plays a dominant role because of its global importance, and particularly its importance in

politics. To be American is a desirable goal because one becomes part of something grand and beautiful.

The origin of American Exceptionalism can be traced back to the first Puritan settlers. These settlers were linked together because they believed that they had a mission to fulfill in the wilderness. They left the European homeland because, there, they had no longer been allowed to practice their beliefs. Therefore, being sure they had a mission to fulfill on Earth, they left Europe and ventured out into America, so they could complete their unfinished work.

In America, they were bound together because of their religious belief and the covenant -- in order to be part of that one had to subscribe to the Puritan style of life. Puritans believed in salvation through faith and grace; one could only see the will of God after accepting that human reason was infinite and that God revealed his will through nature -- in form of signs, for example. To belong to this group was something that only a few select could do, and -- therefore -- not everyone who had left for America was part of this covenant. Yet, only people belonging to it had political say, and this caused pressure to change in the community. Finally, non-elect members were given the right to join the covenant -- in hope that they would become full members one day. This shows that from the very beginning there was no such thing as a harmony or unity within the group.

This is further made clear by the writer Nathaniel Hawthorne in his work *The Scarlet Letter*, where he criticises the rigidity of Puritan laws and statutes. Deborah Morgan further points out that the novel shows how Puritans believed in the supernatural, often using it to condemn what they considered immoral and unlawful. She maintains that Nathaniel Hawthorne mocked this, by making it clear that signs are subject to a broad spectrum of interpretation and ambivalent in meaning.

The scarlet letter A, for instance, shifts from its original negative meaning to something positive throughout the novel. Moreover, the main character Dimmesdale is revealed to be a hypocrite because he, in his fevered state of mind when it is finally revealed that he is the father of Pearl, willingly interprets a natural phenomenon as a sign of God's malice. This is revealed to be

egoistic because, it is not nature or some supernatural force that decides what is right and what wrong, but Dimmesdale himself, and this shows that -- in the end -- identities are not preordained, but decided by human beings alone.

The ambivalence and conflicted nature of American Exceptionalism is further shown by Madsen mentioning Gloria Anzaldua, a multicultural writer of Mexican descent. In one of her works, the writer focuses on the irreconcilable nature of being American and Mexican; she likens this irreconcilability to a fence that runs through her entire body, and has -- more or less -- split her in half. She is neither American nor Mexican, but something in between. However, this should not be seen as something dismal, as the Deborah Madsen points out, because 'being split in half' makes one more tolerant, and more willing to embrace other cultures. By not belonging to a particular ethnicity, one can be both and so much more. So, while being a hybrid is seen as a state of permanent conflict, it is also viewed as something positive and even, as the author expresses, gives hope for the future.

In another of her works, Gloria Anzaldua subverts the usual narrative of American Expansion, and American Exceptionalism. She likens America to a male rapist, while the countries that are being conquered are seen as metaphors for submissive women. However, in the long run, it is not the man who 'wins', but the woman -- and that inverts the belief that it was the Puritans who constructed the American identity. The native Americans did it instead. Yet, Deborah L. Madsen points out that this upturning or undermining was only done possible through referring to the widely believed concept of what is considered to be American -- and this reference is done through nothing but the power of language.

Language is not objective, but subjective and liable to change. Neither is it fixed in meaning, but shifts and alters when the need for it occurs. Therefore, Deborah L. Madsen points out that the belief in American Exceptionalism has always been in a state of crisis, and constantly in need of being reaffirmed. What it means to be American is not only an issue of 'real Americans', but also of people who have either voluntarily migrated to the US or been forced to become part of it. All of those people have the desire or wish to become part of America, and also should have a

say in what makes America different from other countries. Furthermore, Deborah L. Madsen claims

[...] but it began as a hybrid and will always continue to be hybrid. The exceptional and unstable phenomenon labelled 'Americanness' is an imaginary extrapolation from an equally unstable amalgam of negatives denounced from time to time as Other or "un-American". This desire is both national and subjective; it is the desire of the subject and the citizen both to possess and to be possessed by America described by exceptionalism (Madsen 18).

In the end, American Exceptionalism is nothing but a hybrid -- a construction of many beliefs and values. Deborah Morgan makes it clear that America is made up of many identities, and that -- while the notion of a 'real American' exists inside people's heads -- it is not a reality (Madsen 3-19).

2.4 The Metaphor of the Chutney

Although postmodernism, as Stuart Hall states, has enabled it for the centre to become marginalised, and feel what it is like to be 'the other', Mita Banerjee says that it should not necessarily be seen as a good thing. The problem is that, by stripping everyone of particular fixed characteristics and suggesting them to be made of the same grain, one runs the problem of making it seem that all people share the same experiences. This, however, is problematic because it is a universalised concept and downplays the traumatic experiences that several nations have gone through. Moreover, it cannot be said that all people share the same experience. Yet, it is also problematic to apply a certain experience to only one group of people; still, the point remains that postmodernism downplays a lot of reality by making it seem like everyone shared the same issues.

However, this is one of the core problems of postmodernism: in its zeal for everyone to be the same and to obliterate differences, it avoids realism. Things are presented in an idealised manner, and everything that is considered problematic is removed. This can be seen in the metaphor of the chutney that Mita Banerjee (it was coined by Salman Rushdie in his novel *Midnight Children*) engages to portray hybridity.

In its homeland, India, chutney is nothing special, but part of everyday food. When brought to the West, however, it becomes something exotic. In order to avoid being too threatening, however, only those elements are 'accepted' that can be blended with the Western cuisine. Why is this problematic can be discerned very clearly: it is the West that decides which parts are to become part of mainstream or everyday culture, and which parts should be downplayed. Moreover, it is a shallow representation of another culture; it turns the chutney -- India -- into something that is merely spicy, and something that can be consumed. If one takes this metaphor further, it turns India into a country that should only be revered for its spicy food; other aspects are ignored or fall prey to misconceptions -- misconceptions that are considered negative, and should, thus, be ignored.

Mita Banerjee considers this to be an unfortunate implication because it shows that, if one takes the chutney metaphor further, it is not the West that has to adapt, but the immigrants. This shows that, from ignoring the 'Other', the West has now simply gone to deciding which parts of the 'Other' should be accepted.

Clinging to one's roots is viewed as being culturally a fundamentalist -- indeed, one is viewed as laughable and hysterical. Instead, hybridity is celebrated as the one thing one should aspire to, but Mita Banerjee conceives it as problematic as well because not all people who cling to their roots can be called hysterical or laughable.

In postmodernist literature, it is common for characters coming from an immigrants' background, to search for the homeland. Homeland, in this case, is defined as the country the parents came from, and is a highly idealised construct. It is considered to be everything that the immigrant has been looking for, and -- once found -- should help the immigrant feel complete. However, the problem is that -- according to the theories of postmodernism -- no such thing as a homeland exists. Because if everything is believed to be hybrids from the get go, then there can be no such things as an origin. Therefore, the search for a homeland can, in the long run, only prove to be dissatisfying and fruitless.

Instead, it is believed that one simply belongs nowhere, and everywhere, as Salman Rushdie proves in his novels. Space, in postmodernist theory, is considered to be full of layers, but none of these layers have depth. This theory has given rise to what Mita Banerjee considers a celebration of rootlessness. She points out that this sort of cultural flexibility is considered modern, and something everyone should aspire to.

However, she points out that this is a flawed conception because, like the metaphor of the chutney, it ignores reality. By making everyone rootless, many writers who ascribe to this sort of theory again liken characters' experiences to be the same, ignoring differences. Not everyone immigrates because he wants to, and not everyone can do it in the same manner. Therefore, like in the case of the chutney metaphor, Mita Banerjee appeals that differences should be applied in those theories as well -- in such a way that the very tenets of postmodernism theory remain intact.

She believes it is possible if one acknowledges that, for example, one does not only focus on how colonisers invaded a colony, and contaminated it with their culture, but also analyses how the colonised willfully borrowed cultural aspects from the colonisers. She, furthermore, points out that cultures have never been pure, but always borrowed from other cultures. She does point out that the belief in pure culture is a flawed one, but also makes clear that postmodernism ignores the fact that history does shape a culture and each culture has a different history. Therefore, it is a very flawed concept to -- as mentioned before -- make it seem that all immigrants experience leaving their home in similar ways (Banerjee 9-51).

2.5 Japanese Americans during WWII

Discrimination against Japanese Americans began before World War II (WWII). Japanese Americans, who entered America during the 1880s, faced discrimination and racial prejudice as early as the 1900s when, after reaching affluence due to buying and cultivating land that no one else wanted to own, newspapers began publishing articles that described Japanese as untrustworthy and unreliable; they were also referred to as the 'Yellow Peril' together with the Chinese. Unions formed that pressured the government to introduce, as it had for the Chinese,

acts that prevented Japanese from entering the American mainland; the Japanese felt that this was an affront because it was the United States that had invited Japanese to work in the sugar plantations of Hawaii and the American West Coast in the first place.

Furthermore, despite being told – prior to leaving Japan – that working conditions would be more favourable than in Japan, the Japanese labourers faced hardships at work and were expected to be docile towards their overseers. However, the Japanese were often not that submissive and, together with other marginalised workers, often formed unions to protest against the poor working conditions; some workers even went to court, but were only met with rejection and scorn – they were not given the same rights as American citizens, but expected to be submissive. Japanese Americans did not only face discrimination in the media or at work, but also fell prey to violence. One first generation Japanese American, during the early 1900s, noted that he had been attacked by children, addressed as a ‘Jap’ and had stones flung at him¹.

More and more unions formed, especially in California that pressured the government to introduce laws that barred more Japanese from coming to America and did not allow Japanese Americans to become naturalised citizens. Thus, in the year 1908, the Gentlemen’s Agreement was formed, in which Japan agreed to stop issuing passports to Japanese labourers. However, this did not stop Japanese women from coming to the United States – the law did not prohibit wives to join their husbands who were already working in the US. Therefore, the first generation Issei – the term used for first generation immigrants – settled down and their children, commonly referred to as Nisei, were fluent in English, well-educated, but – due to the racism prevalent in the US at that time – not allowed to reap what their parents had sown. In the 1920s, a series of laws was passed that restricted Japanese Americans from owning land and from becoming citizens. Japanese Americans were segregated in schools as well.

However, racial discrimination and prejudice reached a climax during WWII. Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the government showed itself to be suspicious towards Japanese Americans, and President Roosevelt ordered that Japanese Americans, both on West Coast and in Hawaii be put under constant surveillance. Moreover, in the year 1941, Curtis B. Muson was

¹According to the article: taken from hearsay, no name given.

commissioned to write a report on the loyalty of Japanese Americans; in a twenty-five paged report, Muson came to the conclusion that Japanese Americans, both Issei and Nisei, proved to be no threat to the US. According to him the second generation of Japanese Americans desperately wished to be part of America, and the first generation would prove to be loyal to America as well. However, the American government ignored these reports and set out to prepare internment camps.

With the attack on Pearl Harbour on the 7th December of 1941, the government found a reason to justify the discrimination and persecution of Japanese Americans. Three hours after the attack, roughly a thousand Japanese Americans were imprisoned and, later on, sent to internment camps. Under the executive order 9066 signed by President Franklin Roosevelt on February 19th in 1942 and the passing of Public Law 77-503, the way was paved for the removal of more Japanese Americans settled on the West Coast.

Like this, thousands of Japanese Americans were faced with evacuations orders; they were forced to hurriedly sell their property before being deported to the internment camps – they were only allowed to take what they could carry with them. These internment camps were in Arizona, California, Oregon and Washington; prior to becoming camps, they had been race tracks, country fairgrounds and livestock exhibition halls. Each of these camps housed about five thousand people, and the living quarters often still traces of having previously been horse stalls. Later onwards, people were moved to one of the ten inland camps situated in the isolated areas of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah and Wyoming. Around 120, 000 Japanese Americans were detained.

These concentration camps were surrounded by high barbed fence wires and there were guard towers; any Japanese American who tried to leave was in danger of being shot. There was little space; entire families were put together into unpartitioned 20 x 25 foot units. People tried to make these camps halfway liveable by using scrap materials to build furniture and room partitions; they grew gardens and operated their own farms – many camps provided their own food by being self-supporting. Although leaving the camp was not possible without permission,

thirty-three percent of the detainees were granted leave to either study at university or relieve the critical labour shortage in the Mountain Plains.

In February 1943, detainees were asked to fill out a questionnaire that tested whether they were loyal to the US or not, despite them not being granted the status of being citizens. The questionnaire served the purpose of fishing out people to serve in the military and to find suitable workers for any war-related industry. Japanese-Americans were asked to deny having any alliance to Japan, even though most of them did not have any connection to that country in the first place. Most people responded favourably to the questionnaire, but there were a number of individuals who refused to take part, feeling that their rights as American citizens had been violated.

In fact, there were young men who refused to join the army and had to suffer terrible consequences for their decision afterwards. Scorned by other Japanese-Americans, they were forced to live a life in obscurity.

In August 1945, the Pacific war ended, but the last detention camp did not close until October 1946, and one last special internment camp kept operating until 1952. Returning home did not prove easy for many Japanese-Americans; they had lost their jobs and many families found themselves living below poverty level. In the year 1988, The Civil Liberties Act was signed by President Reagan. It was a symbolic presidential act of apology making sure that Japanese-Americans who had been mistreated during WWII were given some monetary compensation (Takematsu 1-15).

2.6 Asian Indian Americans

From the years 1858 to 1947, Great Britain ruled most of India. During that time, a lot of Indians left the mainland to study or work in other countries. One of those countries was the US, in which Indians arrived to escape British rule; this happened during the 1900s. The first Indians who arrived were farmers. They were young men with little to no education who left India because they had little money and, as a consequence, it was difficult for them to maintain their

own land. Many of those men dreamt of purchasing their own land one day. They had heard that, in America, it was possible to earn way better by working as loggers or help building railroad tracks. Most of those Indians were Sikhs – a religion dictating that men keep their hair wrapped with a piece of cloth called a turban. In the US, many of those Sikhs faced prejudice and scorn because of wearing a turban.

As the only possible way to come to America was via a boat voyage, the journey was often long and weary; the men had to sleep in crowded places and were only given little food to eat. After days of travelling, their destinations were port cities like San Francisco among others. There, the newly arrived immigrants started working as vegetable pickers or helped build railroads.

Many of them lived in Washington, Oregon and California where, as already mentioned they picked fruit or worked in lumber mills and factories. However, living conditions were not easy: many of those men did not have a permanent home and were forced to move around a lot. They either slept in broken-down buildings or tents. A lot of these men, after having earned money, returned to India. Some, however, remained – something that was frowned upon as is evidenced by the fact that, in the year 1917, a law was passed that did not allow Asian Indians to enter the US. It was only in the year 1947 that the law was relaxed, but even then only hundred Indians were allowed to come to US. Yet, they were permitted to become US citizens.

In the year 1965, a new law was passed in the US that allowed thousands of Asians Indians to enter the country. These Indians were skilled workers; many of them had gone to college and spoke English, which made life in America easier. They often worked as doctors, scientists or engineers; in the US, they earned more money than in India and could find a job that had not available for them in their homeland.

Nowadays, a lot of Asian Indian Americans live in cities like New York or Los Angeles: these cities are popular for allowing them be close to their families and for providing them with good job opportunities at the same time (Yoder 6-19).

3. Wife

3.1 About the Author

Bharati Mukherjee is the daughter of an upper class Hindu Brahmin family and was born in Calcutta. In 1968, she immigrated to Canada with her Canadian husband Clark Blaise whom she had met while studying at the University of Iowa. After having had to deal with racism and discrimination in Canada for fourteen years, she moved to America in 1980 where she was granted status of a permanent resident. A lot of her works are drawn from her own real life experience (Myles 107).

3.2 Plot Synthesis

Wife tells the story of the twenty-year-old Dimple. At the beginning of the novel, Dimple lives in Calcutta with her parents where, while studying for her exams, she dreams of getting married. Her aspirations are accompanied by various daydreams, in which she imagines herself as the dutiful wife of a fine engineer. She makes a vow to be just as diligent and obliging as Sita -- a woman who, according to legends, walked through fire for her husband.

However, a potential husband is nowhere to be found, and Dimple is pestered by feelings of insecurity; she worries that she is too flat-chested, uneducated and not pretty enough to attract a good suitor. Her mother gives her various pills against her problems, but Dimple's body remains unchanged. Not even her friend Pixie, with her love for Bollywood film stars, can console Dimple, and Dimple falls ill -- the stress of waiting, and the added burden of examinations being delayed indefinitely make her collapse under the strain. She has to remain hospitalised for a few days.

Life takes a turn for the better when her father announces that he has found the perfect husband for her -- Amit Basu, a twenty-year-old engineer who is planning to move to the United States. Her father arranges an interview with the mother of Amit, and -- even though Dimple is not the first choice -- the woman agrees to the match. The days before her wedding pass by in a flutter, and Dimple is happy because her dreams have finally come true.

Unfortunately, she soon learns that marriage is not what she imagined it to be. Amit is not the dashing film star she dreamt of, nor is her new home a charming mansion. Instead, she has to share an apartment with her mother-in-law and Amit's younger brother Pintu.

The apartment is full of embroidered pillows, and does not meet Dimple's expectations at all. The house they live in is rather shabby, and Dimple always has to ask the landlord for permission whenever she wants to use the phone. Meanwhile, her friend has landed a job as an interviewer, and Dimple -- though she is not willing to openly admit it -- is jealous of her friend's glamorous lifestyle. The only thing that provides her with any thrills of sorts is the planned immigration to the United States.

During that time of waiting, Dimple falls pregnant, but she is not happy about it. She concocts various ways of getting rid of the baby, and even works more than she should until her mother-in-law learns about her state.

As a consequence, she is ordered to take care of herself, and spend a lot of time in bed. Amit is ecstatic; he looks forward to having a son. Dimple, however, is still not happy about her pregnancy, and -- during a symbolic encounter, in which she kills what she believes to be a pregnant mouse -- she finally makes up her mind.

She locks herself up in her bathroom, and by jumping around with a skipping rope, and pouring hot water over her head, she manages to 'abort' the baby. She loses a lot of blood, and ends up in hospital. Yet, no one finds out that she self-aborted her baby because she managed to hide the clues.

Afterwards, Amit resigns from his job, and announces that he has gotten the immigration papers. Dimple is happy because this means that she can make a new start, and she prepares herself for her new life by sewing warm clothes, brushing up on her English skills and daydreaming what life in the US will be like. So, she and Amit leave for the US.

Once they arrive in New York, Dimple is both impressed and intimidated by the sight of skyscrapers and the people she meets there. One of those people is a friend of Amit's -- he and his wife have lived in the US for a while, and allow Dimple and Amit to stay in their apartment until the latter has found a job. However, Amit fails in finding one immediately, and -- during the waiting period -- Dimple learns more about America.

She is impressed by the lifestyle promoted on TV and the glossy magazines; she yearns for such a lifestyle herself. Moreover, despite the fact that she has been brought up to be an obedient wife, Dimple comes to admire Ina Mullick -- one of her new acquaintances. Ina is not like the other Indian housewives; she dresses in Western clothes, and is not afraid of voicing her opinion. She attends women meetings as well.

Dimple, though she tries to hide it, is impressed by her attitude. She is also attracted to one of Ina's male American friends -- a young man called Milt. His sister is married to an Indian man, whom she met during her postgraduate studies. Also, Milt's sister arranges an apartment for them when Amit finally gets a job; he pretends to be disappointed with his new job, but is actually grateful and so is Dimple.

Life, however, does not take a turn for the better this time. Dimple, who has been watching lots of television, is terrified of going out on her own because she fears getting mugged or even murdered. She is afraid of opening the door sometimes because crime programmes and newspaper articles have made her paranoid regarding possible rapists. So, Dimple spends most of her days sleeping, watching TV and cooking. At nights, she cannot sleep, and -- when she does -- she dreams of various ways to commit suicide.

Sometimes, Ina comes over, and Dimple develops something of an uneasy friendship with the older woman. It is an uneasy one indeed because Ina accuses Dimple of being unfeeling and callous. Dimple, on the other hand, feels that Ina is mean because she does not try to understand what life is like for her.

Sometimes, Milt comes over -- sometimes with Ina, at other times on his own. Dimple feels attracted to him because he is easy to talk to, and he takes an active interest in her. Unlike Amit, he is not dull. Throughout the months, Dimple has grown increasingly annoyed with her husband, and he, in turn, is puzzled by her strange behaviour. He urges her to go out and meet with friends. However, Dimple remains isolated and anti-social.

One day, Dimple sleeps with Milt, and, even though it is implied to have been nothing but a fling for Milt, an insomniac Dimple daydreams of killing Amit. One night, during which he cannot sleep either, Dimple stabs him in the back with a knife, and she keeps on stabbing and stabbing until his head drops from his shoulders.

3.3 Structure

The book is made up of three parts. Each part ends with a move or, better said, with a life altering event. A move in this novel is not only seen as a change of location, but is accompanied by Dimple going through some development. There are also important things happening in the plot, and each part marks a beginning as well as the end of a certain plot twist.

The first part is about Dimple's life while still in India, and her girlish idealism regarding life and marriage. It also involves her getting engaged, meeting Amit for the first time and her marriage. It is the only segment where her friend Pixie shows up and interacts with Dimple.

In the other two parts, Pixie is only mentioned in letters, dialogue and Dimple's memories. It is also the only part where Mrs. Basu and Pintu appear as characters. Afterwards, they are also only mentioned in letters and dialogues as well. Dimple's parents, interestingly, are never fully fleshed out. Even in this chapter, her father is only mentioned in the narrative, but has no dialogue of his own, while Dimple's mother only has one scene where she says something.

The changes that Dimple goes through in this chapter are, on the one hand, getting married to Amit and moving out of her parents' home, but, on the other hand, being forced to grow up abruptly

The end of the chapter is marked by two events: Dimple aborting her baby, and Amit's immigration papers coming through. One event is decidedly negative, showing just how much Dimple has changed, while the other is a happy one, the beginning of what Dimple hopes to be a new life.

The second part of the book opens with Dimple and Amit arriving in the United States, in New York; they meet with Amit's friend. During the car journey to the Sens' apartment, the reader gets a glimpse of what Dimple's feelings towards America will be like: she is impressed by the skyscrapers, but also alarmed by the tales of blood thirst and crime that Amit's friend is recounting. Later on, during a shopping scene, Dimple's fear of America gains the upper-hand when being confronted with aggressive Americans. It is an important scene because it is the beginning of the end.

Arguably, one could say that not much happens in this segment. Amit and Dimple attend a party, meet with various people, Amit spends a lot of time looking for a job, and worrying over it while Dimple watches lots of TV. Yet, despite nothing dramatic happens, this part serves as a build-up for the climax.

In this part, Dimple meets Ina and they start interacting; she even visits the Mullicks at home along with Amit and the Sen family. It is there where she is first made the acquaintance of Milt, and is also surprised to see how different the Mullicks are compared to other Indian families. For example, during her first party in the US, the hosts were still very traditional, but the Mullicks are not -- they are acquainted with Americans, and even serve beef, much to Dimple's disgust.

Dimple's growing uneasiness and restlessness is an important aspect of the plot. At the beginning, she is still willing to play the perfect housewife and is impressed by everything in the Sens' household. However, towards the end, she finds the furniture disgusting and even breaks some of it in a fit of anger. This is also a part where she starts thinking of a suicide.

Dimple is unhappy with herself: she feels that, compared to Ina, she is nothing but a boring and dull Indian woman. Interactions with other women seem to confirm her suspicions, and Ina's flippant dismissal of her hobbies -- cooking and cleaning -- heightens Dimple's feelings of self-consciousness.

India still plays an important life in Dimple's life in this part. She writes a lot of letters to her parents, and often thinks of Pixie. She wonders what Pixie is doing and is somewhat disappointed that her friend does not write back to her as often enough. She herself cannot go to work because Amit is against it, and Dimple, because she wants to be a good housewife, does not accept one of the job offers her new acquaintances present her with.

In this part, while waiting for Amit to get a job and observing his interactions with other men, Dimple notices that her husband is not elegant or dashing at all. She considers him frail, and helpless; some of his habits disgust her. Their marriage becomes increasingly tense and forced.

The second part ends with the birth of Meena, Sen's baby, Amit getting a job and the expectation of them moving into a new apartment soon. While Dimple does not care much about the birth of the baby, she is happy that Amit has found a job, but is even more excited over the prospect of moving.

The third part opens with Amit and Dimple having moved into their new apartment. All the tension and uneasiness that Dimple has been feeling reaches a peak -- not only in her final act of killing Amit, but even before. In this part, everything Dimple does is done excessively-- she watches TV excessively, lets herself go excessively, and even lets the apartment go to waste excessively.

Ina and Milt are more fleshed out in this chapter while the other characters fade into the background. Even Amit himself does not play such a big role in this chapter, which hints at his weakening influence in Dimple's life. Pixie herself is only mentioned in one letter, but plays an important role because her marriage to a film star shatters Dimple's last vestiges of confidence.

As Dimple's life falls apart, so does her character. She grows careless, reckless and apathetic. While she was still very concerned about upholding Indian morals in the first and second part, in this part she does not even bother to pretend anymore. She indulges in her follies and daydreams; the act of sleeping with Milt is a final nail in the coffin, and marks the end of Dimple's facade of being the perfect Indian woman. .

3.4 Narration and Prose

The narrative takes place in the past, but the story is not told retrospectively. Instead, the story follows the events as they unfold and are unfolding; there is no narrator making references to future events or predicting outcomes. Instead, the focus is on events as they are transpiring -- the 'present' in the story plays the most important role; there are also references made to the past -- but this is done very sparsely.

The past is only mentioned in the form of memories, or when characters are talking about themselves. The future, though never predicted, plays an important role because Dimple, through her daydreams and wishes, always thinks about what her life would be like one, fine day; her vision of the future is always strongly glorified. Yet, the main emphasis is placed on the present, which is never glorious, but always boring and trite. Indeed, if the story had been narrated in the present tense, it would not have affected the writing style too much.

The story is told through the eyes of Dimple; however, this is done in a quite impersonalised manner: Dimple never seems to speak directly to the readership, but only the narration gives the readers hints of what she might be feeling -- the story is told in the third person. There are no direct references to the inner workings of her mind -- no stream of consciousness, no introspective, but just the mentions of her nightmares and her daydreams.

And even those nightmares and daydreams never tell the reader what Dimple is really going through: they are always symbolic and veiled in obscurity. The only times Dimple talks about her feelings are when thinking about her outward appearances -- her body, the way her apartment looks, the way she is dressed and what kind of social standing she has in society. As criticism, it

can be said that, for a novel that is merely focused on one character, *Wife* is a very far from being introspective, and the reader does not really gain much insight into Dimple as a person. She is not a very well-fleshed out character, which might -- of course -- have been the writer's intention.

None of the other characters are well-fleshed out either. In fact, they are even concretely presented than Dimple, and only characterised in the way Dimple sees them. Due to the fact that Dimple shows relatively little interest in her fellow beings -- other than appearances -- one cannot say much about them.

The writing style of the novel can be described as a very crisp and clear one. However, it is not "sharp" because the author does not use biting sarcasm or wit to prove a point. Indeed, most of the novel is written in a very straightforward, nearly journalistic style: the narration just tells us what is going on, and relies on symbolism taking place in Dimple's nightmares to show the reader what is really going on below the surface. Dialogue does not play such an important role as one would expect; the dialogues in this novel are always very shallow, and do not bear much impact on the plot.

Not much detail is used in the prose; the writer does not dither with details about the surroundings -- when describing apartments or houses, the prose is always to the point, and just states the most important facts. This might be intentional: for example, when it is mentioned that Dimple has lizards and cockroaches in her parents' home back in India, the prose reveals this in a very straightforward way -- there is no dramatic description of how disgusting or appalling this might be. This reflects, perhaps, how Dimple, having lived in India all her life, is used to the presence of such creatures in her home.

The novel is not very sensuous either: there are no vibrant descriptions about how the food smells, no tactile descriptions, and very few visual ones. The few times the novel does use visual imagery is when Dimple is dreaming or imagining things. In her daydreams or nightmares, she is painfully visual -- the descriptions of committing suicide, for example, are very perceptible: she imagines blood being splattered all over the place in one of the instances. In other instances, she

likens herself to a dead cockroach and imagines what it would be like if someone found her dead. Her imagination regarding crimes is also very vivid; it is rather odd and unsettling to ponder that the few times the novel really gains momentum and colour is when Dimple is thinking of violence and death. However, this also corresponds to the main themes of the novel, which shall be addressed in a later section.

Yet in spite of these facts, the novel is rather subtle. Although the writing style itself is very straightforwardly delivered, due to the lack of introspective and revealing dialogue, a lot remains unknown about the characters' motives. Therefore, a lot of the events in the novel are open to interpretation -- especially when it comes to Dimple's assessment of other characters in the story. Ina's behaviour, for example, can be either interpreted as genuine interest towards Dimple as a person or be seen as a selfish attempt to forget about her own problems.

The writing style can also be described as "dry". From a reader's perspective, it can be outlined as not a very emotionally gripping novel: it has no dramatic moments, but also no poignant or quiet scenes that reveal insight into what is going on -- the atmosphere of the novel remains static and colourless. None of the characters are very multi-dimensional, and, therefore, it cannot be said that one can identify with them. Yet, this does not mean that the novel lacks depth and cannot evoke emotion: it is realistic -- very much so -- at points. The author does a believable job of re-creating the atmosphere of Indian parties for example; the mention of the food, the conversations and clothes are well-described. Perhaps, it is the realism that makes this novel hard to read at points; not all readers like to be presented with concepts that are not easily resolved, that are part of our everyday life, but which we do not acknowledge. Certainly, the ending is surrealistic and extreme, but Dimple's issues are not.

The heavy use of symbolism is what makes *Wife* an interesting novel: there are recurring symbols -- like the dead mouse and death itself, nearly personified -- that convey a lot of meaning; it is vague and blurry, though. Moreover, each reader will come up with their own interpretation; however, it is this multi-layered, with nearly an infinite possibility of interpretations that makes the novel interesting.

3.5 Characterisation

As mentioned before, the characterisation in this novel is quite one-dimensional -- even Dimple herself is not very well developed. In order to consider a character well-developed, the same has to be complex -- multi-layered like an onion -- and, most importantly, the character should not just be a printed name in a book, but be something fluid and transient; after finishing the book, the reader should feel either sympathy or hatred for a character. If the reader is apathetic, then the writer has done something wrong or never wanted the character to truly have an impact on the reader in the first place. The author of *Wife* was not keen on making Dimple a figure one could relate to; the focus of the novel seems to be more on themes than character development. This does not mean that Dimple does not change, but the process of changing her change is not that drastic: she simply slips from being one thing to another.

What makes Dimple a shallow character? Why is she not easy to identify with?

The answer is very simple: Dimple does not, if one likens a book's narrative to the window to a character's soul, allow the reader to truly understand her. Her way of thinking -- when she thinks at all -- is shallow; Dimple is never preoccupied with what one would consider substantial issues, but always worried about appearances: her appearance, other people's appearance and what to do to make herself look better. Her world, as evidenced by her passionate and ardent interest in fashion magazines, is all about appearances, is dictated by this concern.

At the beginning of the novel, Dimple is a vain young woman who is naive and dreams of nothing but marriage. She is a bit like a princess waiting for her future husband to come and save her; she is so fixated on getting married that she even falls sick -- which implies that this wish of hers is bordering on an obsession. During the time she has to wait, Dimple reads a lot of beauty articles; she daydreams about pretty girls giving advice to each other, and there is a hint of bitterness in those scenes -- Dimple considers herself ugly and worries that she will not secure a husband because she is not pretty enough.

Even her education -- it is mentioned that she is studying for her BA examinations -- seem only to be a means of securing a good husband because, in one scene, she worries that the delaying of her exams will hinder her from getting a degree, and this -- in turn -- put a damper on her wedding plans. She does not seem to have an interest in academia otherwise. It is hinted that she is reasonably intelligent -- she likes reading books -- but, unfortunately, her desire to get married has taken precedence over anything else. It seems that, in those first few pages of the book, Dimple really has no other aspirations but becoming someone's obedient wife. Something that, for a person her age, is a bit strange. Not only because young people, due to a strong desire to explore the world, tend to be interested in a lot of things, but also because it seems strange that a young woman who has been through at least two years of university is so disinterested in the world surrounding her.

Indeed, the only thing Dimple shows an interest in is, even back in India, a glamorous lifestyle -- a notion that betrays how naive she is; she has highly idealistic notions about marriage -- she dreams of grand houses, a charming husband and sophisticated people. In her daydreams, things like disappointment have no place. When reality disappoints her, she flees to other things; when Amit proves to be less than charming, she just focuses her attentions on leaving India and what life will be like in a new country -- and it only gets worse. The entire novel just shows how Dimple becomes increasingly more extreme in her perception of life. At first her demands are fairly reasonable: she wants a pretty home, and a husband who can take care of her. However, when she gets that, she is not satisfied and yearns for more; she is disillusioned, but cannot admit it to herself. So, she drowns herself in furniture ads and TV programmes.

The real tragedy surrounding Dimple's character is that, in fact, she seems shallow. She makes herself appear like that, but -- underneath that facade of a perfect Indian woman -- hides a person who is very sensitive and intelligent. The fact that Dimple analyses American life and the people around her proves that she is, if she puts her mind to it, quite perceptive: she has a keen eye for little details -- this is evident especially when she describes other characters. Certainly, it also shows how obsessed she is with appearances, but also displays her ability of really looking at a person; a reader is forced to pause and consider that, if this ability was used correctly, Dimple would have definitely garnered more respect from other people. However, Dimple is afraid to

open her mouth, and also terrified of looking underneath the surface. So, her talents for observation are wasted.

Dimple seems to be dimly aware of her wasting her life, and not living it up to her full potential. But her fear of confronting issues keeps her from accepting people who could help her. Ina, for example, tries to reach out to her and offers her a different outlook on life, but Dimple keeps pushing her away; she likes and admires Ina and what she represents, and yet, she is afraid of allowing the other woman to become a deeper part of her life. This is tragic because it is strongly implied that, if Dimple had just allowed Ina to help her, she would have felt better; she would have had someone to talk to, and would also have realised a few things about herself. However, Dimple prefers to remain alienated, and her condition just gets worse.

She grows from a shallow woman with idealistic notions to an even shallower person with even more far-fetched notions. In the end, she is not able to tell reality and dreams apart from each other because her perception on life has been so perverted: her alienation from other people and the world outside have rendered her half insane. However, it is not as if Dimple had not tried at first. When she moves to New York, she tries to fit in, but finds her efforts wasted. No one seems to understand her, and, by the time Ina does take notice of her it is too late.

At the end, Dimple is unable to feel deeply for others. Perhaps, she is completely self-absorbed. This is hinted in by the fact that she never seems to think about other peoples' problems; she always dismisses them as being less relevant than her issues. When Ina reveals that she is unhappy, Dimple is reluctant to believe it, and -- because of that -- cannot bridge the gap between them; part of her just seems not to want to understand. This also makes her appear cold and emotionally stunted.

It is interesting that, for someone who dreams a lot about Sita and eternal devotion, Dimple is not very romantic. She has illusions about love -- as shown in her interactions with Milt and Amit, but cannot seem to act out on her feelings when much depends on it. This is mostly clearly shown in her post-coital talk with Milt; he talks about wanting to protect her and cherish her, but Dimple is just worried about what kind of job he has. Moreover, she claims to be in love with

him, but her relationship with him is not very emotionally intimate: she does not confide in him, and seems more in love with the idea of being with a foreigner than Milt himself. Her reflections regarding him are only centred on the physical; she is startled by how different he is from the other men she knows, but only in terms of appearance. She does not really seem to care for his personality all that much, other than him being easy to talk to. Then again, even she admits that he does most of the talking, while she keeps to herself. Dimple keeping it to herself is also what strains her relationship with Amit. Towards the end of the book, Amit actually expresses concern, and even implores her to go out; however, Dimple ignores him and remains disillusioned with him because he is not the man she hoped to marry.

The thing Dimple seems to be so afraid of is the fact that she is lonely and fearful; her not opening up to her problems makes them grow worse. If she was lonely and fearful in the first part of the book, she turns downright suicidal later on; it seems that death may be the only way of defeating the loneliness that is eating her up from the inside out. Because Dimple is not willing to talk about her problems, she flees to dreaming and -- when the situation becomes too much to bear -- to violence.

The first instance is in India when she decides to self-abort her baby; it is not a rash or spontaneous decision -- Dimple is not a rash or reckless character. Instead, she actually shows, proving that she *is* intelligent, a remarkable ability to plan things ahead, and come up with various ways of avoiding detection. In the end, she manages to get rid of her baby without having anyone suspect her of having done anything. However, the second time that her despair escalates in violence, she is not as clear-headed anymore; her murder of Amit will not remain undetected, but -- at this point -- Dimple is no longer able to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

The other characters are not very well fleshed out either because they are seen through Dimple's eyes. As Dimple is very self-absorbed and interested in appearances merely, she only pays attention to the most striking characteristic, but channels everything out that may be of importance: She only views Ina as a charismatic woman, but fails to acknowledge her as someone with failures and problems of her own. She blindly idolises her; however, the way Ina

desperately seeks to make friends with Dimple, is always trying to drag her out someplace, and has -- on the surface -- adapted to the American lifestyle hint that not everything is alright.

In fact, Ina seems to be quite embittered; she mentions, a few times, that life has not turned out the way she planned, and that she had little choice in her marriage. It is quite likely that Ina being so radical -- at least when compared to what an Indian woman is supposed to be like -- is a scream for help; it is also hinted at in the novel that she and her husband are planning to go back to India -- and what is interesting in this case is whether it is less Ina's choice to back, but her husband's. Ina seems to have a lot of regrets; she is mentioned as having a university education, but not having been allowed to pursue it -- despite her being interested in her studies -- due to her parents having found a husband for her. It could be that Ina is so thin and interested in fashion because her appearance is one of the few things she has got a say in. Moreover, her hobbies -- the constant meeting up with women groups -- hint that she is quite interested in feminist issues; her ardent interest might be due to her knowing what it feels like to have no say in matters that concern one the most.

While Dimple idolises Ina, with her husband Amit, it is the reverse. As the plot unfolds, she pays more and more attention to his shortcomings, but fails to see the good in him -- namely, his concern for her, his attempts at trying to listen to her, and how he is, perhaps, just as lost as her; he is nervous about his job, and is trying his best to adapt to American way of life as well. His nervousness is shown through him constantly trying to impress other people, learning jokes by heart in order to appear witty, and keeping a list of words. Amit seems to be the sort of person who tries to downplay his anxieties; he mentions that his new job is nothing special, but Dimple -- proving here, yet again, that she does have a great eye for details -- notes that he seems to be genuinely relieved to have gotten a job after all.

What is interesting about his character development is that Amit starts out as a fairly conservative husband -- he mentions that he does not want Dimple to go to work, for example -- but, towards the end of the novel, seems to have changed his mind; he actually prods Dimple to go out of the house and do something. While this does not mean that he wants her to work, it

strongly implies that he actually realises that life in America is *not* the same as in India. His realisation, however, comes too late.

Another character Dimple heavily idolises is her American friend Milt. Milt, to her, represents something novel and exiting. He is taller than any other man she knows; he is carefree -- not as stiff as Amit. Truthfully, apart from him being flirtatious, amiable and carefree, not much is actually known about him; Dimple does not consider his shortcomings, and her perception of him remains shallow: she does not really seem to love him, but infatuated with what he represents. From a reader's perspective, one could say that Milt is simply a young man who likes to flirt with women, and is not terribly daunted by the prospect of having an affair with a married woman.

Not much can be said about the other characters in the novel. They do not appear that often, and are often nothing but names. Pixie seems to be the one exception: she only has a few scenes in the novel, but her character has a heavy impact on Dimple's life -- indirectly.

Not much can be said about Pixie too: Dimple considers her funny and something of a dreamer. It is also heavily implied that Pixie is far less concerned about being a perfect Indian wife than Dimple is, but she is shown to be as shallow: she is enamoured with film stars and luxury, and the cruel irony of the novel is that, in the end, her dreams do come true, while Dimple's don't. Yet, it is also shown that Pixie, unlike Dimple, is slightly less easily disenchanted and has more realistic expectations of life; she, unlike Dimple, does not consider her job anything special and tries to tell her friend that not everything that glitters is gold. Maybe the reason why she ends up being happier than Dimple is because she is willing to settle with what she gets and not mourn for things she cannot have.

3.6 Setting

In part one of the book, *Wife* takes places in India, Calcutta; however, the author does not go into great detail regarding the setting: very little is actually described in concrete terms. In fact, the details given are very subtle, but yet, to someone who is familiar with India, very realistic and

appropriate: the author mentions lizards in the apartment, lack of electricity and of running water, and describes furniture that gives one a very keen impression of India; lizards in Indian houses are no rarity, and lots of Indian women sew their own pillows. Moreover, lack of electricity and water is nothing unheard of in India either. In general, the picture of India is not romanticised: it is not presented as some exotic country, but one with problems of its own -- not so detailed references are made to political unrest, and the fact that Dimple's examinations were delayed indefinitely also points at flaws in the bureaucratic system.

However, although India -- as a country -- only 'appears' in the first part of the book, its food, its traditions and lifestyle remain a running theme in the book; Dimple's ties to country are not simply cut loose by leaving her homeland, she remains part of the cultural processes because she still dresses like an Indian, still eats Indian food and tries to uphold Indian norms. Moreover, India plays an important role in her memories -- Dimple often reminisces about her parents, the restaurants she went to and her friend Pixie. Furthermore, the other characters often talk about India, and what it is like. So, one could say that India -- as a country -- is not bound by its geographical sphere, but continues to play a role in the characters' lives because of their lingering attachment to it.

What is interesting, however, is that while Dimple does not idealise India, the other characters -- characters who have been in America much longer than she has -- idealise the country to a great extent; its food is considered better than American, its lifestyle upheld to be of the highest quality, and -- in fact -- everything is done to ensure that life in America remains as Indian as possible. This is not only done through the cuisine, but women wearing traditional Indian clothing, and one tries to have as many Indian friends as possible. Therefore, the reader gains less a picture of India as a country, but of the people. The book depicts Indians as traditional in their habits, loving food and social gatherings; Indians in *Wife* are a closely knit community of people who help each other. Speaking from personal experience, I would not call this an idealisation: Indians do tend to be traditional and helpful towards each other -- especially in a foreign country. Of course, this is not pure altruism: people do use each other in order to gain the best possible advantages. Amit and Dimple both make clear that these parties are also viewed as an opportunity to climb up the social ladder and improving one's financial situation.

New York is not described in great detail as well; street names and locations are not mentioned often. Rather, the only impressions the reader gains is that it is a noisy place, full of danger and crime; Dimple rarely goes out and, therefore, her picture of America is nearly completely shaped by things she has seen on TV and what her acquaintances have told her. Jyoti Sen, for example, constantly tells her about people being shot in cold blood in public, and gives her the impression that America is a place where one cannot move safely. He never seems to mention anything positive about America.

Therefore, Dimple develops a phobia, and refuses to go out -- so much that, to her, America is merely reduced to her apartment and the TV set in front of her; the world that the television presents her with, ironically, further heightens Dimple's anxiety. There is always violence perpetuated by violence in the channels Dimple watches: people die randomly, and no one seems to be ever safe. Dimple, who never goes out, starts to believe that America is what TV channels depict it to be like, and becomes hypersensitive to noise or anything that is unfamiliar to her.

Moreover, she suspects most Americans to be lewd and even criminals; the only exception to this rule seems to be Milt. Yet, in her eyes, he is reduced to a flirtatious person who seems to have no moral barriers. However, in her view she is not alone: most of her Indian friends view Americans as lacking in morals. This is most clearly seen in the way they disapprove of Ina's adaption to her surroundings. Instead of being commended, her actions are frowned upon, and Dimple is warned not to become like her.

Therefore, one could say that America, in truth, remains confined to Dimple's two apartments in New York and the imaginary, dream world that Dimple has constructed. Otherwise, she simply has no attachment to America, which leads to her undoing.

3.7 Symbolism

Wife uses symbolism that reveals a lot about the inner hidden life of Dimple's mind. Most of the symbolism is indirect; however, there are occurrences when it is not so subtle, and has more of a

direct connection with the happenings in the book. This does not mean that the indirect symbolism -- the patterns that keep repeating themselves in her nightmares and daydreams -- are of no importance.

In fact, they are very important because it is only through the symbolism -- often thwarted in meaning due to occurring in dreams -- that the reader gets to know anything about Dimple at all. Otherwise, as mentioned before, Dimple remains a somewhat hard to read character -- not only because she rarely addresses her own feelings and thoughts in the novel, but because her actions are so unpredictable and often erratic.

The most important incident, where the symbolism is direct, is the one where Dimple encounters a mouse and, in a fit of rage, kills it; she believes that it was a pregnant mouse. The description of the mouse -- with its deformed body and contorted features -- strikes the reader as disturbing and appalling.

During that time, Dimple is carrying a baby inside of her body and is haunted by the idea of it; she abhors being pregnant and wishes nothing but to get rid of the unborn child; the distorted features of the mouse reflect the hatred Dimple is suggested to feel during her own pregnancy: she often complains about how she feels like swelling up. She feels that she is losing control over her life -- everything she has been hoping so hard for is spiralling out of control; the birth of a baby proves to be a potential hindrance for their emigration to another country.

At the time that she kills the mouse, she is in a state of anxiety: the sound of a mouse running perturbs her, and it is only by the act of killing it that she temporarily gains her freedom. Or, rather said, she begins to feel calm again; the act of killing the mouse provides her with a feeling of emotional cleansing. The same can be said for killing the baby -- only by the act of removing it from her body can she regain control over her body. The unease she has been feeling goes away, and Dimple is free to hope for a new life in America. Before killing her baby, she was in a state of disarray and frantic; afterwards, she seems to feel better and is somewhat capable of returning to a normal life again. Of course, the implications of this are disturbing: it suggests that violence can have soothing effects and even help a person feel better; however, as the novel shows later

on, it is only a temporary solution. After all, towards the end, Dimple resorts to violence again, this time not shying away from murdering her husband.

Her killing a pregnant being may be interpreted as both a foreshadowing and a hint of what Dimple really desires -- namely, death. It is a foreshadowing because, soon afterwards, Dimple does kill her own baby -- in a similar manner as she killed the mouse: ruthlessly. Perhaps, it can also be said that the act of killing the mouse can be seen as a hint to her emotional state: she is volatile and frustrated -- it is the calm before the storm, so to speak. Moreover, the actions suggest that Dimple is not a rational person; rational people do not kill mice in such ways -- and they do not substitute them mentally for themselves and their inner fears. Dimple, because she is unable to confront her problems, only finds an outlet for her pent-up frustrations in an act of needless violence.

Dimple's desire to die is revealed in her daydreams and nightmares. In one of her nightmares, she dreams about stabbing herself in the shower, right somewhere in her neck. There are other instances where she daydreams of placing her head in the oven or suffocating herself to death with a plastic bag. What is important here is that her dreams of death are always volatile and never fail to be visual; they are also quite creative. While Dimple is rather bland about other aspects in her life, she never fails to be imaginative when it comes to her inner desires: the fact that her mind is so visual when it comes to dreams of her own death implies just how upset she is. By killing herself violently in her dreams, it is suggested that Dimple hates herself and her current life.

As in the case of the dead mouse, her dreams can also be seen as a sort of foreshadowing for the ending. In the end, although she does not stab herself to death, she kills her husband -- by stabbing him with a knife in the neck. The way Amit dies is somewhat reminiscent of her one nightmare in which she also dies by stabbing herself in the neck. Moreover, it is a violent and messy death -- full of blood; in its messiness and goriness, it is very similar to her recurring daydreams and nightmares. Furthermore, because it is such a gory and messy death, it also implies that, for Dimple, Amit's death is something that frees her -- from her marriage and the self-hatred for what she has become. However, it also suggests that she has come to hate Amit or

that he has simply become the victim of her pent-up frustrations. After all, by murdering Amit, she also feels calm again; the restlessness that has been haunting her is gone.

The other symbolism in the story is the repetition of violence shown on TV; whenever Dimple watches television, someone always seems to get shot. These images Dimple sees on TV begin to gain control over her; soon she starts seeing them everywhere. Another reason why her dreams might be so visual is because she is used to seeing graphic violence on TV. Actually, it would be better to say that the concept of violence itself can be seen as a symbol; it stands for frustration, loneliness and becomes a temporary solution for her problems.

3.8 Themes

One of the central themes in *Wife* is pent up aggression and how it shapes people's lives: the novel explores how too much indulgence in violence can pervert and twist one's perception of life. As Dimple comes undone -- by resorting to murder as a means of solving her problems -- shows, violence is reprehensible. Not only does it solve problems only temporarily, it harms others; Dimple's volatile actions do not make her life better nor are of merit to anyone. Instead, it is strongly suggested that things will only go downhill from there -- in spite of Dimple's hoping that women can get away with killing their husbands. Yet, by that point, Dimple cannot be said to possess much rational thought.

Indulging in violence comes in many shapes and forms: watching too many violent programmes is one of the many shapes violence can take. The novel *Wife* depicts how easy it is to fall prey to temptations. After all, Dimple does not start out as a murderer; she is an ordinary young woman at the beginning of the novel; however, by being exposed to too much television and isolation, she loses her grasp on reality.

Therefore, it can also be said that the novel explores how easy it is for people to become delusional, and lose themselves in fantasy worlds. Dimple, because she cannot cope with the pressure of facing the challenges in her new home, begins to substitute the world of television -- with its random violence, theatrics and exaggerated views -- for reality; throughout the course of

the novel, she becomes increasingly more radical, often using what she has seen on TV as a means of evaluating her life. However, it should be mentioned that this trend of hers is not something that Dimple started doing once she came to America, but it is clearly shown that she did this in India as well. In India, she is shown to idealise Indian myths believing that they are reality or, better said, should be.

This means that another important theme in the novel is the search for an identity: Dimple's entire character development is centred on her trying to sort out who she is. She is conflicted because she cannot reconcile herself with the fact that she is neither a perfect Indian housewife nor can she adapt to America all that easily.

Interestingly, her search for an identity does not start in America; she is already broken and confused in India when, after her marriage, she discovers that life is not a fairy tale. This is noteworthy because it already hints at the fact -- as most scholars in cultural studies believe -- that identity is not something stable, but fragmented. However, Dimple -- instead of acknowledging that she is not a whole -- falls into despair and chooses to run away from her problems.

Another theme might be internal despair. Dimple is never directly shown to suffer from depression, but her behaviour, at least upon considering how she becomes more and more isolated from her surroundings and other people, could be attributed to such a state of mind. As early as in the first part of the book, Dimple is said to suffer from headache whenever going through a difficult time; this could be a symptom of depression. Also, before killing Amit, Dimple is described as being restless and suffering from a headache.

3.9 Bollywood in America

In an essay entitled *Bollywood in America* published in , Mita Banerjee analyses how America and Indians living abroad are seen through the eyes of Bollywood. Taking into account that Bollywood tends to sugarcoat things, she points out that themes such as hybrid identities and

conflicting loyalties tend to be glossed over. Instead, Bollywood emphasizes the necessity of remaining Indian over anything else.

The Western world, Mita Banerjee says, is seen as a threat to Indian culture because of its lack of morals, and Indian culture is glorified because of its being able to withstand temptation, and uphold important as well as traditional values. Trying to adapt to American values -- as shown in the example of a film scene, a middle-aged woman trying to behave in a flirtatious manner towards her customers -- is considered laughable, hinting that Bollywood's main message towards non-residential Indians is that of remaining as Indian as possible.

According to the author, Bollywood films show that, by giving in to Western norms and ideals, one is in danger of growing corrupted and losing out the opportunity of becoming financially successful as well. In one film, a family restaurant run by Indian immigrants only starts gaining profit after it becomes truly Indian; before that, the restaurant offered the same sort of meals one could find anywhere in America, which is bland and boring. Only by sticking to one's roots and proudly proclaiming one's culture is it possible to survive abroad.

The article continues to say that, in Bollywood, hybrid identities are ignored, and America itself is reduced to some sort of spectacle. The focus in Bollywood films taking place abroad is not on the tension that arises between one's origins and the new country that one lives in, but on how Indian culture, due to its being so traditional and moral, ends up saving the day. On the other hand, an American setting like New York is not really acknowledged; the setting merely serves as a background -- like a landscape in a painting. Indeed, Mita Banerjee points out that New York is merely of interest as a part of India; the characters are so immersed in their culture and spend so little time interacting with anyone else that the 'other' just ends up being pesky side noise.

The implications are unfortunate -- America only is of interest when it comes to economy. Otherwise, it is regarded as something eccentric; Mita Banerjee, again, points out how Bollywood films merely depict popular stereotypes of Westerners in their movies -- as people who dress in strange clothes, are too open-minded and not as moral as Indians. Indians in

Bollywood films tend to regard these Westerners with something akin to amusement and even pity.

However, it is not only Westerners, but other Asian cultures that fall prey to such unfortunate depictions as well. One film shows that Chinese immigrants -- they are not even regarded as such, but merely as Chinese -- manage to survive because they stick to their culture and make money out of it. On the one hand, this could be seen as something positive, as Mita Banerjee points out, but is also unfortunate because it implies that all Chinese are the same. Additionally, they are rendered interchangeable with the Japanese, which further shows that Bollywood dismisses other Asian cultures instead of, as one would expect, portraying feelings of solidarity.

Yet, it is not only other Asian cultures and the West that gets depicted unfavourably in Bollywood films, but also India itself. In Bollywood, India is celebrated as one whole, rather than a nation of diverse cultural identities. This sort of idealisation is, as Mita Banerjee hints, dangerous because it ignores how people in India itself differ and how -- by pretending that India is one big, happy family -- Bollywood renders India into some sort of commercial commodity that is bland as well as very nationalistic in its approach towards other cultures. In fact, Mita Banerjee states how several Bollywood critics see links between Bollywood's idealised love for India and its dismissal of everything that is not -- one of the most prominent parties in the country is nationalistic in its nature.

Another thing that Mita Banerjee points out to is that, while Bollywood depicts New York as a place of cultural intermingling and how India, because of its celebration of love and marriage, promotes such ideals, Bollywood also shows how hypocritical it is: homosexuality, for example, is only tolerated when it is parodied. Otherwise, it is regarded as unnatural and obscene.

In sum, it can be said that Bollywood, while celebrating the West because of the economic advantages it holds for Indians, also slams it because of its supposed lack of morals and for being different. Indian morals are celebrated and considered better than anything else; however, at the same time, it is ignored that India is just as fragmented in its identity as any other country out there.

Wife reveals many of these nationalistic tendencies. It is not so much Dimple herself who displays an exaggerated sense of pride in India, but the Indians who surround her. Despite the fact that they have lived in the US for years, they dismiss, for example, American food as bad and proclaim that Indian food, even if it is rotten, is still better than anything else. Their pride is displayed in the fact that, during their social gatherings, they only eat Indian food and, it seems, try to recreate India as much as possible. This is shown by the fact during social gatherings, only Indian music is played, the people eat with their fingers rather than using a fork and knife and how, during the conversations, most of the topics revolve around India. Sometimes, they talk about their hopes to return to India one day.

It seems that everything remotely possible is done to not regard America as home; one of the characters, for example, always talks about how violent America is. Indeed, he seems to regard the States as such a dangerous and threatening place that -- as Dimple notes -- all of his New York centred talks revolve around violence. This can be seen as a clear dismissal as well as rejection of the USA and as a clear avoidance of becoming emotionally attached to it. Perhaps, by downplaying America like this and turning it into a constant scene of violence, this particular character manages to keep his love for India fresh.

Western influences are frowned upon; this is most clearly shown in the way Ina's habits are frowned upon by most of the characters in the novel. In fact, she is considered something of a black sheep because she has succumbed to American influence. Whenever Ina is mentioned, the other characters state how she is a bad example and that the newcomer Dimple should avoid trying to become like her. Actually, Ina's husband is blamed as well because he has neglected to take care of his wife and allowed her to become like this. This shows that the Indian immigrants have a very clear concept of what an Indian woman should behave like. Furthermore, it also proves that, according to these characters, the husband is to play a dominant role -- it is within his responsibility to make sure that his wife does not fall out of line.

The way Western morals are rejected is also shown when Dimple, upon being proposed a job, is immediately confronted by Amit who tells her that his wife should not work; his objections are

met with approval by some of the other characters. They state that a job would only give Dimple wrong ideas and, once again, they start talking about Ina. This scene implies that Western ideas -- such as emancipation and women having jobs -- are considered immoral. Moreover, the lifestyles of the women that are considered good are that of a typical Indian's wife: they stay at home, take care of the children, clean the household and prepare good meals for their husbands. Basically, this means that, even in America, the role of women is reduced to that of a housewife and mother. While other options might be available, it is not considered good for a woman to embrace them; the implications behind such ideas might be that the West is seen as a threat to traditional Indian views.

Interestingly, the same cannot be said for the men in *Wife*. They do not dress in traditional Indian clothes and, as can be seen in the example of Amit, try their utmost to adapt to Western culture. Amit tries to learn English phrases off by heart and, in the course of the novel, tries to become more modern, as opposed to stiff and traditional. Moreover, his attitude towards Dimple changes as well; while he is opposed to her going out on her own at first -- he even goes shopping with her, towards the end he is the one trying to persuade her to do something with herself. This is noteworthy because it shows that Amit is, at least, trying to understand Western culture. Yet, it is strongly implied that the only reason the men try to adapt to American values is to secure their job -- adaptation in this case is merely done for economic reasons, which -- once again -- shows that America is only viewed as a place to gain profits from.

However, it is not only the other characters who reject the American ideas, but Dimple herself displays disdain for it as well. At the beginning of the novel, she is shown as celebrating Indian culture. She deems that only arranged marriages can bring happiness to a woman, and that more modern ideas -- such as not getting married -- should remain unheard of. However, with time, she loses conviction and becomes increasingly ambivalent. If anything, she -- while not embracing American culture -- is somewhat fascinated by it. Its versatility and the freedom it seems to promise, as symbolised by Milt and Ina, makes her eager to experience it. However, she is too afraid to tackle new ideas.

Moreover, Dimple's main problem is that, to a large extent, her mental conception of America is characterised by stereotypes. For her, Americans are crude, fun-loving and do not understand traditions as well as Indians do. This is shown, for example, in how she treats Milt; she does not seem to consider him as anything but an easy-going and flirtatious guy. She regards the motives of each American man having a look at her as questionable. It is quite possible that these ideas have been shaped by Dimple's having watched too much television; her main problem as a character is that she -- like the Bollywood filmmakers Mita Banerjee deals with -- pictures America as one great whole. A whole that is freakish, strange and immoral. Like this, she simplifies Americans and ignores the fact that they -- just like her -- are very conflicted themselves.

Yet, there is an instance, in which Dimple shows a lot of awareness and maturity; she is shown to be aware of India's not being very well disposed towards foreigners. She muses upon an acquaintance's marriage with an American woman and wonders how his parents feel about it. She comes to the conclusion that they cannot be very pleased because marrying a foreigner is something of a betrayal. Not only because the man has gone against his parents' wishes, but because a decision like that makes it clear that he has no intention of returning to India. This implies that the worst a non-residential Indian can do, according to Dimple, is to become American and, as such, forfeit India.

This further implies that becoming a hybrid, in other words interacting with America so much that one becomes entangled with the culture, is viewed as dangerous. Not only -- as in Ina's case -- because it promotes an immoral lifestyle, but one is endangered of forgetting one's roots.

Wife explores how Dimple's cultural identity is not stable at all, how -- in fact -- it is fragmented even before she arrives in America. This, of course, goes against what Bollywood is trying to depict -- an India that is bound by values and traditions that are shared all across the country. Dimple, however, is not a perfect Indian woman: she tries to be one, but her struggles are in vain. For example, she is not a woman who desires to have children. When she falls pregnant, she is not ecstatic, but feels pressured and afraid; most Bollywood films would have portrayed Dimple as accepting the baby immediately. There are other instances as well, which shall be explored in

a later section. What remains important though is that, as Mita Banerjee states in her article, Bollywood glosses over a lot of issues (Banerjee 349-358).

3.10 Great Expectations

One of the reasons why Dimples comes to suffer through so much hardship is because she is too much of an idealist. She yearns for things she cannot have and becomes embittered when life disappoints her -- time and time again. Coupled with her inability to talk about her problems, Dimple's idealism is one of the reasons why the novel ends the way it does.

Dimple's idealism is already evident in the first few pages of the novel. Like most young girls, she dreams of marrying a rich engineer. Interestingly, her dreams cannot necessarily be called romantic; she does not dream about eternal love or passion, but her desires can be called purely materialistic. For her, marriage is all about social status. Of course, she does have ideas about how a woman should behave and her ideas are shaped by traditional Indian values. Dimple accepts these values without questioning at first. However, once she is married, Dimple is faced with the bitter reality of things not being as glorious as she envisioned them to be. Moreover, she is confronted by the fact that she cannot play the role of an Indian wife as well as she had planned to.

She is not sacrificing, but selfish; she does not find pleasure in preparing meals for her husband, but feels stifled in her new home. Moreover, Dimple is confronted by the fact that, unlike the expectations of her parents, husband and friends, she does not look forward to motherhood. If anything, she feels captured and trapped.

This realisation turns her into an embittered individual in India; she tries to deny it, fleeing in daydreams about emigrating to a foreign country, but she fails. Instead, she is jealous of her best friend and the lifestyle she leads; she spends a lot of time in her apartment and starts thinking of death. First, she thinks of harming herself, but soon, she turns against her unborn baby -- because the baby symbolises everything that Dimple has come to hate.

After all, motherhood and marriage are celebrated as a source of pride and happiness in India; both her and her parents, at the beginning of the book, behave as if marriage were the only thing desirable in a young woman's life. Even her friend, whom Dimple considers modern, hints that marriage is a state of perpetual happiness and that having a baby can only lead to more joy. Amit also does not even halfway suspect that Dimple is unhappy; he has no reason to because, in his mind, a woman couldn't be anything but looking forward to motherhood.

However, when Dimple kills the child, she not only reveals that reality clashes greatly with expectations, but also reveals that the idea of stable identities -- in other words, fixed notions about a person according to their heritage and status in life -- are nothing but a myth. Dimple, who is supposed to be the epitome of a perfect Indian housewife, is nothing but an ugly parody of it. Moreover, in her despair to act like one, Dimple falls into depression, acting violently against her surroundings -- and it is hinted at that this is her only way of being able to voice a protest.

In the United States, Dimple is confronted with the reality of America not being the luxurious place she expected it to be. Instead of living in a grand house with modern furniture, Dimple and her husband live in a rather modest apartment. Moreover, she is -- yet again -- confronted by the fact that she is not a perfect Indian housewife -- even more so in America because she is introduced to alternative lifestyles. However, the problem that occurs then is that -- instead of embracing the new lifestyles or infusing them into her already existing cultural identity -- Dimple falls apart even more. She feels even more confused, trapped and stifled than ever before.

Wife is such a gripping book because it greatly reflects reality. Up to this date, as hinted at in the script's introduction, there is a great tension between what is expected of Indians and what real life is like. In the case of the book, the emphasis is placed on second generation Indians and their cultural identity. For some, against contemporary expectations, cultural identity is not about being proud of Indian, associating with Indian friends or being as Indian as possible in America. However, it is also not about being as American as possible. Instead, it is something much more personal, individualistic and complex. Dimple's tragic falling apart in *Wife* hints at that greatly --

namely that one cannot and should not harbour too great expectations about a person's cultural identity. That, rather than associating a person with given stereotypes and accepted traditions, it would be better to reflect on a person's personal history and consider whether these aforesaid traditions and stereotypes are truly applicable. Also, as Dimple's character development shows, cultural identities -- identities themselves, in fact -- are fragmented, contradictory and susceptible to change; they are dynamic, so much indeed that they can turn a naive girl into a murderess.

Dimple's conflicting identities aside, *Wife* explores the theme of expectations versus reality in a much more tangible manner. *Wife* is also about expectations that new immigrants harbour about America: Amit, for example, believes, prior to leaving India, that America is going to offer him a much better life. In this assumption he is not only supported by family and friends, but it seems to be a general consensus among the other characters in the novel as well; Dimple constantly reads in both articles and books how life across the ocean is much better than in India; it is an exalted, glorified version of America, and the author of the book introduces hints that, even nowadays, many Indians fall prey to the illusion of America being a land of golden opportunities.

Indeed, while a large number of Indians are very well-off, statistics reveal that there is a large number of Indian immigrants living below the poverty line. *Wife* hints at that because, despite Amit believing that he would land a job at once, several weeks elapse between his arrival and finally getting one. So it happens that Dimple is disillusioned -- not only because life is not as luxurious as she expected it to be, but that her husband is not as intelligent or sophisticated as she wanted him to be.

3.11 Jeans and Sari

As the title of this subsection hints, clothes determine to a considerable extent to which cultural identity one belongs to in *Wife*. Also, it is not men's clothes that determine what is Western and what not, but women's. Indeed, in her introduction to the book *Desis In The House* published in 2002, Sunaina Maira claims that the woman's body is used as a parameter to decide who is Indian and who is 'fake'. Saris and traditional Indian clothes are considered to be Indian by the

spokepersons of Indians in the USA, while sexy, revealing outfits are brushed off as being American.

Dimple, because of her always wearing traditional Indian clothes, is marked as being a traditional Indian woman. The fact that she is good at cooking and behaves demurely makes people view her as an Indian. Ina, on the other hand, because of her openly wearing Western clothing and being outspoken -- in the sense that she is not afraid of flirting openly with other men -- is considered to have become corrupted by America. Other factors that decide how Indian someone is the novel are: remaining friends with Indians, listening to Indian music, and -- in the case of women -- remaining a housewife and not having a job.

If one examines these factors closely, what is revealed is how shallow these stereotypes actually are; the characters in the novel seem to pretend as if India were a united country, ignoring the fact that it is made up of many states and many different identities. Only once in the novel are tensions within India hinted at when Dimple wonders about the revolts in Calcutta -- but this allusion is quickly brushed over, and not picked up again. Also, the novel pretends that the statement that Sikhs are dirty and perverted results from them having become corrupted by the West. Historical reasons or possible discrimination against Sikhs in India are not referred to.

Moreover, while women are expected to continue upholding traditions, men seem to be encouraged to adapt to the Western lifestyle as much as possible. They, for example, wear Western clothing and no one criticises them for that (Maira 1-20).

4. No No Boy

4.1 About the Author

John Okada was born in 1923 in Seattle. He was the eldest of three sons, and his parents owned a boarding hotel. He studied at the University of Washington, where he received a bachelor's degree in English and in library science. Afterwards, he earned his master's degree in English at Columbia University, where he also met his future wife Dorothy.

During WWII, he and his family were interned at Minikoka in Idaho. He volunteered for military duty and served as a sergeant in the Air Force until he was discharged in 1946. After the war, he married Dorothy, had a son and a daughter and worked as a librarian and technical writer. In the 1950s, he started working on *No-No Boy*, which is stated to have been inspired by a real life story. He published the novel in 1957.

John Okada died of a heart attack in the year 1971 (Chen 281).

4.2 Plot Synthesis

No-No Boy by John Okada starts out with the twenty-five-year-old Japanese American Ichiro Yamada, who has recently been released from prison, returning to his hometown in Seattle. He has not been there for four years and notes that everything has become shabbier and more diluted. Furthermore, he meets a former acquaintance who, once he finds out that Ichiro went to prison for refusing to join the US armed forces, turns hostile and even spits on him in disgust. Ichiro decides that it is best to just leave.

He returns home to find out that his mother is proud of him, his father still as spineless as ever, and his younger brother disillusioned with him; Ichiro's mother believes that Japan has won the war and that ships will come to rescue them. She even reads out a letter that backs up her claims, and Ichiro feels nausea crawl up his spine because his mother is not willing to accept things as they are.

After reading out the letter, Ichiro's mother immediately drags him off to meet some acquaintances, where Ichiro is shocked to find out that one of his old friends died in the war and that his mother, instead of offering condolences, calls the deceased a traitor because of him having fought for America. When she storms out of the apartment in anger, Ichiro stays behind and apologises for his mother's behaviour.

At home, Ichiro is tense and wonders about his life; he reflects on how he chose not to go to the army because of his mother and the fact that his entire family was relocated and put into a concentration camp. He feels conflicted because he feels that he should have chosen differently.

Still, Ichiro tries his best to meet with old friends; he visits a friend called Freddy -- a friend who is also a 'no-no boy'. Ichiro hopes that his friend might give him some answers on how to deal with his situation, but ends up being disappointed because Freddy has simply grown wild and reckless; his new philosophy of life can be simply translated into wasting oneself away.

Disappointed, Ichiro decides to visit his former university where he studied engineering for two years. He visits his old professor and feels awkward when he starts talking about the war; he naturally assumes that Ichiro served in the army as well, and Ichiro is tongue-tied and feels out of place. He ends up leaving the university and, there, he meets an old friend of his called Kenji. Kenji has served in the war, which resulted in the loss of his leg.

Ichiro feels uncomfortable in Kenji's presence at first, but Kenji -- unlike others -- does not mind him being a no-no boy; he even invites him over for a drink. However, at the bar, Ichiro meets with his younger brother Taro and his group of friends. Taro has been behaving coldly towards Ichiro, and even distanced himself from his parents by exclaiming that, instead of finishing high school, he will join the army. The situation only grows worse when Taro, under false pretences, has Ichiro beaten up by his friends; the beating only comes to an end when Kenji interferes.

Angered and upset, Ichiro asks Kenji to stop associating with him, but the other man remains friendly and makes it clear that he doesn't care what others say about Ichiro; he also shows a clear desire to continue being friends. Touched, by this sign of loyalty, Ichiro allows Kenji to drive him to the countryside.

There, they meet one of Kenji's friends -- a woman called Emi who, as Kenji reveals, has been deserted by her husband. Emi is instantly attracted to Ichiro because the way he is built reminds her of her husband; the fact that he can play on the piano additionally thrills her, and the two quickly grow comfortable in each other's presence when she starts playing with him. In the end,

when it comes to sleeping over, Kenji takes the sofa, and Emi does not object to Ichiro sharing the bed with her; Ichiro relates being an objector to Emi and is surprised as well as touched when she, instead of reprimanding him, sympathises with him. Moreover, Emi shares her troubles with Ichiro. They end up sleeping with each other, both of them needing the comfort and assurance of another person.

When Ichiro returns home, he finds that his mother is immediately disappointed to learn that he has been spending time with Kenji. His father, clearly fed up, confronts her with a letter from her elder sister. At first, Ichiro's mother tries to reject the veracity of her husband's words, but she ends up accepting the truth when the letter refers to an incident in the past that only her sister and she knew about. This revelation forces Ichiro's mother to cope with the fact that Japan has lost the war after all. She does not handle it well and locks herself up in her room. Ichiro's father is worried.

Ichiro, however, does not have time to reflect on his mother's mental state because he accompanies Kenji on a trip to the hospital. He knows that they will stay there for two days, and he is resolved to find a job for himself. Not only because he wants to make himself useful, but is determined to move away from home. However, things do not end up being easy for him because the employers are interested in Ichiro's past -- something that perturbs Ichiro greatly. At one interview with a man named Mr. Carrick, he reveals that he is a no-no boy and expects scorn -- only to find empathy and understanding. More so, Mr. Carrick blames America for driving young men like him into such a painful situation; he offers Ichiro the job, stating that he does not care what Ichiro did as long as he proves to be a good worker. Ichiro assures him by saying that he will think about it. In the end, he decides to reject the offer.

When Ichiro goes to visit Kenji at the hospital, he notices that his friend looks noticeably worse and, despite his attempting to deny it, he realises that Kenji is on the brink of death. Kenji tells Ichiro that the situation will not always be as hopeless as it is now. In fact, he states that, sooner or later, the Japanese Americans who fought in the war will realise that this does not necessarily improve their situations; Japanese Americans will continue to be the object of discrimination.

After leaving the hospital, Ichiro drives to Kenji's home, where he finds out that his friend has passed away -- a mere two hours after he saw him last.

Distraught, Ichiro goes home, only to find his father passed out from drinking too heavily and his mother dead -- she has committed suicide. The next few days Ichiro and his father prepare the funeral. Ichiro feels restless and trapped, thinking about how much he hated his mother, and yet, realising what a good person she was in her own way. He mourns the fact that she could never accept America as her home. During the funeral, which strikes Ichiro as both grotesque and fake, Ichiro ends up leaving with Freddy. He feels he has to escape. Freddy tells him about a possible job, and Ichiro considers trying it out.

The job is a Christian centre, where people offer things at a garage market; however, it also focuses on repairing items of various sorts, and Ichiro feels confident that he might land a job at this place. Yet, when it comes to the interview, he is immediately made feel uncomfortable when asked by the employer about his past. Ichiro reveals what he did, and the conversation takes an awkward turn. Not because Mr. Morrison, the employer, states that there is nothing he can do about Ichiro's emotional trauma as a "no-no boy" and the hell he must be going through mentally. He still offers Ichiro a job though -- a job that the latter notices has far less pay than the one Mr. Carrick offered him. At the place, he also meets one of his old friends -- a man who is a no-no boy as well. This friend relates a story to Ichiro about his former working place; he says that he had to resign because one of the men who tried to protect him nearly ended up being killed. He states that he could not remain there where others were in danger because of him.

Ichiro decides to decline this job offer as well and returns home. There, he meets with Freddy again and they go for a ride. However, Fred causes some trouble at a club when he gets into a brawl with another man. Ichiro gets involved because he wants to stop the two from fighting; Fred leaves when the situation escalates and ends up dying in a car accident. Ichiro consoles the man whom he was fighting with, realising that he is just as confused and lost as he himself is.

4.3 Structure

No No Boy has eleven chapters, which tend to be all about fifteen to twenty pages long. The time covered in the book is some five to six weeks. The events in the book happen in chronological order; this means that events unfold as they are told and are not mere reminiscences. From time to time though, the characters make references to past events while dwelling on their lives; Ichiro, especially, remembers events and people that have shaped his life. There are no references made to the future.

The book cannot really be divided into any parts, other than the eleven chapters; a single chapter consists of a scene or several scenes related to each other. For example, the chapter in which Ichiro's mother commits suicide is made up of several scenes: Ichiro's father, while getting drunk, dwells upon his past and married life, Ichiro's mother stares upon the letter from Japan again and then locks herself up in the bathroom; the event of Ichiro discovering her dead body is dealt with in another chapter.

However, what can be said is that the most important changes happening in the plot -- accompanied by shifts in tone and atmosphere -- are marked by a character's death. Three characters die in the novel -- Kenji, Ichiro's mother and Freddy. The first death is seen as a saddening event, marking a real loss in Ichiro's life, but also helping him to realise that he is not as alone as he thought he was. The death of his mother helps him make peace with himself and the woman who has influenced his life so much. The final one -- the death of a man very similar to himself -- makes him understand that not everything has been lost yet; he knows this because, unlike Freddy, he has something to hold onto.

The travelling that Ichiro does in the story could also be considered to mark different parts in the story -- he travels thrice. Once to Emi's house, the second time to Portland where he drops Kenji off at the hospital, and the last time to check out one of the job opportunities that Freddy mentions. These journeys are important because they all end up with Ichiro undergoing important character development. After he leaves Emi's house, Ichiro feels at peace and has also come to understand that not everyone out there hates him. In Portland, Ichiro learns that not all Americans are prejudiced against fellow Americans of different background; he learns to hope. His last meeting with Kenji makes Ichiro realise that he cannot run away from his problems

anymore. These feelings are further heightened when he goes to that job interview. There, he comes to realise that avoiding his problems will lead to nothing.

As a conclusion it can be said that the structure of *No No Boy*, apart from the division into eleven chapters, remains fairly arbitrary; this means that there are several ways to interpret how many parts the book has -- or, better said, one could ask oneself whether the book has any parts at all. All in all, *No No Boy* has a fairly simple plot and the events unfolding take place during a very short piece of time. It is not an epic, but a simple story about a man struggling to find out where he belongs to.

Considering these factors, the way the book is structured into eleven chapters is perfect. The short length of the chapters makes *No - No Boy* easy to digest and fits the nearly episodic way the story is told.

4.4 Narration and Prose

The book is written in the past tense and is mainly told from Ichiro's perspective. However, sometimes the point of view shifts to other characters briefly -- most noticeably Kenji. But characters such as Ichiro's father and Kenji's father also have their moments of introspection; these moments help the reader to understand the characters. These contemplative moments also reveal what happened in the past.

No No Boy, unlike *Wife*, is much more explicit in showing what each of the characters feel; it does not shy away from showing Ichiro's inner life. Ichiro's inner life is revealed to be very embittered, but also vivid, full of conflicting emotions and desperate longing. The other characters are also very emotional, often expressing a longing to fix the past.

The writing style itself can be described as quite vivid and sentimental; it is very raw, but also very simple. The simplicity comes from the usage of no big words or the author going into great detail when it comes to settings. Instead, the writer chooses to describe places, homes and people

very sparsely, often just hinting at things. The only time the author really goes into detail is when it comes to describing a character's emotions.

The introspective scenes in the story are marked by long sentences and are always told in the present tense; the author can be said to really dive into the character's heads. As such, each time a character dwells on something, the writing becomes very personal, nearly intimate. It becomes so because the writer does a very good job at re-capturing the essence of thoughts, namely how disjointed, subjective and hurried they are in nature. In fact, they can be said to be, rather than interior monologues stream of consciousness because the re-collecting is always quite spontaneous and not ordered.

For example, after Ichiro's mother dies, he falls upon musing on his relationship with her; he reveals how he both hates and yet feels pity for her. In his memories, Ichiro recalls things such as her breaking his collection of records or how she frowned upon his being fond of American music. He shifts between present and past, wondering what made his mother the woman he knew her to be and what might have happened if she had been different.

Dialogue is, next to the introspective moments, something the book relies heavily upon; characters in *No No Boy* spend a lot of time interacting with each other, talking about their hopes, expectations and experiences; part of the reason why the book is so effective in portraying its message is due to the authenticity of the dialogues. The latter come across as authentic because the author does not use stilted language when having his characters interact; they use plain language, swear a lot and sometimes also contradict themselves. Kenji, for example, is torn between being proud of what he has done, but he also expresses a lot of bitterness. Ichiro himself is often torn between pushing people away with his words, but longing to be closer to them.

However, there are also silent moments in the book that are subtle, relying more on the characters' physical actions and the atmosphere when trying to get a message across. The strongest example would be the scenes dealing with Ichiro's mother after her breakdown; she has no dialogue after that, but -- through her silent actions and unwillingness to eat -- her mental torment and grief are plainly shown. Freddy's restlessness is made evident through his

restlessness than the words he says. *No No Boy* is a powerful novel because the author knows how to combine ‘showing’ with ‘telling’; Ichiro’s perceptive observations help make sense of a scene, but they never reveal too much. For example, during the funeral of his mother, Ichiro’s observations are enough to understand how overdone and awkward the process is, but the author also leaves enough room for the reader to envision what is happening; what Ichiro doesn’t reveal is filled by perceptions on the part of the reader.

The writing style of the book remains simple and straightforward because the writer does not use many metaphors or symbols; the writing is vivid, but that is more achieved because of the raw emotion the author uses than anything else. Otherwise, it is very plain in fact; the author writes with a nearly journalistic precision, only breaking his clear and short sentences when the characters are reflecting upon their lives.

No No Boy’s prose is not always smooth; sometimes the writing -- especially when it comes to character’s thoughts -- strikes one as erratic; there are moments when it feels like the characters are rambling and the prose is rendered difficult to read. Interestingly, the book also has grammatical and typological errors -- not only in the dialogues, but also in the main writing itself. Sometimes, the writer repeats the same recurring themes over and over again, making *No No Boy* less subtle than it should be. The book suffers from a somewhat rushed transition; towards the novel, things happen too quickly, and the effect is akin to a rollercoaster ride: the reader does not have much time to process the happenings. However, this might be intended as the events that haunt Ichiro’s life are unexpected; it also gives the novel a sense of honesty and realism that is rarely found in other books. Therefore, despite its shortcomings and somewhat unpolished prose, *No No Boy* is effective because it seems genuine – Okada manages to touch his readers where it counts the most.

For the main part, the novel is told in the third person, but the narrator is not an uninterested observer, but everything is told through the eyes of Ichiro. When not the latter, then it is either Kenji or one of the other people he interacts with. Therefore, the narrator never knows more than the characters themselves; everything is told either in the present or in the past -- the present and the past that the characters are familiar with. As such, the novel is heavily subjective, revealing

mostly the insights of Ichiro and his problems; the focus is on Japanese Americans, and the only time an outsider's views are mentioned is through the appearance of characters such as Mr. Carrick.

However, despite the novel being mostly told in the third person, it sometimes slips to the first when the characters' thoughts are being explored. This shift is very effective, giving the novel -- as mentioned before -- a very intimate feel; the reader really gains the opportunity to get know the characters. Another thing making this shift so effective is the fact that the author changes the tenses; while the book is usually told in the past, once the characters start thinking, it shifts to the present. This change in tenses makes their thoughts immediate and tangible.

4.5 Characterisation

No No Boy is a book that primarily relies on characterisation. This simply means that the driving forces of this novel are the characters, namely their actions and the decisions they make. Yet, despite its strong focus on the protagonist Ichiro, *No No Boy* also places an emphasis on the other characters; in fact the character who plays the most important role in the novel is not Ichiro himself.

The one who takes centre stage is Kenji -- the injured, half-crippled war veteran who fought for America because he felt compelled to. Kenji serves both as an antagonist but also an ally to Ichiro. On the one hand, his actions are considered to be noble by most of the characters. After all, unlike Ichiro, Kenji willingly joined the army because he felt American enough to do so; he did not defy the country nor hold onto values that were no longer a part of his being. Yet, on the other hand, Kenji reveals himself to be more than sympathetic to Ichiro's cause; he instils his friend with hope because, according to him, nothing is over yet for Ichiro. The reasons why he says such things are multi-fold: the most important one would be that Kenji is dying. He is aware of it, just like his father is; he makes no pretences about it and seems to have accepted his fate.

It can be said that Kenji's acceptance of his fate is something of a role model for Ichiro -- and possibly the reader. Kenji does not whine about his fate nor hold any grudges against anyone; he

is fairly complacent and nearly jovial about always having to go to the hospital. Of course, it could simply be that this nonchalant attitude is the only way Kenji can grapple with the situation. Because, underneath his veneer of light-hearted acceptance, there are cracks that reveal that Kenji is something of an embittered individual too. This is shown most clearly when he tells Ichiro that, despite many Japanese-Americans having willingly joined the army, things will not change for the better. He knows that Japanese-Americans will continue to be alienated as well as isolated. However, unlike Ichiro, he does not only blame America merely for that, but also the Japanese themselves; he states that things would stop being like this if the Japanese-Americans did not always mingle with each other.

These observations make Kenji both a wise and very empathetic character; he is not as radical as most of the other characters in the novel, but tries to understand everyone. However, it is hinted that he is also something of a sombre and melancholic character, deeply suffering from the burden of being a Japanese-American; his father muses that, if things had been different, Kenji might not have found it necessary to prove himself -- and might not have lost a leg. He is a very important character in the novel because it is through him that most of the plot unfolds his death that seems to affect Ichiro the most: even after Kenji is gone, Ichiro remembers him as someone gave him the strength to continue moving on with his life.

Ichiro himself seems to be more of a symbol, representing the broken generation of men who declined serving in the army because of their conflicting identities. Most of Ichiro's actions in the novel -- his entire character development, in fact -- can be described as a search for peace; Ichiro starts out restless, but ends up having some semblance of hope towards the end. At the beginning of the novel, Ichiro is an embittered young man who feels both out of place at home and everywhere else; he is pessimistic from the "get go" and filled with hatred towards himself and others. He expects everyone to lash out on him and is, therefore, very surprised when Kenji offers him a hand in friendship.

In fact, the changes Ichiro undergoes happen because of people being nice to him; he starts becoming increasingly less embittered once he realises that he is not alone, that he has -- in fact -- people who understand him or are trying to, at least. While he is afraid and ashamed of his

actions at the beginning, Ichiro grows nearly proud of them towards the end -- at least, he does not avoid stating outright that he is a no-no boy. What is interesting about Ichiro is that, though he wishes to start anew, he does not choose the easiest way out: he does not accept Mr. Carrick's offer, for example, because he knows he would be running away.

This nearly stubborn trait of his -- namely, to not sell himself under his worth or fall back into old patterns -- makes Ichiro an unexpectedly strong character; it reveals, after all, a willingness to fight back and to face challenges. It also shows that he is unafraid. However, it might also just imply that Ichiro is a bit reckless and impulsive; his impulsiveness is shown, for example, in the way he lashes out on others at first. However, he does become quieter towards the end, his impulsiveness only getting the better of him when he is directly confronted and his patience has been tested. However, his character development does not come across as being too idealistic: Ichiro is still shown to be struggling, and it is strongly implied that his problems will not be solved all that quickly. Yet, there is definite hope that, one day, he will be happy; Ichiro makes it clear that he is convinced of that -- and that conviction itself is enough of a development. For, at the beginning, he has no aspirations at all.

Freddy is the character that Ichiro might have become if he had allowed himself to go to waste. Freddy is a restless and embittered young man who also said "no" to the army, suffering greatly for this decision. Instead of Ichiro, however, he does not choose to ponder over his actions, but prefers losing himself in deadly pursuits of pleasure. He seems intent on killing himself in order to escape the pain of not knowing where he belongs. Unlike Ichiro, he does not find that inner peace nor resolve to hope for a better future.

Other characters that showcase how dangerous it is to cling to things are Ichiro's parents -- especially his mother. Ichiro's mother is convinced that Japan has not lost the war, despite the fact that she has more than ample evidence to undermine that belief. Yet, she clings to her beliefs, refusing to accept anything that is contrary to them. Moreover, she expects her family -- her sons and her husband -- to not only support her in her beliefs, but to follow them as well. When they refuse to do so, her world begins to fall apart. It could be said that Ichiro's mother is a

tragic example of a control freak; however, she is also vulnerable because once she loses her convictions, she loses the will to live.

Ichiro's father is both a weak and strong character. On the one hand, he is a tired man who is afraid of standing up against his wife, but -- on the other -- he is more of a realist than his wife is; he has no problems with accepting that Japan has lost the war. In the end, he manages to survive because, though subservient and fond of drowning his sorrows in alcohol, he manages to adapt himself quite well. Ichiro even comes to admire his father a bit because he realises that he will always find a way to live; he might not be the strongest man out there, but he does try to make the best out of his situation.

Emi is another important character in the novel; she is depicted as a compassionate and understanding young woman who tries to help Ichiro. She does not claim to fully understand him, but is moved by his inner torment and wants him to be happy; it is strongly implied that she needs Ichiro because she is suffering from loneliness herself. However, because of Ichiro and Kenji -- and their ability to move on with their life, she manages to find the strength to break the ties with her neglecting husband forever.

4.6 Relationships

It is not only the characters that move the plot forwards, but the relationships they share with each other. *No No Boys* deals with a wide variety of relationships -- familial, platonic and romantic.

Ichiro's most important platonic relationship is the one he shares with Kenji. In a short time, the latter becomes one of his closest companions because, unlike the other people in Ichiro's life, he bears him no ill-will nor expects anything of him. Instead, Kenji treats him like an equal, meaning that he does not pity him either. Nor treat him with especial delicacy. Instead, he states that he would rather trade places with him because Ichiro has not lost a foot and is not on the brink of dying either. Moreover, he seems thoroughly convinced that, one day, Ichiro's situation will improve.

Ichiro tries to push Kenji away, but he quickly warms up to him because he realises that he can be himself around him. He does not have to pretend or strain himself to be happy. Kenji is insightful and willing to listen to his problems. Kenji himself seems to draw strength from Ichiro -- Ichiro does not treat him with especial delicacy either. The same way Kenji, because of the way he just treats Ichiro like a person rather than an object to pity, is a source of comfort to Ichiro.

The strength of his friendship with Kenji is revealed when contrasting it to the one he shares with Freddy. Although Freddy is a no-no boy like Ichiro, he is too mantled in his own fears and restlessness to be any source of comfort to Ichiro. In fact, he refuses to talk and would rather just have fun than anything else -- something Ichiro cannot relate to. After all, the latter is someone who wants to start anew, but Freddy is too stuck on the past. He also seems to be indifferent to Ichiro's problems. If anything, he is annoyed by Ichiro's trying to move forwards.

Another relationship that is very important to Ichiro is the troubled one he shares with his mother; they do not interact much in the book, but it is hinted that Ichiro's mother was the main reason why he refused to join the army. Although Ichiro claims to hate what his mother stands for, it is clear that she has had a shaping influence on his personality. Everything he knows about Japan comes from his mother, and, in his bitterness towards her. Ichiro's feelings towards that country are revealed as well.

Ichiro claims to hate his mother. In his thoughts, she is depicted as a domineering woman who terrorised the whole family with her radical views; he further reveals that she disapproved of any mingling with American culture, but idealised Japan instead. The part of Ichiro that was influenced by his mother could not feel willing to join the army. However, when he returns from prison, the relationship between him and his mother is noticeably strained. While his mother expects him to return to his studies and support her in her radical views, Ichiro is clearly disgusted by both of her expectations of him and her views. He cannot believe that his mother cannot accept reality and feels ashamed for her. Ichiro is especially disgusted when she insults one of his friends who died while fighting for America.

When Ichiro's mother falls into despair and dies as a consequence, he feels a certain sense of relief and even sympathy with her. With her passing away, Ichiro seems to realise that his mother might not have been as terrifying as she seemed in life, but been a woman who had just been disappointed too often in life.

Ichiro's relationship with his father is awkward. Although his father is more realistic in his views than his wife, he is weak-willed and runs away from his problems. Instead of confronting them, he turns to drinking, and Ichiro is disgusted: he cannot believe that someone like this should be a role model for him. Even after confronting his mother, Ichiro's father is haunted by second thoughts; he tries to take everything back, much to Ichiro's mortification. After her death, their relationship remains awkward, but also bears traces of a possible reconciliation. Ichiro has gained some sort of respect for his father and is willing to support him financially. Unlike his wife, his father does not bear too great expectations.

Taro and Ichiro's relationship is clearly strained; Ichiro realises that his younger brother hates him because of what he has done. He knows that Taro is ashamed and feels the need to prove himself -- he wants to undo the wrong his brother has committed by willingly joining the army himself. Though clearly upset by his brother's behaviour, Ichiro is understanding and does not feel any ill-will. It is only when Taro allows his friends to beat Ichiro up that he starts feeling angry. Less so because his brother is angry, but because Taro is such a coward; he is disappointed that Taro did not choose to voice his frustrations directly. So, their relationship ends on a frustrating note -- Taro leaves for the army before he and Ichiro can really talk about their problems.

Emi and Ichiro feel a mutual attraction. It is not merely sexual. Ichiro admires Emi's independence and is touched by the way she tries to help him; some part of him is annoyed too, but Ichiro cannot deny that Emi is giving him hope for the future. Emi herself seems to admire the way Ichiro, despite his pain, is still deals with his life. However, it is not clear whether she is attracted to him because of his slight resemblance to her husband or genuinely likes him. Ichiro himself is attracted to her and considers that if things were different, she would be the sort of girl

he would have liked to marry. However, he seems to be aware of the fact that she is still in love with her husband. The book ends with the relationship being left on an indefinite note.

What is interesting about *No - No Boy* is how it proves that, sometimes, encounters with strangers can leave a huge impression on people. Mr. Carrick is a stranger who leaves a lasting impression on Ichiro. Due to his understanding and openness -- his willingness to admit that America was wrong in its treatment of Japanese -- he gives Ichiro the necessary courage and strength to move on with his life. Although Ichiro does not accept Mr. Carrick's job offer, he does stop running away from his problems.

4.7 Setting

The main setting of the book is Seattle. Seattle is, as mentioned in the novel, described as a place that Japanese people liked to live in; it is mentioned that generations of families have been living in special ethnic quarters. Despite the forced relocation of Japanese to concentration camps, families are mentioned who have been moving back. Ichiro's family nearly lives in the same place as before, just a few blocks away from their original home.

The place where Ichiro lives is described as being shoddy and decrepit. Buildings are slowly turning into ruins, the streets are dirty and it is full of gamblers and drunkards. There is only one important club that, despite its claiming to be exclusive, lets anyone in. It is a place that mostly immigrants frequent -- Chinese and Japanese Americans. However, African Americans attend it as well, along with Americans of questionable background. The bar is depicted to be a loud and slightly dangerous place -- outbreaks of violence occur often; these outbreaks of violence within the novel convey an uneasy, tense atmosphere that fit Ichiro's often troubled and conflicted thoughts quite well. He is often, before he finally makes peace with himself, restless and uneasy.

Ichiro observes how Seattle -- or at least the Seattle he knows -- has become filthier than he remembers it; it is implied that the war has left its marks on the place. Moreover, it is clear that the Seattle he is familiar with is not an affluent place; it nearly seems like a ghetto of sorts where one only finds immigrants and people who make money off them -- like prostitutes. The setting

mirrors the hopelessness of Ichiro's situation quite well; he knows that, unless he finishes his education, he will not have a bright future. And yet, even if he does finish his education, Ichiro knows that most employers would refuse to hire him, due to his ethnic background.

Moreover, the setting with its huge concentration of Japanese-Americans, also shows how, as Kenji states, that America has still not come to accept them. In one scene, Ichiro travels by bus and comes across a part of Seattle that is, according to him, typically American: houses with white picket fences and fancy gardens. It is a clean area that Ichiro feels he will never belong to, and the contrast between what these two places -- the Seattle he is familiar with, and the one he knows he will never belong to -- is more than striking. After all, on the one hand there is the clean, orderly image of the American Seattle, and the chaotic, violent and dirty Seattle of the Japanese; the one is glorified, and the other is regarded as something abominable -- this contrast reflects Ichiro's conflict quite well. He spends quite a bit of time between yearning for the clean, unattainable America, but also feels a certain sense of loyalty for the area he grew up in.

Japan, though not directly used as a setting, does play an important role as a country -- though merely in a mental sphere. It is strongly implied that Ichiro's mother, in her head, still lives in Japan. Although she has lived in America for three decades, her ties with Japan are still strong, and she has never stopped believing that she would return there one day. Although Ichiro has never been to Japan, he is familiar with its history, and also associates it with glorious warlords and dashing samurai. Of course, this vision is very romanticised and idealistic to a nearly childish degree -- the letters that Ichiro's Japanese relatives send them are more than evidence of the reality. In a few words, these letters make clear that Japan is poor, people are starving and things are far from being fine.

This way, *No No Boy* reveals that the yearning for home is nothing but a myth because it is not possible to retrace the past. Moreover, a country is not something unchangeable, but just as prone to exterior influences as everything else. What this means is that Japan, due to its defeat in the war, is no longer the proud nation Ichiro's mother grew up in, but a country that is struggling to survive. So that the Japan she knew is nothing but an imaginary homeland.

4.8 Themes

At its core, the novel *No No Boy* is something of a coming-of-age story. Ichiro learns to cope with his past and accept that, despite his mistakes, there is still hope for him. Ichiro might already be in his mid-twenties, but he is still searching for a place in life. Huge parts of the novel revolve around his nearly frantic search to reconcile himself with his past -- and identity. His restlessness is mirrored in the way he moves around a lot in the novel; he travels to various places and is often in motion -- usually driving a car.

However, along with being a coming of age story, *No No Boy* is also something of a social commentary. While not as ambitious in its goals like *1984*, for example, the book definitely aims to make its audience aware of the problems a no-no boy faces. Further, it gives hints on how Japanese-Americans feel, especially second generation ones. Ichiro, for instance, with his conflicted identity can be seen as representing an entire generation. His parents, particularly his mother with her extreme views, are the epitome of first generation Japanese-Americans.

Yet, it cannot be said that it aims to offer any solutions, although *No No Boy* shows how one can deal with such a situation. On the one hand, as in the case of Kenji and Ichiro, one can try to make the best of a situation and move on. Or, like Freddy does, let go and fall prey to tragedy. Interesting, the latter view is not necessarily condemned because Ichiro is clearly sympathetic to Freddy.

The same can be said for Ichiro's mother. Although Ichiro feels embittered and angry towards her and her behaviour, he does not demonise her. He often notes how haggard and tired she looks; in his eyes, she is straining to keep alive. With her loss of sanity, Ichiro's mother becomes a pitiful character since John Okada uses silence and body language to show how weak she is; her not saying anything makes those passages in which she is slowly falling apart, much more painful to read.

In fact, *No No Boy* is very humane and strikingly honest in its approach; one could call it a novel that deals with 'slice of life' themes. The end, though clearly optimistic, does not gloss over the

fact that things will continue being painful to Ichiro. Instead, it is a fairly tentative ending that aspires to the best, but knows that things could, just as well, go to hell.

In fact, it would, perhaps, be best to consider *No – No Boy* a character study that deals with topics such as guilt, loss of identity and the often futile attempt to reconcile oneself with the present. It is also a novel that, rather realistically, depicts how difficult it is to be the child of immigrants. Ichiro's emotional trauma did not start with his saying no to the army, it was already there before; he did not know where he belonged from the moment he was born.

It is not only a question of being Japanese or American, but deciding whether one is something at all. Ichiro, after being released from prison, has to struggle with both the fact that he can neither relate to his mother nor to America. This honest portrayal in regards to Ichiro's identity makes the novel not only interesting for people who want to know more about Japanese-Americans post WWII, but also for readers who are merely curious about what it means to be the child of an immigrant.

4.9 Symbolism

Although the author does not seem to consciously use metaphors or symbols, some of the phenomena in the novel can be interpreted as representing something, especially the characters themselves.

Ichiro, for example, can be seen as standing for a large number of Japanese-Americans that grew up in pre WWII America; he is educated, speaks English fluently and only has a lingering attachment to Japan. He only speaks some phrases of Japanese, although he can understand everything his parents say. However, he can also be seen as representing the author himself -- John Okada also grew up in Seattle and is Japanese-American himself.

Ichiro's mother can be said to represent first generation Japanese-Americans. She barely speaks English, still believes that she will return to Japan one fine day and is steadfastly loyal to her home country. Mrs. Yamada dislikes America and hopes that her sons do not become too

contaminated by its culture. Indeed, when one considers her role in the story, she could even be said to represent Japan itself -- she starts out as proud and haughty in the novel, only to be defeated mercilessly in the end. Japan, it could be said, also started out as being very powerful in the combat, only to be crushed brutally by its antagonists in the war. Ichiro's mother could also simply be modelled after John Okada's parents or people he knew when growing up.

As already mentioned in the section where the settings were described, the ghetto in which Ichiro lives could be said to stand for the hopelessness that is his own future. Its bleak appearance, the decrepit buildings do mirror the heaviness that is coiling inside of Ichiro's breast; however, it could also be said to represent the situation of Japanese-Americans during WWII.

Mr. Carrick, one can say, represents the virtues and ideals of America. He is a very idealistic character, who seems far too understanding. Because, not only is he open-minded and does not care what Ichiro did, he is also critical of America without being embittered. He loves America despite being aware of its flaws and is optimistic enough to believe that things will get better.

4.10 The Jap

The introduction to *No No Boy* -- a touching observation of John Okada's how the war brought out another surge of hatred against Japanese Americans -- makes it clear how Ichiro's environment perceives Japanese Americans. Interestingly, the book never directly hints at racism towards the above mentioned minority, but -- just because the hints are subtle -- this does not mean that *No - No Boy* glosses over those issues. In fact, the book makes it painfully clear just how segregated and isolated Japanese-Americans were. There are numerous scenes and incidents in the novel that make it clear that Japanese-Americans were far from being welcome in America.

The first hint of racism occurs when Ichiro returns to Seattle; he is nearly immediately referred to as a Jap by a group of African Americans. They belittle him and urge him to go back to where he came from -- namely Japan. Ichiro just ignores them, but feels a wave of hatred wash over him.

However, he is also aware of the fact that these African Americans are not better than him; he muses on them being discriminated against and isolated as well. Yet, instead of working together, they lash out their frustrations on Japanese Americans.

Another noticeable event of racism occurs when Ichiro is beaten up by Taro's friends. Ironically, despite their being of Japanese origin themselves, they treat Ichiro like an outsider, referring to him as a Jap and pretend that he does not understand the language they are speaking. This is due to Ichiro's position as a "no-no boy"; he is viewed as being a non-American because he did not join the army.

Why this scene is both saddening and disturbing is self-evident. Firstly, it reveals how this group of youths is lashing out on Ichiro -- it is an act of suppressed rage. Indeed, it is also quite likely that those young people have been subject to discrimination themselves; it is also quite likely that they are just imitating the acts of violence that Americans may have used against them once. Probably, by behaving like this, these youths are trying to -- desperately, one might say -- prove that they are Americans; they are eager to distance themselves from their Japanese heritage.

This distancing is made quite clear in the character of Taro. Taro, unlike Ichiro, was too young to join the army when the enlisting started. However, he is not too young to understand that Ichiro, by remaining loyal to his Japanese heritage, poses a threat to Taro's American identity. Just like his friends, Taro seems to be ashamed of his being Japanese-American and is overzealous to prove himself loyal to the US; he believes that he can become American by enlisting in the army. Like this, *No No Boy* implies that being American, according to some characters in this novel, is only made possible if one swears allegiance to it -- without questioning it.

Why this is problematic is made clear by Ichiro himself. In his musings, he reveals that he did not feel any less American than his friends. He states that one does not grow up in America without adapting to the lifestyle and culture; however, he also makes it clear that he was disgusted by the way he was treated. Ichiro muses on why it was the Japanese Americans that were singled out, rather than Germans or Italians. Indeed, although Ichiro regrets that he could

not say 'yes', a part of him is angry that the country that calls itself the land of the free treated him and his family so badly that he could not help but refuse.

Moreover, this unflinching loyalty is further challenged by characters such as Kenji's father. As he reflects on his past, he realises that Kenji felt compelled to join the army because he had to prove his identity; he felt the need to join because, otherwise, he would not have felt American. At that point, Kenji's father wonders if he made a mistake by not instilling enough Japanese values in his son. Yet, on the other hand, as he remembers a scene from his days in the internment camp, he also knows that his children cannot possibly be forced to accept values that he grew up with. After all, his children have grown up under different conditions and circumstances. And Kenji's are such that made him choose between his Japanese roots and the country he grew up in.

This implies that not only is it necessary to swear allegiance to America, but surrender one's other identity as well. In other words, one cannot be American, unless one is willing to cut ties with the Japanese part. After all, as implied in the novel, Japanese are viewed as being old-fashioned, unwilling to cope with changes and fundamentalists. These stereotypes are shown quite clearly in the characterisation of Mrs. Yamada.

Ichiro himself reveals prejudices against the Japanese. For example, when he watches one of Emi's neighbours -- a Japanese man working in the fields -- he muses on how typically Japanese the man is. In his mind, the latter is unalterable, loyal to his principles and incapable of understanding the turmoil that Ichiro is going through. That way, he -- unwillingly, perhaps -- shoves the man into a card box, without considering, perhaps, that this field worker might understand Ichiro, after all. Why this is unfortunate is shown in the example of Kenji's father. Although he still feels loyal to Japan, he understood Kenji well enough to not bear him any grudges when he joined the American army -- even if he knew that, implicitly, his son was renouncing his Japanese roots like this. Ichiro, however, has been so branded by his mother and her nearly fanatical assumption that all Japanese immigrants should cling to the past and only living in America because they have to.

4.11 Clinging to Old Gods

The book explores, in great detail, how dangerous it is to not let go of the past. Ichiro's mother is the most fitting example. From the get go, she is characterised as being steadfastly proud of Japan – to the point that the mere hint of Japan being capable of losing the war makes her furious. For example, during one scene someone mentions photographs of post-war Japan – pictures that show the aftermath of the atomic bomb dropping – and, she, like her friend, agrees that those pictures are nothing but scams: she proposes that they are the result of a conspiracy, and that the person who shot them was not actually in Japan, but in another country instead. When people attempt to convince her of it being the truth after all, she merely suggests that they are part of the conspiracy themselves.

This scene already hints at how dangerous such fervent beliefs are: not only does she comes up with outrageous theories to combat the bitter truth of reality, but – as another scenes shows – is also callous towards those who try to convince her otherwise. In that other scene, Ichiro and his mother visit the parents of a recently fallen friend. Instead of showing compassion towards the family as one would expect in such a situation, Ichiro's mother calls the friend a traitor because he fought for America, and applauds herself for having a son who showed his loyalty to Japan by refusing to join the army. She also states that she is very proud of him.

What makes her ruthlessly callous in this case is the fact that the parents of Ichiro's deceased friend did not scoff at him like the other people he met, but treated him with the utmost respect. They were neither embittered nor disappointed by his actions, but merely stated that they themselves had come to accept America as their new home. Even after his mother's outburst, they tell Ichiro that he is welcome to visit them anytime; this shows that they are good-natured people who are understanding and able to look outside of the box. Mrs. Yamada is not capable of such behaviour.

Not only does she show off with Ichiro, not taking into consideration that her son is alive while the other woman has lost her child forever. Mrs. Yamada also ignores that the other woman does not really care if her son fought in the war; she just wishes he were still alive. However, in her

eagerness to be loyal to Japan, Ichiro's mother seems to have forgotten what it means to be compassionate: her desire to be loyal to her home country means more to her than anything else and renders her incapable of sympathising with the people around her.

Indeed, Ichiro's father demonstrates this as well by sharing a letter from his wife's sister – letters that she refused to acknowledge before. In one of those letters, her sister begs for financial support, quoting how she once saved Ichiro's mother from drowning; she is apologetic in tone, but also astoundingly honest, stating that despair requires her to be so blunt. She also makes it clear that life in Japan is far from being easy and that a lot of things are necessary for survival. Like this, she directly challenges Mrs. Yamada's belief in Japan's still being a mighty nation. Furthermore, the tone of the letter makes it clear that, in a way, she admires her sister for living in America. However, Mrs. Yamada refuses to see anything positive about America and believes that the letter is a part of a conspiracy as well, despite the fact that its earnest, pleading tone cannot possibly be a fake.

Her inability to sympathise comes into play when Mr. Yamada mentions to Ichiro how she refuses to help, despite many letters having come from Japan. Moreover, he also adds that she does not allow him to send anything to Japan either, showing yet again how controlling and domineering her personality is. It also shows that Mrs. Yamada is not swayed easily. Her stubbornness is shown in her persistence to look down on America.

For her, America is nothing but a place to earn money and better one's economic situation. Furthermore, she sees the US as a place, where her children can receive a good education, but not because she believes that being educated is important, but because she thinks that a well-rounded education can help her sons to make good money in Japan. In other words, for Ichiro's mother, America is nothing but a means to an end – an end that is always tied to Japan. This shows that Mrs. Yamada is a very persistent and loyal person. At least, in respect to Japan – a place that she still considers her home, even though she has not lived there for decades.

Therefore, she is convinced that nothing good can come out of adapting oneself too much to American customs. Her refusal to accustom is shown by her not being able to speak English, and

the fact that she stoutly adheres to what she considers to be Japanese principles. For her, these principles are loyalty and pride in Japan as a country; she seems to believe that Japan is superior to America. She expects her family to show the same loyalty and pride towards Japan. Moreover, she refuses to believe that her sons are anything but ‘sons of Japan’.

For example, Ichiro narrates that he was instilled to believe in Japanese warlords and that pride is essential in every situation; it can be surmised that his defiance against America during the war was inspired by some of the stories his mother told him in childhood. He also mentions how his parents constantly talked about returning to Japan one day. This means that living in America, for Ichiro’s mother, is just a temporary condition – a condition she is forced to tolerate and can only deal with because of better things to come along one day. Although it is never directly referred to in the book, it can be assumed, from the way Mrs. Yamada and her husband do not seem to have much contact with people other than Japanese-Americans that they do not really know much about Americans themselves. All of Ichiro’s friends are Japanese Americans, and the area they live in is mainly populated by immigrants.

Thus, it is quite possibly that one reason why Mrs. Yamada’s hatred in America is so strong is because she and her husband are not really used to dealing with what they consider to be American. The only contact they are suggested to have is when buying things in shops or selling products to ‘Americans’ themselves. Even then, interaction is reduced to an absolute minimum because of their bad English skills. Indeed, Kenji criticises this phenomenon of clinging to the motherland’s customs for it isolating immigrants from the people they are supposed to interact with. Mrs. Yamada, at the very least, is not very appreciative of America and its culture at all.

It is mentioned, for example, that she did not like how Ichiro was fond of American music – she destroyed his records on purpose. Moreover, she does not like it when he hangs around with friends who, in her eyes, have betrayed Japan – this is made clear when she openly criticises Kenji. It shows that, according to Mrs. Yamada, being Japanese is not only about remaining loyal to its language and traditions, but also to its political goals – despite the fact that she and her family do not really have anything to do with the country anymore.

This is a bit strange because it should be of no concern to Mrs. Yamada whether or not Japan has lost the war. Instead, since she lives in the United States, the welfare of the US should concern her instead – especially because it involves them more directly. However, Ichiro's mother refuses to acknowledge America and looks down upon Japanese who have. She is not only callous towards the mother who lost her son in the war because he 'betrayed Japan', but because his parents have adapted well to the American lifestyle. By saying that they are satisfied with living in America and have no interest in returning to Japan, they have betrayed the Japanese values that Mrs. Yamada herself so strongly believes in.

Towards the middle of the book, Mrs. Yamada's fatalistic belief in Japan is so apparent and strong that she crumbles when forcefully confronted with reality. She loses all hold on herself and falls into a catatonic shock. In the end, she cannot cope with things at all, and decides to commit suicide. The reader never finds out why she is so fixed on Japan, but it can be inferred that it was either a matter of extreme, desperate pride or stubbornness. In the long run, it does not really matter because the final result was that it was deadly and nearly destroyed the life of her family. In fact, her obsession on setting things right, alienated her from her children and turned the relationship she shares with her husband into something similar to a parody. Not only is Mr. Yamada afraid of confiding in her, it is implied that their relationship is lacking in other departments as well; this is hinted at in the one scene, where he muses – in a drunken state – how their giving into their passions before their wedding night inevitably soured their entire marriage.

In a way, *No - No Boy* suggests that Mrs. Yamada's extreme fixation on Japan not only makes life with her more difficult, but also makes others overlook that there is more to her than the facade of a rigid, stern and callous Japanese woman. Ichiro himself narrates how he did not really know his mother all that well in the end; during the funeral, he is surprised to hear that she was a good student and wanted to become a teacher. It can be said that the reader, just like him, equally feels puzzled and saddened because it shows just how much she has allowed herself to go to waste. Her husband, too, hints that she used to be a passionate and bold young woman, not too invested on Japanese traditions – after all, she and Mr. Yamada were bold and daring enough to consummate their relationship before getting married. Ichiro's father mourns the fact that she has become so rigid and lacking in passion.

In the light of these facts, *No - No Boy* suggests that a more accepting viewpoint – such as Mr. Yamada's or Kenji's father – is healthier because it helps the elders to get over their grudges and also be better parents towards their children. While they might not understand the issues of their children wholly, both men, at least, try to be as understanding as they can be. Especially because they know that, unlike them, their sons are not Japanese, and cannot be expected to behave like their ancestors. This, in turn, makes their children confide in them and helps the parents, at least, somewhat accept living in America.

4.12 Rootlessness

At its core, *No - No Boy* is about a young man who does not know where he belongs. It is not about a Japanese struggling to be American, or an American struggling to be Japanese, but far more complex than that. *No - No Boy* is a work that – with shocking and nearly brutal honesty – explores what it means to be neither. It shows how, by neither feeling Japanese nor American, Ichiro is stuck between two cultures; his whole identity is an undefined, ugly mess that makes it difficult for him to fix because few people understand him. He feels conflicted and restless being unable to make the opposing identities merge into one.

His family, especially his mother, expect him to behave like a Japanese; he mentions how he was brought up to believe in Japanese heroes and is familiar with some customs and traditions. However, he does not speak the language very well, and it is mentioned that he usually converses in English – even when speaking to his parents. This implies that he does not care a great deal about the country's language or culture – at least, not enough to immerse himself fully in it. Moreover, as evidenced by his mother's funeral ceremony, Ichiro feels removed from those aforementioned traditions and customs – if anything he merely feels out of place and uncomfortable, like a fish out of water.

Japanese culture, if anything, seems to strike him as strange and odious; the ceremony only makes him realise how little he knew of his mother and the land she came from. In fact, the only thing that makes him identify as Japanese are his familial ties, and the fact that he is viewed as

Japanese by outsiders. Otherwise, he actually does not have any affiliation with Japan: he is not interested in its politics, religion or anything else that his mother imbibed him to believe in. It is implied that he does not know what is really going in that country at all. Regardless of all that, the fact that it is family ties that link him to Japan should not be dismissed because the bond between family members is often strong and deeply personal. In Ichiro's case, they were definitely strong enough to make him renounce America for a moment.

Ichiro often relates, during the novel, that he chose to say 'no' to the army because of how his family and he himself were treated during the war. Moreover, he states that he kept thinking of his mother; it is heavily implied that Mrs. Yamada's fierce pride in Japan and her unyielding loyalty towards her country prompted her son – perhaps, subconsciously – to follow her example. This means that, while he might not have identified as being Japanese otherwise, his mother's example inspired him, for a moment, to defy the country he had been brought up in. It is suggested that, despite him claiming to hate how his mother made his life oppressive, Ichiro did love her; the fact that he spends a lot of time analysing her actions and the effect she had on his life do suggest that Mrs. Yamada is someone very important to him. He might have tried to love Japan for her sake – and her sake only. The fact that he attended her funeral ceremony for a moment also suggests that he even her death does not entirely change that fact.

Otherwise, it is heavily suggested that Ichiro considers himself to be American. He speaks the language, has attended university and is even mentioned to have been romantically entangled with American girls; he also shows a strong appreciation for American culture. His hobbies and lifestyle heavily suggest that he has been influenced by American lifestyle and is eager to conform to them. Even after returning from prison, he constantly talks about how he wishes to live like an American – namely to have a good job, own a nice house and get married. He shows little or no desire to return to Japan – his home is in America and nowhere else. Ichiro also says, how before the war, he did never question his American identity.

It is only the war that made Ichiro question whether he was truly American or not because of how he and his family were treated. Ichiro hints that he was disgusted and thoroughly disappointed in America. Not only because they treated him like an outsider and a criminal, but

actually sent him to prison when he merely tried to defend his rights – Ichiro also said ‘no’ because he felt that a country that treated its citizens that way did not deserve to have people enlisting in the army for them. He might have been inspired by his mother’s pride, but it is also strongly suggested that Ichiro himself was too proud to say ‘yes’; the part of Ichiro that was earnestly American and believed in American values might have felt that he deserved better treatment.

Ichiro also comes to realise, in a way, that he was never truly American. Despite the fact that he knows the language and feels American enough to understand as well as appreciate its culture, he knows that he is also a victim of discrimination as well as segregation. Although the segregation might have been, as Kenji implies, voluntary, Ichiro also implies that Japanese-Americans are still regarded as being strange or foreign and not welcome in many places.

This is illustrated when he relates an event from his youth; he and one of his friends became acquainted with an American family that treated them extremely well and even invited them to church mass. However, during one of these masses, Ichiro observed how the family scoffed in disgust when an African American expressed interest in joining. He states that he stopped maintaining contact with the family after that event because, despite the fact that the event was not directly related with him or his friend at all, he still felt offended. After all, he knew what it meant to be discriminated, and the fact that the family treated him well, but still proved to be racist in some other aspect disappointed him. Not only does this recollection show that Ichiro has a strong sense of pride, but it also depicts that he is something of an idealist: he seems to believe in values like equality and justice.

While Ichiro does regret some of his actions throughout the story, it is never because he finds it wrong what he did, but because of how much he had to suffer afterwards. Not only has he grown isolated from former friends and acquaintances, but his family has also been torn apart; his younger brother hates him and leaves for the army after Ichiro returns. His actions have not made him understand his parents any better – he only finds them older and more embittered. Mrs. Yamada is on the brink of insanity and his father has turned to alcohol for solace. Even if Ichiro

has shown his loyalty to Japan, his actions have not necessarily improved his family's economic situation nor made life any easier for his parents; everything is falling apart, anyway.

Moreover, it is not easy for Ichiro to find an employment because no-no boys are treated as Japanese, and Ichiro does not want to be judged by people who cannot understand his situation. This is shown when he converses with Mr. Carrick; the latter assumes that Ichiro served in the war and talks about how good it is that Japanese-Americans showed their loyalty to America, even when the country had treated them most unfairly. He assumes that Ichiro was able to overcome his indignation and still support America of the ideals it represented, which is not the case at all.

In a moment of anger, Ichiro states that he did not join the military precisely because of how he was treated. This is an important scene because it shows him not regretting his choice after all; he might have his doubts, but – when it comes down to it – he is bold enough to state that he did not do anything wrong. Later, at his job interview in a factory, he more or less states the same, showing that – even though his life is in shambles and he does not know where he belongs – he is not afraid of sticking to his principles.

This sense of pride is somewhat enviable because being a no-no boy has not necessarily solved the inner tension Ichiro has been going through with his identity either. In fact, it has merely confused him further. While he felt American before the war and considered Japan to be part of his daily life, life after war has made him realise two things: he was not American enough to join the army when he should have, and that a part of him was apparently Japanese enough to show loyalty when he should have, by all means, not have done so. This epiphany is painful for Ichiro, and he spends a considerable amount of the novel mulling over it; he hates himself for not having been able to say 'yes'. Ichiro also does not understand what made him different from all those other Japanese-Americans that did enlist.

After all, as stated before, he felt American before the war and does not have much attachment to Japan other than familial ones. And yet, he refused, but does not quite understand why. He feels rootless and out of place with everything, including his family, friends and the place he was

brought up in. This restlessness, as shown in the case of Freddy, is dangerous because it makes one bold and reckless. However, it can also, as Ichiro shows, make one feel stronger. While he is alienated from others, it does not necessarily mean that it is too late for him to find a place in America. Ichiro comes to understand that, even for people like him, there is hope. He just has to be willing to make that first step.

Indeed, the first step is that of acknowledging his conflicted identity and to stop trying to fit in; the moment Ichiro stops being ashamed for what he did, he does become a stronger person because he is no longer running away. The second step is to understand that, while some people might not understand, there are more than enough people who are willing to do so. This happens when he meets Mr. Carrick, but also when he interacts with others – people such as Kenji who points out that he is not as alone as he might believe himself to be. And it is this understanding of not being alone that is the final and most important realisation because it gives Ichiro the strength to move on and start living. He might not be at peace with himself, but he also knows that it is not a battle that he has to fight on his own.

5. Contrasts and Similarities

5.1 Themes

Both *Wife* and *No No Boy* can be seen as coming ‘of age’ stories that place a strong emphasis on the development of the main characters. In both novels, the characters change noticeably and realise things about themselves that they were not aware of before.

For Ichiro, it is the realisation that his situation is not as hopeless as he originally thought – Freddy’s abrupt demise opens his eyes, and shows him what happens to people who fall prey to depression and despair; Ichiro, who spends a good portion of the novel wanting to die or escape from his fate, is more resolved to go on.

Also, one of the consequences of Freddy’s death is that he is confronted with the fact that he is not as isolated from others as he originally believed. He realises that other people are just as

lonely and confused as he is. He finds consolation in that thought because it makes his conflicts appear less unmanageable to resolve.

Dimple, after being confronted with alternative lifestyles in America, starts to understand that she is not the perfect Indian housewife she always believed herself to be. Furthermore, she accepts that it is not what she aspired to be either. During the novel, the expectations her society has placed on her lose more and more credibility for her.

At first, she wants to fight against the ‘bad influences’ and only hesitatingly embraces customs that are different to what she was brought to believe in; however, as time passes by, Dimple grows increasingly more disgusted with tradition. It is not necessarily because she recognises the hypocrisy behind the traditions, but because life in America offers her a glimpse of a world that she has not known before. Torn between two cultures, Dimple tries to remain firm to what she was brought up to believe in, but she fails. In the end, she snaps because she just cannot choose between the two, and has pushed away everyone from her who could have helped her.

So, one could say that, while *No - No Boy* is a very dark and distressing book at the beginning, – though retaining a certain sense of bleakness – it could be said to have something of a bittersweet ending. Perhaps, not all characters live happily ever after, but Ichiro’s character development is a good one. Instead of falling lower and digging his own grave, Ichiro becomes a stronger man during the course of the story, and it is implied that he might make things work in the long run. At least, he has overcome his pessimism and is willing to make a change.

However, in *Wife*, no good outcome can be predicted for Dimple. After all, she has not only murdered her husband, but alienated herself from her family and friends. She might delude herself into thinking that she will find a happy ending, but the book’s somewhat cynical tone makes it clear that it will not happen. Rather than that, it is strongly implied that Dimple will either kill herself or just further fall prey to her delusions. The happy ending only exists in her head.

What is important to consider is that the epiphanies that trigger off the major changes in both characters do not occur in a flash of a moment. Instead, those altering thought processes are gradual; it takes a while for Ichiro and Dimple to arrive at that breaking point – and the road, for both of them, is weary and long. In the way that things do not come easily to them, but are accompanied by anxiety and fear, one could say that *Wife* and *No No Boy* are, though bleak and distressing, also unapologetically realistic in their approach.

Both novels demonstrate how painful changes can be, often coming hand in hand with a sense of loss. Indeed, apart from being stories that strongly focus on coming ‘of age’, loss is also something that binds these novels together. During the unfolding of both plots, the two characters are confronted with the loss of something that they owned before and cannot retrieve. It is not necessarily innocence, but still something that forces both characters to further mature, in both a negative and positive way.

For Dimple, it is not only the loss of her Indian housewife image. At first, she is, while still in India, separated from her parents when marrying Amit. It is not only a loss in the sense of leaving her childhood home behind, but a loss of her innocence and girlhood. Dimple’s life was comfortable, and the only thing she had to worry about was college and getting married. She earnestly believed that her problems would be over once she became the wife of a rich and successful man.

However, after moving in with Amit and his family, Dimple comes to realise that marriage is not the fairytale romance she originally envisioned, and that Amit is someone she feels she cannot love. He disgusts her, and her new home is quite shabby and not a place she can feel comfortable in. In a sense, she is constrained because being married opens her eyes to life that is not as comfortable as she thought it was.

Her pregnancy only adds to her distress because it is an ugly reminder of the fact that she cannot control her body either. With a baby on the horizon, Dimple fears that she might not go abroad. Emigrating is the last hope that she clings to, and the loss of that dream would have probably shattered her completely.

Yet, when she arrives in America, Dimple's hopes and dreams are further crushed. America destroys her belief in Amit being as strong and independent as she believed him to be. She learns that Amit can be just as self-conscious as she is. This, rather than strengthening their relationship, is the incentive that makes her distance herself emotionally from her husband.

However, she is also made to realise that India itself – with its supposed virtues and superiority to other cultures – is not as unimpeachable as she believed. Because not only do some of the Indian women living in New York adapt fully to American fashions and beliefs, but Dimple herself grows intrigued with Western clothing and ideals. It becomes something of a clandestine obsession for her – being fascinated by Western ideals while pretending to be a virtuous Indian housewife.

She finally loses the image of her Indian housewife, committing adultery with an American man. This, however, is not only a loss of her cultural identity, but she betrays the dreams of her girlhood, where she genuinely believed that marriage was a sacred and romantic bond – one that should be celebrated and upheld. However, at that point, she has grown so cynical that those things she used to believe in no longer have any meaning for her. That process should not necessarily be seen as a negative one: Dimple has simply become an adult woman who is capable of acting on her own desires.

At the end of the novel, when she kills Amit, she literally loses her husband, but – in a way – regains a sense of self. In the same way that she regained her freedom when she killed her unborn baby, the murder of her husband enables her to make another fresh start; she feels that she escaped the dullness of her daily existence and embraced the American way of life that she has so earnestly and desperately wished for.

Ichiro's losses are less metaphysical than Dimple's and more tangible in the sense that most readers can relate to them; Dimple's losses tend to relate more to feelings and phases in life. Ichiro, on the other hand, is confronted with the loss of people. Shortly after being released from prison, he is struck with the news that one of his friends died fighting in the war; the death of this

friend leads to the realisation just how deeply his mother has fallen. It also leads Ichiro to, inevitably, cut the ties with his mother and despise everything she stands for. While this might sound very dismal, it actually is one of the necessary steps that Ichiro needs to take for him to become an emotionally stronger person.

The second loss occurs towards the latter half of the novel. When his mother commits suicide, Ichiro loses not only the last thread literally connecting him to Japan. After all, it was his mother who imbued him with a sense of loyalty towards that country – but also the one thing that kept him chained to his home. While realising that she was imperfect helped him make decisions for himself, her death really frees him because he no longer has to worry about hurting her anymore. While it is never outright stated, it is implied that Ichiro felt guilty when he saw her hurt. In his narrative, he might claim to have hated her, but his actions imply something else: his mother is always in his thoughts, and he does reproach his brother for leaving school. Even when he is angry and upset, he is, at least, never indifferent.

It is a bit disturbing that her death can be seen as something of a relief for Ichiro. According to him, his mother's death frees him from the contempt he felt towards her while she was still living; her suicide is nearly an act of absolution that restores his sympathy and goodwill towards her. It might not be the most compassionate or understanding reaction, but Ichiro tries to trace her life in his head and understand why she has become so embittered. Her death makes Ichiro respect his father a bit more as well. He comes to realise that his father, while weak and submissive, is more of a realist than his mother was.

However, a death that truly conveys a sense of loss in the novel is Kenji's. Not only because Kenji was one of his few friends who genuinely did not care about Ichiro's being a "no-no boy", but because the readers are shown how much people suffer when someone dies. His sense of shock is very vividly conveyed to the reader and can easily be considered to be one of the most touching scenes in the novel. He might have seen his death coming, but this does not prepare him for the emotional grief in any way. Kenji's death does not offer any closure, but makes Ichiro realise just what a good friend he really was.

While Ichiro does not mourn the death of his mother, his father reacts to her suicide quite strongly. He tries to hide it, but Ichiro implies that Mr. Yamada feels quite lost and confused in his new role as a widower. He seems to be in state of shock and is only doing things because he has to. Yet, on the other hand, freed from the shadow of his wife, he can finally do what he has always wanted to do – namely support his son in his endeavour to find out what being an American truly entails.

Another death to occur in the novel is Freddy's. While Freddy and Ichiro seem to have been close in the past and should be close due to both of them being no-no boys, Freddy is not close as to him as Kenji is nor does he understand Ichiro all that well. For Ichiro, Freddy's death is a major eye-opener and the final step towards a, hopefully, better life. Through Freddy's demise that Ichiro understands that his situation is not as unique or special as he thought it was. He begins to understand that other Japanese Americans have to redefine their identities as well.

Considering the many deaths that occur in *No - No Boy*, it can easily be said that death indeed is an important theme in the novel. It serves as a process that help the main character grow, but is also a reflection of how life itself is a never-ending cycle of both losing and winning; Ichiro may have gained hope, but -- in order to accomplish this -- also had to cut ties with things he used to be very familiar with. Through the deaths of his mother, Kenji and Freddy, Ichiro, each time, matures further as a person, but not without having some of his dreams crushed.

In *Wife*, however, death – though also a central theme – is not dealt with in the same way. Dimple seems to associate death with freedom as well, but differently. She does not consider death to be a loss, but something that can fill her with a happiness and peace she cannot find anywhere else. For a good part of the novel, she dreams of killing herself, and it is strongly implied that this wish to die is spirited on by the frustration she experiences in her daily life.

Dimple thinks that killing herself is the only option she has. She is not wise enough to understand that, in order to better oneself or one's life, it is essential to work hard. Dimple is too passive or lazy to take the initiative. Therefore, she favours the easy approach – suicide or murdering someone else are examples of such an easy way out. However, the problem with these

‘solutions’ is that they do not solve problems in the long run, and they do not help Dimple mature as a person.

Thus, the death of her unborn child does not make Dimple grow as a person. It only makes it possible for her to go to America. Yet, she remains as insecure and obsessed with perfection as before. Even in America, she cannot shake off the feeling of wanting to fit in instead of doing what she really wants to do; the act of aborting the child did not leave any lasting impression on her. However, in a very morbid way, the act of killing the baby is one of the few things she does actively; it is one of the few times that she decides to do something out of her own volition. In other words, by killing her unborn child, Dimple actively freed herself from an unwanted condition.

The same can be said when she kills Amit; she has managed to free herself from the chains that kept her shackled to her odious existence. It is questionable whether the death has any impact on her as a character because, by that point, Dimple has fallen prey to delusions and can no longer separate reality from fantasy. And yet, she is freer than before because she does not have to deal with Amit anymore – a man she has come to despise and who represented everything she hated. Considering these facts, perhaps it can be said that while the deaths that occur in the novel do not make Dimple grow as a person, they do serve a specific function: they help her escape.

Therefore, another theme that *Wife* deals with is running away– escape from places, from other people and oneself. Dimple yearns to leave India because she thinks that a life abroad can offer her the luxuries she has always dreamt of. In India, Dimple feels encaged and desperate.

Therefore, when the opportunity to leave India presents itself, Dimple is willing to embark on the journey – even if it means leaving everything behind that she is familiar with. Still, the wish to leave everything behind she has grown tired of is more important to Dimple than homesickness and adapting to a country she is unfamiliar with. However, once she is in America, she learns that life over there is not necessarily as luxurious as she thought either. Dimple is dissatisfied and, again, falls into daydreams -- this time inspired by what the American media dictate to be perfect. She dreams of being athletic, modern and independent.

In many ways, *No - No Boy* is also about escape. Ichiro spends the first half of the novel unwilling to confront his problems: he falls into a lethargic-like state that makes it impossible for him to deal with his anger and indignation. Instead of telling people that he is fed up with them making assumptions about him, Ichiro prefers to run away. He is aloof and avoids company. It is only through Kenji that Ichiro gets the backbone to stand up for himself. While he still does not necessarily take on specific jobs, he is not ashamed anymore of saying he is a no-no-boy, which is important because it means that Ichiro has accepted that more tumultuous aspect of his identity.

The book shows that running away is dangerous through the characters of Freddy and Mrs. Yamada. Both characters are unable to face things, too stubborn and afraid to acknowledge the changes in their lives. Rather than deal with them, they stubbornly cling to demons of the past or just stick to the present: Mrs. Yamada glorifies Japan, and Freddy has adopted a hedonistic outlook on life. When confronted with things, they grow angry and restless: the long suppressed emotion boils over and causes them to do something irrational. Both characters end up by committing suicide - Freddy through his reckless actions, and Mrs. Yamada by drowning herself in the bathtub. Ichiro manages to overcome such suicidal tendencies because he makes peace with both his past and the future.

5.2 The Construction of Identities

Both novels deal with unstable identities or, better said, hybrid identities. Ichiro as well as Dimple have to grapple with the fact that they are not what they believed themselves to be. Neither of them feels that they can fulfil the roles they were supposedly born into, nor do they fit into their surroundings: instead, they are stuck somewhere in the middle, torn between two identities. This realisation of not belonging is often painful for both characters, going hand in hand with a traumatic event that either breaks or makes them. In other words, they either grow to accept that they are 'different' or fall into despair.

For Ichiro, the realisation of not belonging is something that not only has consequences for himself as a person, but directly affects his life and family as well. When he refused to join the

army, Ichiro made it clear that he was not American, but Japanese. After all, according to his surroundings, only a “real” Japanese would remain loyal to a country that, by attacking the United States, proclaimed itself to be an enemy to the US.

By saying ‘no’ to the army, Ichiro took on the role of a traitor and was, as a direct result, sent to prison. Americans considered him a thankless culprit, and the Japanese-American who voluntarily joined the army think that his actions were disgusting and ignoble. According to these people, Ichiro should just go back to Japan since he did not love America well enough. However, Ichiro’s motivations are neither that clear-cut nor that simple.

Throughout the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Ichiro did not refuse to enlist necessarily because of his being loyal to Japan. Instead, it is revealed that he believed himself to be American at heart and that being a no-no boy has not made him feel any more Japanese. Rather than that, he feels alienated from his mother and the country she so desperately idolises; he can neither support his mother’s fanaticism nor understand why he should feel proud of his refusal. In fact, he comes to the conclusion that this decision had nothing to do with Japan or his not feeling American enough.

And yet, his action has also isolated him from America. Ichiro realises that he cannot be as American as he always believed himself to be. Some part of him, he grasps, must have felt attached to Japanese values enough to refuse at the right moment and place. It is also suggested, in his narration, that America just never made him feel American enough – he was always isolated and could only dream about things that should have been rightfully his.

This is also suggested by his friend Kenji on his death bed. Kenji states that Japanese-Americans will always fall prey to discrimination. He says that them having fought in the war will not change that. However, he also states that Japanese-Americans are partly at fault themselves because they refuse to intermingle with others, but insist on living in ghettos where most families have a Japanese background. He entreats Ichiro to be different and settle down in an area where there are no Japanese-Americans. However, Ichiro does not do this, but remains loyal to his roots.

And these roots are neither American nor Japanese, but something in between. By acknowledging that he is a no-no boy, Ichiro seems to accept his complex identity. It is not an easy condition because he knows that he will remain torn between them for a while, but Ichiro also realises that is just who he is.

For Dimple, there is -- at first -- no identity struggle. She was born into a traditional Indian family and follows these aforementioned traditions that she has been brought up with. Dimple understands that, for an Indian woman, the greatest joy in life is to get married and live a financially stable life. Although she is educated and an avid reader, it never enters her mind to think differently about her path in life. Education is, just like her appearance and household skills, a tool to render her a more attractive candidate in the wedding market.

When she is finally married, Dimple is resolved to follow the rules that every Indian woman is expected to heed: she takes care of the household, is obedient towards her husband and his family, and supports Amit in every decision. She tries not to be selfish nor show others that she is unhappy. Yet, Dimple does not manage to suppress her own desires and wishes. She cannot help but sacrifice the life of her unborn child for a future in America. Also, by killing her child, Dimple has broken one of the most important duties of an Indian woman: she has refused to become a mother.

In America, her behaviour even worsens. Although she is considered to be Indian by her people there due to her outward appearance, the truth is she can no longer decide what she wants to be. On the one hand, she wants to continue playing the role of the perfect housewife, but on the other, she wants to be free and independent.

Yet, though she does form a friendship with the more daring Ina and becomes attracted to an American man, Dimple never quite breaks free from her Indian ties. A part of her is still very Indian because, when it comes down to it, she cannot make the important step to change as an individual. Instead, she bottles herself up and relies on things that she is familiar with. Her attempts at becoming 'American' could be considered to be tentative experimentations. She

never fully endorses this, but just gives in to temptation once, only to slip back into her old role as soon as she had a taste.

Yet, the question remains as to how 'Indian' Dimple truly is. On the one hand, she is clearly familiar with the customs and adheres to them; she has fulfilled her parents' expectations and, at the beginning of the novel, is the dutiful wife that everyone wants her to be. Yet, on the other, even in India, Dimple reveals character traits that are decidedly not Indian, revealing a young woman who is depressed and constantly yearning for recognition.

In conclusion, it can be said that Ichiro's identity struggle is far more wide-reaching. His decisions affect his family as well. In a way, it is more important for him to know where he belongs because it will have an effect on his life. Not necessarily because he has to make a decision between being American or Japanese, but because he can only find peace if he reconciles himself with the fact that he is neither. He is forced to ruminate over his identity because it is the only way to deal with his problems. If he did not choose to mull over his existence, he would end up being even more lost and confused than he is, and this is the worst possible outcome for him. For Ichiro it is essential to understand that, even if he does not know where he really belongs, his decision was the result of his being torn between two cultural identities. Ichiro manages to grow stronger because he realises that being a hybrid is an acceptable cultural identity as well.

Dimple's issues, on the other hand, are far more personal. Whether or not she is a true Indian woman is more a problem for herself. She is the one who has to suffer because of her insecurities, and her life would be easier if she chose to confront her problems. However, it is not as much of an imperative as it is for Ichiro. After all, she does manage to function somewhat, even if the results are not beneficial. Towards the end of the novel, she just chooses to continue denying, and it somehow works for her.

6. Conclusion

What *Wife* and *No No Boy* both reveal is that identities are not only very complex, but also truly indefinite: it is not just about being one thing or the other, but being stuck in a state of uneasiness that makes it difficult for a person to find their place in life. While the characters in both books might strike one as being unrealistic and overdramatic, the truth remains that quite a lot of people from a multicultural background might be going through similar experiences.

Not just because they cannot relate to their parents or the traditions of their ancestors, but because – even if they were grew up in the country their parents chose to immigrate to – they do not feel like they truly belong anywhere else either. In some way, they might feel that they will be always be ‘different’, and might try searching for that missing clue that makes others fit in. That search can be depressing and often lead to disappoints, but – if one grows to accept that being torn or conflicted between two identities is not necessarily unproductive – also help one realise that maybe this state of uneasiness, this cluelessness is a form of being as well.

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ANHANG

Zusammenfassung

Die Arbeit behandelt das Thema ‘Hybride Identitäten’ im Kontext der nordamerikanischen Literatur. Dabei wird ein Augenmerk auf die Literatur von Autoren mit asiatischem Migrationshintergrund geworfen; die Arbeit behandelt zwei Bücher: nämlich *Ikiru* von John Okada, einen japanischen Amerikaner, und *Wife* von Bharati Mukherjee und versucht herauszufinden wie die zwei Hauptcharaktere mit der schweren Situation umgehen nicht in ihre Umwelt hinein zu passen.

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