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TRANSITIONAL IDENTITIES IN DIASPORA: FLUID SELFHOOD IN ANDREADES' *BROWN GIRLS* (2022)

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Abstract

Diaspora has changed the concept of cultural individuality by generating multicultural societies and leading to the formation of hybrid identities. "Diaspora literature has emerged as a significant area of literary studies, reflecting the experiences of migration, exile, displacement, and resettlement across geographical and cultural boundaries" (Mathur, 2024, p. 20). Therefore, this study aims to examine the dynamics of transitional identities and fluid selfhood in Daphne Palasi Andreades' Brown Girls, situating the novel within the diasporic experiences of second-generation immigrants in Queens, New York. Drawing on Stuart Hall's conceptualization of identity, the study explores how the characters of the selected fiction navigate the complex intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and cultural expectation, negotiating belonging in a society characterized by systemic inequities and racialized hierarchies. Brown Girls by Daphne Palais Andreades presents a powerful examination of diasporic experiences by the interwoven lives of young women growing up in Queens, New York. The novel portrays identity as an ongoing, dynamic process rather than a fixed construct, emphasizing the tension between inherited cultural legacies and contemporary urban realities. By illustrating how transitional identities spring from diaspora.and how diasporic subjects craft hybrid identities that are simultaneously resilient and mutable, the study not only sheds light on diasporaic experiences, but also adds to the existing body of knowledge within diasporic studies.

Keywords: *Brown Girls, Cultural Hybridity, Diaspora, Fluid Selfhood, Liminality, Race and Ethnicity, Transitional Identity.*

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1. Introduction

The term 'Diaspora' is used to indicate the scattering of individuals out of their motherland. "Diaspora refers to the dispersion of people from their homeland to different parts of the world, often accompanied by a sense of loss and longing for the place left behind" (Mathur, 2024, p. 2022). Diaspora has radically transformed the concept of culture, community, and selfhood, causing individuals to mediate their identities amid multiple social, cultural, and geographic locations. Diasporic experiences higlight the ambiguities of belonging and displacement, heritage and assimilation, centrality and marginalization. In diaspora, dentity emerges as a negotiated and constantly shifting category, as opposed to a fixed category. "Diasporic communities often encounter identity-related challenges in their host countries. Migrants frequently navigate a liminal space between their homeland and exile, becoming enmeshed in the complexities of living between two worlds" (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 596). Postcolonial scholars underline that diaspora is not only the physical movement but the process of cultural negotiation, hybridity and self-reconstruction; diaspora is conditioned by the impact of the past, social relations, and the demands of the local and global environment. "In the postcolonial world, cultural hybridity is an ever-present phenomenon, characterized by the constant blending of cultures" (Mortaza, 2024, p. 4177). Literature becomes an important instrument of studying the experienced reality of diasporic communities. Fiction enables authors to describe spaces of liminality, physical and psychological, in which characters move through racialized systems, intergenerational pressures, and social orders and form hybrid identities. Through reflection of these negotiations, diasporic literature not only describes the struggles of cultural adjustment, but also imagines the creative potentials of fluid, resilient and transitional selfhood in transnational terms.

Brown Girls by Daphne Palais Andreades presents a powerful examination of diasporic experiences by the interwoven lives of young women growing up in Queens, New York. The novel prefigures the diversity of identities of brownness, including South Asian, Caribbean, African, and Asian, and presents the intersectional difficulties these groups experience in their process of negotiating belonging in a racially stratified city. Such characters as Khadija and Emma can be described as examples of these struggles: Khadija has to negotiate her Muslim identity against the expectations of her peers, whereas Emma has to struggle with being too brown in certain places and too American in others. Andreades (2022) locates transitional identity as the key idea, focusing on the fluidity and flexibility of the diasporic subjectivity, when the girls negotiate microaggressions, racialized stereotypes, and intergenerational negotiations. The expectations of the parental body may be supportive and restrictive, based on the survival strategies of the diasporic precarity. The institutional and peer contexts may result in the marginalization of the girls. The novel demonstrates that it is these pressures, even though limiting, which generate

desire, agency, and ambition, impelling the girls to balance inherited cultural expectations with self-actualization in complicated, frequently ambivalent fashions.

Andreades (2022) shows that the diasporic selfhood is recurrent and recursive: even those individuals who seek mobility or distance between themselves and their communities cannot completely lose the connection to the ancestral, cultural, and family background. Travels to ancestral homelands and exposure to racialized beauty ideals and media-based ideals show the conflict between the forced societal standards and self-acceptance. Experiments, shame and subsequent reclaiming of identity are some of the episodes that emphasize the process of assimilation and heritage negotiation by the girls and identity is formed through constant reflection, reconfiguration and interaction with the collective memory. Intergenerational divergence is also a theme in the novel in which the priorities of parents to survive and maintain their culture collide with the daughters to achieve independence. This thing leads to a conflict, alienation, and subsequent reflexive development. Finally, *Brown Girls* depicts identity as both hybrid, fluid and negotiable, and the product of the various spheres, including familial, communal, and societal, yet it also shows how second-generation immigrants shape the selves that are flexible, resilient and multiple to structural and cultural constraints.

2. Review of Literature

"Diaspora is the movement of indigenous people or a population of common people to a place other than their homeland region..." (Smith, 2014, p. 1). Diaspora is not simply about the geographical displacement but is a complicated state of cultural negotiation, adaptation, and self-redefinition. As Clifford (1994) explains, diaspora consists of "dispersed networks of peoples who share common historical experiences of dispossession, displacement [and] adaptation" (p. 309), and these communities engage in the creation of "homes away from home, while remaining rooted in specific, discrete histories" (p. 302). Brah (1996) describes diasporic spaces as "sites of hope and new beginnings" (p. 182), while Bhabha (1994) describes as a "third space" in which identity is neither a mere replication of the homeland nor a full assimilation into the host society (p. 38). The Third Space dislodges the purity of cultures by showing that every cultural utterance is created in articulation and difference processes. This in-between space creates fluid, contested and constantly negotiated identities based on memory, loss and survival. "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood — singular or communal — that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative signs of collaborations, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself"(Bhabha, 1994, p. 10). Diasporic subjectivity therefore is precarious, with the diasporic subjects living in a liminal situation whereby their sense of self is constantly being constructed, at the point where personal experience, cultural heritage and societal expectation intersect.

"Diasporic Literature is written by authors who live outside their homeland". (Samuel & Pulizala, 2023, p. 136). Diasporic literature seds light on the issuws of identity among diasporic/migrant communities. It not only records the physical displacement but also examines the emotional and cultural displacement that ensues when individuals are displaced out of their social, cultural and historical backgrounds. According to scholars like Brah (1996) and Clifford (1994), diaspora does not consist of simple physical displacement, but rather a process of unceasing negotiation of culture, memory and belonging whereby identity is not fixed but rather fluid, hybrid and constructed by context. Diasporic subjects are always involved in the process of reconciliation of various attachments to homeland, host society, and family or cultural groups, and between assimilation and cultural retention. Hall (1990, 1996) continues to postulate that cultural identity is never fixed or static but is a dynamic and changing process, which is influenced by historical memory, social interaction and pressures of transnational contexts. He posits that the identity is formed through a discussion with the difference and constantly re-formed under the pressure of historical, political and social forces. Modern researchers stress upon the fact that globalization, migration to cities, and the interplay of race, gender, and class complicate diasporic identity even more, creating what Vertovec (2009) calls "super-diverse" urban spaces, where various cultural, linguistic, and social forces co-exist. These complexities are manifested in the in diasporic literature; diasporic writers reflect the experiences of living between worlds, rooted, and yet mobile; personal and yet collective.

Brown Girls is a lyrical story about the lived experiences of young women of color in Queens. It is strong in depicting female unity and the fight to define oneself across the cultural lines but its piece-meal nature might restrict the depth of an individual character. Andreades's fiction is a wise commentary on a collective echo of the sense of diasporic identity and belonging (Young, 2022). In Brown Girls by Andreades, female friendship and coming of age in Queens are glorified, women of colour are discussed in terms of identity, engagement, and ambition against the backdrop of race, classes, and family expectations. The novel is written in the first-person plural and it focuses on the collective experiences, which might be problematic to readers who want to see individual character lines, but it is a poetic ode to diasporic identity (Andreades, 2022). Brown Girls is a vignette-based, lyrical debut, nearly a spoken-word poem, that describes the social life of young immigrant women of colour in Queens and how they have to deal with identity, belonging and otherness. The collective 'we' voice brings the readers into the collective cultural memory and racialized experiences, but its disjointed structure restrains the depth of the individual characters. Nevertheless, the novel is a thought-provoking addition to diasporic literature due to the richness of the themes and vivid writing style of Andreades (Hostin, 2022). The first-person plural voice used in *Brown Girls* is designed to produce a

rough, emotionally touching portrait of the young women of colour in Queens by reflecting the collective experience of struggle and personal ambitions in their diasporic life. The poetic storyline is an account of childhood to adulthood, an account of microaggressions, cultural demands, and the conflict between home and broader perspectives, a texturally rich description of friendship, self, and intergenerational bargaining (Dexter, 2022). The novel is a hot-blooded poetic, chorus-driven journey of the author Andreades into the lives of immigrant daughters in Queens, where the collective 'we' is used to show the similarity of their struggle with heritage, belonging, and the hypocrisy of the American dream. Although its broad 'we' can force the conventional emphasis on the character, it is a potent portrayal of solidarity and the intricate emotional terrain of women of colour trying to find their way in the world (Center for Fiction, 2022). Rendered with a mixture of poetic prose, *Brown Girls* offers a coming of age narrative in the shared lives of young women of colour in Queens; it prefigures collective identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation. The collective 'we' voice used throughout the novel helps the novel to create thematic unity, but occasionally creates the sense of a collection of personal essays. This spoils the development of characters as well as narrative richness. Nevertheless, the fiction is a profound reflection of the nuances of power relations between generations and the complexity of the realities of diasporic identity in modern urban life (Amoako, 2026).

Despite the fact that *Brown Girls* has been discussed in terms of its lyrical collective story and illustration of diasporic life, very little research has been done on how the novel addresses transitional identities and fluid selfhood in diaspora. Available literature tends to concentrate on either narrative form or multicultural representation and there remains little research on how characters work out their connection to place and culture as well as agency in liminal spaces. This study fills that gap by examining how second-generation immigrants construct their selves fluidly when within Queens.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Research methodology is an integral part of conducting research. "Research methodology is the study of methods by which knowledge is gained" (Mohiuddin et al., 2024 p. 5). This study applies a qualitative, interpretive, and hermeneutic methodology, where close reading and textual analysis are used to explore the issue of transitional identities and fluid selfhood as portrayed in Daphne Palasi Andreades' *Brown Girls*. Hall's critical conceptualizations serve as a theoretical framework for understanding fluidity in identity formation, highlighting the interplay of personal agency, social expectation, and structural constraint in shaping diasporic subjectivity.

Postcolonialism focuses on cultures and societies that have been historically influenced by colonial activities which encompasses the period since the colonization to the present period. Postcolonial is a term that denotes all the cultures and societies that came under the influence of the historical events of colonization (Ashcroft et al., 2007). It

"is used to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Walder, 1998, p. 35). Colonization not only re-defined territorial borders but also created huge migrations that left people in a state of in-betweenness, balancing between the homeland and the hostland (Chariandy, 2006). The premise of postcolonial criticism, consequently, is the focus on lived experiences of individuals whose history has been marked by the political, social, and psychological oppression during the colonial rule. It explores the role of colonialism in the structuring of knowledge and meaning production and how Western epistemologies tend to absorb and subjugate non Western views (Said, 1978). Postcolonial theory emerged as a reaction to the shortcomings of Western critical paradigms, which ignore the cultural heterogeneity and socio-political complexities inherent in postcolonial texts (Ashcroft et al., 2002). Postcolonialism offers a a critical approach to understanding social inequalities, cultural differences, and political injustices created by colonial rule (Bhabha, 1994). "Postcolonial theory examines and critiques the social history, cultural disparities, and political injustices resulting from colonial and imperial systems" (Jabeen et al., 2024, p. 1029).

Diasporic identity has mainly been theorized in terms of difference, rupture and discontinuity. Scholars of migration and diaspora studies traditionally used the term to refer to individuals who have been dispersed or displaced, often traumatically and permanently. Over the past few decades, the emergence of new phenomena such as globalization, transnationalism, and the creation of international communities has widened the scope of the conceptualization of cultural identity within diaspora and postcolonial studies. Postcolonial theory challenges the fixed concept of identity, suggesting instead that identity is constantly being re-defined in the process of cross cultural interactions. Identity is subject to transformation; it is something dynamic and chageable. To Hall (1990), identity as a dynamic and ongoing process of 'becoming' rather than a fixed state of 'being'. He asserts that identity is not an essentialized or stable essence rooted in an unchanging past but it is continuously shaped and re-shaped through the 'play' of history, culture, and power (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Hall (1990) critiques the notion of essentialism by distinguishing between two ways of understanding identity---one that views identity as a shared, collective essence grounded in common ancestry and historical continuity, and another that deems identity to be a constituted through difference, rupture, and discontinuity. He emphasizes that identity is the "critical points of deep and significant difference" and this constitutes "what we really are" (Hall, 1990, p. 226). He argues that identity does not exist outside discourse but it is constructed through representational practices such as language, imagery, and cultural narratives. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall (1997) states that meaning itself is produced through signifying systems within which identities are formed and negotiated. And the self is always discursively constituted, mediated by cultural codes, and positioned

within broader frameworks of meaning that shape both self-perception and social recognition.

Another crucial aspect of Hall's framework is his notion of identity as a "production." He states that "cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture… it is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). This idea highlights that identity is not inherited but is created actively in the social practices and historical processes. The concept of production also suggests that identity is not complete, it can always be re-articulated and changed. This is similar to the idea of fluid selfhood wherein the subject is in a constant negotiatory and re-constitutive process of self-making depending upon changing contextual conditions. Hall (1990) claims that identities are created under the interaction between past and present whereby past experiences are being preserved but it is always being re-defined. According to him, identity "belongs to the future as much as to the past" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). This statement reflects progressive and dynamic nature of identity.

Hall (1990) conceptualises identity in terms of positionality whereby, he argues that identity is always constructed within definite forms of power structure, i.e. race, class, gender, and culture, that identities "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall, 1990, p. 225), thereby emphasizing the relational nature of identity and the role of power in shaping varying degrees of visibility, recognition, and agency, while simultaneously advancing a poststructuralist understanding of the subject as fragmented, decentered, and heterogeneous "never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses" (Hall, 1990, p. 277). This indicates multiplicity and contradiction rooted in selfhood. Hall (1990) highlights that migration, intercultural interaction and displacement continuously transform the self, making identity fluid and transitional. He points out that individuals are not merely shaped by discourse and power but they actively participate in constructing their identities through negotiation, resistance, and re-articulation.

In conlusion, Hall views cultural identity in diaspora as fluid, constructed, and in-process. Hall's focus on becoming, difference, representation, positionality and fragmentation gives the reader a solid ground to evaluate transitional identity in diaspora. Refusing the essentialist concepts of a given self and prefiguring the fluid back and forth of the past, culture, and power, the theory by Hall gives us an extensive perspective through which the identities of the characters of selected fiction *Brown Girls* are in themselves unstable, multidimensional, and negotiated on the individual and collective levels of life in the diasporic settings.

4. Textual Analysis

"Identity crisis/hybrid identity is a dominant theme of literature in the rapidly growing globalized society. It has become a highly debatable issue" (Mortaza et al., 2024, p. 4177). *Brown Girls* concentrates on the issues of the life of diaspora and it is important that the issue of identity bargaining is discussed in relation to the immigrant family on the generational level. The novel delves into the conflicts that exist between the inherited cultural practices and the strains of settling in another social context. In the opening scene of *Brown Girls*, the novelist provides us with a scene that prefigures the complications of the life of diaspora: "In front yards, not to be confused with actual lawns, grandmothers string laundry lines, hang bedsheets, our brothers' shorts, and our sneakers scrubbed to look brand-new. Take those down! our mothers hiss. This isn't back home" (Andreades, 2022, p. 27). The moment is an example of a minor but important intergenerational conflict, as it shows that the representatives of the same diasporic family are located at the opposite ends of the acculturation spectrum. The behaviors of the grandmothers imply that they either do not know or do not care about the social norms of the host society, whereas the response of the mothers implies that these norms are getting more and more internalized and the mothers want to belong. This novel shows that, despite trying to adapt to the American society, the adult relatives have a partial and vague knowledge. Their assimilation attempts are not total conversion to foreign customs but an on-going negotiation of the traditional cultural practices against the external demands. This generational difference is particularly reflected on the younger characters, who are more active in the settings of the host society. At thirteen, they are already "training ourselves in the competitive ways of the City That Never Sleeps," while their parents, raised elsewhere, "do not fully comprehend" these processes but still emphasize that "Education is the only way to succeed" (Andreades, 2022, p. 29). Taking subways on their own, to places they do not know, the children explore the city and city life with its thrill and potential, becoming somehow fluent in the culture, the failure of which is not understood by their parents. This break portrays the process of re-constituting diasporic identity across generations, its fluid and transitional quality as it is constantly re-defined through migration, accommodation and desire. In this case, the group voice emphasizes the diasporic commonality whereby identity is formed through initial exposure to the institutional imperatives and socio-economic pressures. In contrast to their parents, the younger generation acquires a sort of cultural fluency that helps them to cope with competitive urban conditions, although their belongingness is convoluted and multifaceted. The fact that the parents do not understand these processes in all ways emphasizes further a break in experience, implying that the identity of the diaspora is never passed on similarly but rather re-constructed across generations.

"Diasporic identities are manifold, heterogeneous and subject to persistent metamorphosis" (Laxmiprasad, 2020, p. 99). Andreades (2022) shows a clear negotiating

of identity among the younger generation influenced by received cultural expectations as well as the needs of the American society. The lives of younger generation demonstrate the conflict between life-saving precautions and the desire to live independently, get educated and show themselves. The girls reveal much more sophisticated knowledge of the mechanisms that drive their lives, in part owing to the fact that, since their childhood, they were exposed to the social, cultural, and institutional orders of American society. Conversely, their parents, although appreciating education, understand it through the narrow prism of their experiences as migrants. Consequently, they put limitations on what and where their daughters should learn and, in most cases, they drive them into those careers that although offer them economic stability, a certain level of social invisibility can still be maintained. This ambition to be left to stay inconspicuous is a survival tactic that is based on the diasporic precarity the necessity to merge into the mainstream culture and not to be exposed to unremitting racial conflicts. Such an inherited caution is, however, not absolute, neither uniformly to be repeated through the generations. Most of the girls change their thinking process of survival to an emotional, intellectual and the cultural fulfillment and rebel against the restrictions they have and define success in their own terms. This is a generational deviation which highlights the appearance of transitional and flowing identities where inherited caution is negotiated, re-worked, or even discarded. The conflict between these two competing value systems is especially clear when a part of the girls do decide to abandon their populations in order to get education and independence. These choices upset the shared morale of the diasporic family and are usually perceived with opposition, bewilderment and emotional outrage: they are called home to question their desires, whether the neighborhood is good enough or they are called ‘Know-it-all’ or ‘Arrogant’. It is enforced by saying the warning like ‘don’t expect a penny from me’. The girls, in turn, have different approaches to this, some are silent, others speak out telling everyone that they do not want to be governed in that way, and all show various kinds of negotiating the family and cultural norms. This movement emphasizes the instability and multiplicity of the formation of the identity of the diaspora. What lies between the communal, collectivist values inherent to their parents and their own needs to self-realize, the girls are in transitional positions not so rooted in inherited tradition or so subsumed into the dominant cultural values. Their subjectivities are volatile, constantly being placed in a state of flux by practices of resistance, negotiation and self-assertion.

The anger that is being expressed in these family interactions can be interpreted as a fear of downward assimilation in the context of general apprehensions regarding the immigrant families that are not treading through specific stability. These fears introduce restrictions to the decisions of the girls, denying them the possibility of getting access to opportunities that their non-diasporic counterparts could access more easily. Ironically, these limitations are also the formers of desire, increasing the desire of girls in that which

they are forbidden and leaving them more conscious of possibilities and boundaries in the social and cultural environments in which they exist. These tensions are so strongly reacted by the parents, highlighting the emotional burden of the negotiations, which dictate the continuity of intergenerational negotiations that inform diasporic subjectivity. The effort to 'bury these voices' in sleep and its ultimate failure is an indication that these disputes place indelible psychological marks, be it profound emotional trauma- the re-organizing of familial relationships around conflict, or internalization of rebuking voices that resonate with time and shape conduct, ambitions and self-identification. The same dynamic is depicted when the members of the family challenge the girls with the charges: "What—you think you're better? See, she's too haughty to even look us in the eye!" Their stunned silence reflects both shock and hurt (Andreades, 2022, p. 31). The emotional situation is acute when individual ambition interferes with accepted family norms. At the same time, the girls are encouraged to "Study hard!" yet simultaneously warned, "Don't go far, stay close… aren't we good enough for you" (Andreades, 2022, p. 31)? These conflicting messages highlight an inherent ambivalence of the structure of the diasporic family, where the aspiration towards upward mobility exists in a state of uneasy coexistence with fear; this leads to a loss of cultural or affective attachment to the community. And as these competing pressures clash, the girls are driven to a never-ending negotiation and self-identification, they juggle the family demands, cultural persistence and their own ambitions. Their reactions, on the one hand silent compliance, and on the other, aggressive resistance can be seen as the fluidity and transitions of the idea of diasporic identity as they undergo negotiation and re-negotiation..

Diasporic identity is complex in nature and it is negotiated in the familial, cultural, and institutional realms and influenced by both internal and external forces. It is usually characterized by a strain between shared identity and personal self-fulfillment, which create emotional self-doubt and self-examination. "… all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common 'we'"(Brah, 1996, p. 31). *Brown Girls* depicts the reproachful intonation of family and friends as a manifestation of a deeper panic of fragmentation and loss, parents can be afraid that the departure of their daughters means not just physical distance but also the loosing of ethnic and cultural connections based on the shared existence of Queens. The responses of friends can be interpreted as the manifestations of jealousy or lack of security especially when we are talking about the desire of the girls to go as far as break the bounds of the community that has long been commonly a source of stability and belonging in a society that has branded them as the other. The physical reactions of the girls, such as turning their heads away and downward eye contact, also indicate the affective aspect of this struggle, being a shame that appears when there is a sense of failure, vulnerability, or interpersonal condemnation, both internal and relational, and is the

embodied nature of the formation of the diasporic identity. These tensions, in combination, help to cast light on fraught and disputed landscape of transitional identities in *Brown Girls*, with the girls torn between two opposing imperatives, the drag of collective belongingness and the repel of individual self-realization. Their identities are, therefore, not determined but continuously negotiated in an emotional battle, social pressure, and longing of change, which supports the overall description of the novel of adaptive and changing diasporic selfhood. This feeling of otherness is especially evident in the institutional environment like school where the girls are faced with the constant obliteration of their personalities. They call students by their names, teachers constantly address the girls as homogenized, although each of them belongs to various ethnic and cultural backgrounds with different personalities. The headscarved Pakistani Nadira is confused with the Guyanese Anjali; Michaela, Haitian and Sophie Filipino are also given the wrong name, and Mae, Chinese is also given the wrong name but she is perceived differently. Such exchanges are comical and bond the girls, yet they also establish a feeling of exclusion, because any of them can be rolled up into one undifferentiated unit, a racial other. The misunderstanding of the teacher is not just a personal failure but a systemic trend of racialized vision, where the people in power easily diminish the girls in the domain of sameness and strengthen their inferior status in the hierarchy of dominant social and institutional structures. The negotiated aspect of diasporic identity is further demonstrated through this description, with the girls increasingly bargained by the intergenerational forces and the marginalized society at large, leading to the transitional aspect of the selfhood in modern diasporic settings. Although laughter may seem at first to be a demonstration of either amusement or resistance, it can be said that due to the physical description of tension, it is rather an ambivalent emotional condition. The smile can then be used not to reveal happiness in this context but a means to cope with difficulties. The reaction of the girls can, therefore, be understood as a temporary triumph smile especially when the teacher is made incompetent before the students. But the tension that is not removed on the face around the eyes signifies that this reaction is not devoid of negative affect; it is not accompanied by anger, discomfort, or shame.

Identity in diasporic communities is habitually informed by the conflict between mobility and location, the way people negotiate the sense of belonging, recollection and community expectations. Beliefs about whether or not to remain a part of the group or to dissociate consequently affect the development and creation of selfhood to a large extent. Not every one of the titular girls in *Brown Girls* opts for mobility or not being tied to their ethnic and communal origins, a large number of them stay in the collective, perpetuating its values and practices. This variation in life decisions, however, causes a rift in the diasporic community itself as everyone starts to view the other as an entity of difference which is often full of resentment and hostility. This tension is sharply articulated when

those who stay express their frustration at the perceived detachment of their peers: “They accuse them of disregarding loyalty, of failing to recognize shared struggles, and of carrying condescending attitudes when they return to visit” (Andreades, 2022, p. 36). It presents the way the girls who stay make their sense of identity based on the concepts of loyalty, memory, and continuity and frame their identity on their connection to place and tradition. These connections gain special importance during the period of socio-political transformations, the advent of which is marked by the spread of signs of the slogan “make AMERICA GREAT AGAIN” signs, which endanger the delicate sense of belonging already developed by them (Andreades, 2022, p. 36). Similarly, the words employed, claims of selfishness, arrogance, and disloyalty, represent an indication of an effort to vindicate morally themselves as more authentic representatives of the shared identity. “We do not forget. We have never been strangers” (Andreades, 2022, p. 36) reminds us of the core importance of memory and its fixation on their own definition. Therefore, identity in this case is maintained by continuity and change resistance, as opposed to the fluid and movement identities adopted by departing persons. The girls who abandon the group, on the other hand, do know about this hostility but, in most cases, they give it a different meaning as they view it as something jealous and not a sign of collective duty or emotional involvement. This misunderstanding makes the gap even worse since the girls who are leaving do not quite understand that they might be scorned because of the need to protect the collective sense of place and protect the community that has formed their common history. As long as people remain, the collective is not simply a type of social structure but a significant source of belonging and cultural continuity; its possible disaggregation is, thus, perceived as loss. Finally, such a mutual estrangement demonstrates an important aspect of transitional identities in diaspora. The girls, who earlier had something in common in identity, now find each other as totally different and even alien.

Andreades (2022) does not enable the girls who abandon their communities to lose all the connections with their ethnic roots; instead, their lives demonstrate a cyclical process of separation and reconnection. Although they focus on their individuality and their alienation to the community, they ultimately get a compelling, near-irresistible attraction to their native homelands: “WE TAKE TWO WEEKS OFF, a month, three--we quit our jobs altogether. We are drawn to places we had heard of all our lives places that have trailed us like ghosts. Beckoned. This is not the time to resist- this time we do not resist” (Andreades, 2022, p. 37). They are going to undergo a significant change in their consciousness where the submerged presence of their heritage comes back to the surface, implying that the diasporic self cannot be completely unraveled of its roots. The imagery of ghosts emphasizes the continuation of cultural memory, which means that the past is still haunting and influencing the present, even when it is being actively dismissed. This is not a smooth ride back; it may be characterized as marking a gap between anticipation

and experience. Their response-- "We curse our families in the States because they did not warn us--but perhaps they had forgot, too" (Andreades, 2022, p. 288)-- are indicators of disillusionment and greater epistemic distance. On the one hand, they might be disappointed because of their prior alienation of the collective, which did not allow them to thoroughly engage in the stories and histories that their families kept. On the other level, it implies that the parents as well might have experienced some form of unconscious assimilation, which resulted in the partial erasing or silencing of the memory of the homeland. They might have failed to pass on a more intricate and varied knowledge of their homelands in viewing the United States as the place of the greatest promise. In that way, the experience of the girls in meeting their motherlands is not only a personal confrontation but also the revelation of the intergenerational breaches in relation to cultural knowledge.

"Diaspora identity is a fluid construct, shaped by the interplay of host and home country dynamics" (Dhar & Raman, 2024, p. 256). DIasporic identities are not fixed, but are created in the daily interactions, memory and social positioning; they tend to be both a result of inclusion and exclusion as they are simultaneously experienced in the host societies (Hall, 1990). The journeys eventually help the girls to re-assess their identities, most notably as compared to their previous efforts at trying to fit in with the prevailing aesthetic and cultural conventions as demonstrated when the girls tell "We rub shimmery gold powder onto our cheekbones like in videos and magazines. Our noses stay wide, colors don't pop, yet we're mesmerized. In secret, we lighten our skin until we are lilies or bones" (Andreades, 2022, pp. 39-40). This excerpt indicates how strong was the desire of the girls to conform to the norms of beauty that had been racialized. Reading this alongside their eventual going back to their home countries, this incident gains further context and importance, contrasting imposed values and recovered identity and demonstrating that these trips are not only physical but very psychological. The women face the incongruity of who they have been trying to be and who they are as determined by the past and cultural heritage they can no longer afford to disregard. All together, these episodes confirm the idea that the diasporic self in *Brown Girls* is deeply fluid and recursive: any withdrawal does not lead to being fully detached but to creating new relation to origins, memory, and identity. This shows that the individual and the collective are interdependent and constantly construct each other and re-define each other in the changing context of diaspora. The practice of trying to become a member of the dominant racial group of the American society with its strong ties to the historical practices of racial passing among African Americans allowed achieving a socio-economic mobility and involved alienation to the racial community and the hostility toward the directive aspects of forsaking the sense of belonging to the collective. Nevertheless, the trips of the girls to their countries of origin become the new turning point in the relations. When they come

back, they start losing touch with the visual cues that used to determine their otherness: "We carry the tangible and intangible. Tangible: We arrive in New York with our skins burnished darker shades of brown. Intangible: the fact that we couldn't care less about our darker skin. After walking through streets filled with people who look like us, our time away has shifted something within-- we are proud of our complexions" (Andreades, 2022, p. 41). This text is an indicator of a significant shift between external validation and internal acceptance. The girls are no longer seeing their physical differences as a weakness in American society, but they accept them as part of them. This change may be interpreted as the reclaiming of the mass but not as something that is suppression, but as the source of strength and acknowledgment. In places where they are no longer referred to as other, the girls feel that they belong. Their travels are, therefore, acts of reflexivity which forces them to re-visit and re-construct their identities in both regards to lived experience and cultural memory.

Andreades (2022) demonstrates that the girls realize that their identities cannot be reduced to a single cultural or national system: "The colonized, the colonizer. Where do we fall? Realize: Whether we like it or not, we lay claim to both" (p. 42). This recognition is intrinsic to the intrinsically hybrid character of diasporic identity, which is being influenced by colonialist, migration, and cultural exchange histories. The girls do not decide on identities, but they have to live in the tensions between them. Such plurality is further manifested in the way they re-visit and choose to challenge the imposed labels. "Whatever existences we've lived in the eyes of the world, we re-examine the identities handed to us from even before our mothers pushed us from their wombs. Labels—male, female—we shed over time, making our own worlds" (Andreades, 2022, p. 43). Here, identity emerges as a process of continual unlearning and re-configuration.

5. Conclusion

In *Brown Girls,* Andreades (2022) points out that diasporic identity is not something fixed or singular but it is inherently a fluid changeable phenomena, impacted by the ongoing negotiation between individual desires and collective expectations. The protagonists' experiences demonstrate that identity emerges from the interplay of different forces: community norms, familial pressures, societal marginalization, and inherited cultural memory. While some girls divorce themselves from their ethnic communities, others remain rooted in the collective identity, creating tension, misunderstanding, and at times mutual estrangement within diaspora itself. Yet, even those who depart cannot fully detach from their origins; the cyclical pull toward ancestral homelands, alongside encounters with cultural memory and inherited histories, reinforces the persistence of heritage in shaping selfhood. The novel, further, demonstrates that attempts to conform to dominant cultural standards, including racialized notions of beauty, generate both vulnerability and psychological dissonance, highlighting the pressures of assimilation.

Over time, the girls' journeys-- both physical and psychological-- foster reflection, reclamation, and re-definition of identity, revealing that selfhood in diaspora is recursive and relational. Ultimately, *Brown Girls* portrays identity as a dynamic and evolving construct, where individual agency and collective belonging co-exist, and belonging is continually re-negotiated across generations, geographies, and social contexts.

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