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Exemplary U.S. Ethnic Bildungsromane in the Era of High Multiculturalism

(Smjer: Američka književnost i kultura)

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## 1. Introduction

The changes in the demographic structure of the United States that occurred over the last fifty years have resulted in a move away from assimilationist policies such as the melting pot towards a more inclusive society and multiculturalism. For the more homogeneous European immigrants from the beginning of the twentieth century the goal was complete assimilation of their US-born children. The arrival of the much more ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse immigrants over the last several decades has changed that. The traditional binary division of the society into black and white was no longer applicable and the society had to find a way of creating a harmonious coexistence of many different peoples. This change has also been reflected in the work of authors belonging to marginalized groups.

In this graduation thesis I will explore how members of marginalized groups form their identity and integrate into the mainstream society. This will be done by comparing the classical European Bildungsroman with the Bildungsroman written by ethnic authors in the era of high multiculturalism in the United States. An analysis of how the two types differ will be proposed. Elements such as the protagonist, his or her journey towards maturity, the help they receive on this journey and the hardships they encounter will be analyzed as well as the differences in narration and endings. Moreover, we will see how the tension between the national and the ethnic influences the protagonists and how it can be resolved. The novels chosen for analysis are *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Sandra Cisneros, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) by Edwidge Danticat, *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khaled Hosseini and *American Dervish* (2012) by Ayad Akhtar. The protagonists of the chosen novels all belong to different minority groups in the United States.

In the first chapter I will offer a brief summary of the origins and features of the Bildungsroman. It will be explained how the classical European Bildungsroman protagonist reaches maturity and becomes a functional member of society. Moreover, I will talk about the

difference in the process of identity formation between a European and an American protagonist. The increase in popularity of the ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman will also be explained.

In the second chapter I offer a brief history of the development of multiculturalism around the world with a focus on its development in the United States. The Civil Rights movement and the change in the structure of immigrants helped move the United States from the notion of a melting pot towards multiculturalism. I will briefly touch on the debate surrounding the question of whether multiculturalism is still a valid policy at the present time. In the second part of the chapter I will focus on the development of literary multiculturalism based on Christopher Douglas's book *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism*. He emphasizes the importance of the impact that social sciences had on literary multiculturalism and divides it into three phases: the period between the 1920s and 1930s, the period between 1940 and 1965, and that from 1965 onwards. The authors of the third phase have changed the notion of the American novel because they started revising and adapting traditional genres, including the Bildungsroman.

In the third chapter I first offer a brief summary of the chosen novels and analyze the differences between the classical European and ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman. In the second part of the chapter, the chosen novels will be compared in detail. I will study how the protagonists create their identity by finding a balance between the expectations of their minority groups and the mainstream society. This will be done by discussing discrimination from within and from outside the minority group on the one hand, and, the importance of education as emancipatory option for members of marginalized groups, on the other.

## 2. The Origins and Features of the Bildungsroman

The term Bildungsroman comes from German and it can be loosely translated as the novel of formation. The term was coined by Karl Morgenstern in 1809 but it was only in 1819 that he offered “a coherent definition of what he now clearly regarded as a new genre” (Boes 649). Morgenstern explains that the Bildungsroman “represents the development of the hero in its beginning and progress to a certain stage of completion” (654), in other words we follow the development of the protagonist from a young age to adulthood, during which the protagonist encounters hardships. Another aspect that Morgenstern emphasizes, which is not apparent in contemporary definitions, is that the Bildungsroman “promotes the development of the reader to a greater extent than any other kind of novel” (654-55). According to Morgenstern, J. W. von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795-96), represents “the most general and comprehensive tendency of human *Bildung*” [formation] (655) and is considered by other scholars as the archetype of the genre.

The purpose of the Bildungsroman is “to create a full and happy men [sic]” (Moretti 31) in the process of their personal development and self-realization. A man becomes fulfilled when he passes into maturity and the happiness stems from “an objectively completed socialization” (Moretti 24) Thus the novel ends when the protagonist becomes a functional member of society. In most classical Bildungsromane the protagonist is the West European middle-class man because he had a “wide cultural formation, professional mobility, full social freedom” (Moretti ix) and because at the time it was difficult to imagine anybody else as a protagonist of such a novel (Moretti x).

Moretti believes that the Bildungsroman is not just a story about a young person finding identity but of a society finding identity. He argues that “the ‘great narrative’ of the *Bildungsroman*” was created because Europe was plunged into modernity without possessing the tools to deal with it, in other words without “a *culture* of modernity”, so it had “to attach a

meaning, not so much to youth, as to *modernity*” (Moretti 5). Even though the origins of the classical Bildungsroman, as Moretti defines it, can be found between two epochs - the Enlightenment and modernity, it seems not to have been affected by European historical events, such as the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. Consequently, politics is usually not mentioned in the novel. The genre not only juxtaposes two epochs but also two social classes- bourgeoisie and aristocracy (Moretti viii). That is why the ideological aim of the Bildungsroman is to create “compromises among distinct worldviews” (Moretti xii).

Even though Moretti analyzes only the European Bildungsroman, he also mentions the American variant in which “the hero's decisive experience, unlike in Europe, is not an encounter with the 'unknown,' but with an 'alien'- usually an Indian or a Black” (229). The ‘unknown’ in the European Bildungsroman refers to what the protagonist encounters during their journey towards maturity and due to changes in society the protagonist has to adjust to the new social situation. The ‘alien’ in the American Bildungsroman are Native Americans and African Americans, whom the protagonist has to get acquainted with and decide how to form a society together. In the contemporary American Bildungsroman, on the other hand, the ‘alien’ is often the protagonist who has to be included in society.

Bendixen compares the process of identity formation in the traditional British Bildungsroman with that in the American one. In the British variant, “the main character is an orphan who travels over a vast social landscape, until he (or occasionally she) discovers his or her identity,” where “identity is something to be found within a relatively stable world of clear hierarchies where each individual must learn his or her place” (15). On the other hand, the American protagonists have to create their own identity, which can sometimes be lost “in the fluid world of American democracy” (15). In traditional European society the individual was usually defined just by class, whereas in American society ethnicity and race play a major role.

The novels chosen for this graduation thesis have protagonists who belong to minority groups in American society (a Latina girl, a Haitian girl, an Afghan boy and a Pakistani American boy) and who are trying to create their identity and incorporate it into the mainstream society; in other words, they are trying to create compromises between their marginalized identity and society as a whole. When Goethe published his novel in the late eighteenth century, the society was changing from aristocracy to bourgeoisie and in the novels chosen for this thesis the society is learning how to incorporate many different communities and create functioning individuals.

The increase in popularity of the Bildungsroman in which the protagonists belong to “historically marginalized peoples” (Slaughter 1411) over the past several decades “corresponds to periods of social crisis over the terms and mechanics of enfranchisement, the meaning and scope of citizenship” (ibid.) that have happened in Europe and the United States. This is directly connected to increased migrations between and among countries and the need to adapt preexisting norms and expectations of the society to include the newly arrived immigrants. This has resulted in a new type of ideal reader, a member of a marginalized group who can easily relate to the protagonist in the same way as the ideal bourgeois reader could relate to the protagonist of the classical Bildungsroman (Moretti 65). This change in the type of protagonist and the type of reader can be attributed to changes in society and the birth of multiculturalism, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 3. Multiculturalism in the United States

In this chapter, I will focus on the concept of multiculturalism, which played an important role in the development of the new, ethnic Bildungsroman. First I will explain the historical origins of multiculturalism, and then I will show how it influenced the literary works that I will analyze later on.

Multiculturalism is a complex term that has provoked numerous debates among scholars. There are many interpretations of the term, so there is no univocal or unanimously accepted definition. This struggle to define it can also be seen in the fact that scholars cannot agree on whether it is a philosophy, an ideology, a program, an idea, an approach, a movement, a social principle or something else entirely. To exemplify this, I offer the following definitions:

Multiculturalism *as a fact* refers to the presence of people of diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds within a single polity. ... Multiculturalism *as an ideology* is a political response which assumes that differences in culture, in the sense of a coherent cluster of beliefs, values, habits and observances, accompany this demographic diversity. (Citrin et al., "Patriotism" 249)

Viewed as an ideology, multiculturalism construes ethnicity as the fundament of personal identity and so emphasizes preservation—recognition at least—of original cultures. (Citrin et al., "Public opinion" 531)

Multiculturalism is an approach or a movement that supports the coexistence of multiple cultures within a community and favorably views the benefits brought about by the coexistence of multiple cultures. (Kajita 5)



These definitions show that multiculturalism can be found in relatively democratic states that are composed of people who belong to multiple ethnicities and/or cultures and that the states acknowledge the differences and develop policies to facilitate the coexistence of different cultures. It emphasizes that all cultures are equal and that a dominant culture should not exist (Kajita 6).

Moreover Turner states that “multiculturalism ... is primarily a movement for change” because it challenges the dominant ethnic group and asks for recognition of cultural expressions of non-dominant groups (412). Banting and Kymlicka emphasize that still in the 1960s, in many Western countries, certain minorities were segregated and discriminated against on many different levels. These authors believe that in order to promote multiculturalism it is not enough to respect laws without taking into account the minority status of a person; laws and regulations should be changed “to better reflect the distinctive needs and aspirations of minorities” (7). To illustrate what they call “multicultural accommodation”, they give the often quoted example of Sikhs who are allowed to change the police dress code and wear a turban, but they still have to be accepted into the police force on their merit.

The term “multiculturalism” was coined in 1971 and it was first used in Canada. In his domestic policies Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau sought to include the indigenous minorities, the Inuit, Indian and Métis, in mainstream Canadian society. He also made considerable concessions to appease the francophone minority in Quebec who had increasing separatist tendencies. Similar policies regarding the indigenous minorities were later applied in Australia. Multicultural policies were introduced in Europe at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.

In the United States multicultural tendencies appeared earlier than in Canada but the United States has never explicitly recognized that they are a multicultural state. The move

away from segregation and discrimination towards multiculturalism began in the 1950s with the Civil Rights movement. The 1954 ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional was one of the first steps towards the abolition of segregationist Jim Crow laws. A year after, Rosa Parks, one of the most famous figures of the Civil Rights movement, refused to give up her seat in the bus to a white person, which led to her arrest and subsequently to the bus boycott led by Martin Luther King Jr. The result of the boycott was that the segregation on buses was ruled as unconstitutional. The following years were filled with nonviolent protests. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act came into effect, banning discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin. Influenced by the Civil Rights movement, during the late 1960's and the 1970's students were able to fight for a multicultural education by mass demonstrations. This education was open to more minority students and teachers at universities and ethnic studies programs were gradually developed. Another result of the Civil Rights movement was affirmative action which is positive discrimination in regards of minority groups that led to opening higher education and better job opportunities for minorities. The Civil rights movement was started by African Americans but later on other minorities joined the struggle for equal rights. During the struggle for more minority rights a change in perceiving Old World immigrants took place. Before the Civil Rights movement some European immigrants such as Italians, Greeks, Slavs and others were considered as racially different from white Americans. Later on they came to be considered as members of the American white ethnicity; they became "mere varieties of white people" and they were no longer "targets of racial nativism" (Yu 106).

The trend towards multiculturalism was made possible not only by the Civil Rights movement. The change in immigration patterns also contributed to this. The United States has always been a country of immigrants, predominantly those from the Old World, but immigration from Europe trickled down and immigration from Latin America, Asia and Third

World countries increased. According to Mesić (291), the Hart-Celler Act from 1952 contributed to this because it abolished the quota system based on national origin, which opened the door for immigrants from non-European countries. Family reunification also contributed to the increasing number of immigrants, since there was no restriction as to the number of family members that were allowed to enter the United States. This can be corroborated with data from the US Census Bureau according to which in 1960 there was 1 in 20 foreign-born residents whereas in 2010 there was 1 in 8. In the 1960's most European immigrants settled in the Northeast and Midwest, while in 2010's most immigrants were from Latin America and Asia and they settled in the West and South of the USA (Grieco et al. 3). Before this major wave of immigration, the term melting pot was used to refer to the US cultural assimilation policy. In the melting pot, immigrants were expected to give up their old identity and to accept American social norms. At the time the process of Americanization was very strong and it included putting the national flag on every public building, the introduction of the anthem before every sports event, the introduction of the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools. All of the practices mentioned became a part of the mainstream and today they are considered as an expression of patriotism. The new immigrants are ethnically, religiously and culturally much more diverse than the old Europeans, which also contributed to the rejection of assimilation and to the struggle for the recognition of their differences.

As there are many controversies in defining multiculturalism, there are also many debates on whether multiculturalism is still a valid policy, especially since the 9/11 terrorist attack. In Europe there has been a move away from multiculturalism towards civic integration which entails an active integration of immigrants into the mainstream society, learning the nation's language and history, introducing tests and loyalty oaths (Banting and Kymlicka 3). In 2010 German chancellor Angela Merkel declared that multiculturalism "has utterly failed" (Weaver). Other European politicians followed her lead: for example, in 2011 Prime Minister

David Cameron said that the United Kingdom should “adopt a policy of muscular liberalism” (Wright, Taylor) and French president Nicolas Sarkozy made a similar statement. The end of Barack Obama’s presidency can be considered as the end of the multiculturalism era in the US, which moved from a country open to immigration, albeit with some restrictions, to a country that has closed its door to the “Other”. The results of multiculturalism in the US can be seen in the “hyphenation of identities”, e.g. African-American, Mexican-American, Chinese-American, and so on, and in the observance of events such as the African American History Month and the National Hispanic Heritage Month.

After the general considerations on multiculturalism that were the subject of the first part of the chapter, now I will go on to discuss the development of literary multiculturalism, which is the main topic of my work. According to Douglas, social sciences contributed to the development of literary multiculturalism through “a comprehensive concept of culture to replace the destroyed notion of race” (2). He pays special attention to Franz Boas, a well-known anthropologist, and Robert Ezra Park, a sociologist, both from the early decades of the twentieth century. Boas made a key paradigm shift from biology to culture. He argued that the only thing we inherit “from our parents is our genes, not our race” (Douglas 4) and that “culture had to be learned, and could be changed” (Douglas 14). In other words, group differences can be explained by culture and not by race. Group differences are a result of environment and learning. According to Boas, culture is characterized by “language, religious beliefs, social practices, family organization, folklore” (Douglas 3) and it is transformed slowly. On the other hand, Park believes that cultures can change quickly, “often in the space of one to three generations” (Douglas 3). According to Park and the Chicago School of Sociology, who were very influential in the period between the 1910s and the Second World War, “racialized minorities could become culturally white, if not phenotypically white” (Douglas 68). Thus they kept Boas’s notion of culture but promoted integration and cultural

assimilationist policies of the melting pot. Moreover, Park developed the concepts of the generation gap, the marginalized man and the four stages through which immigrants become American: competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation (Douglas 69).

Douglas divides his genealogy of literary multiculturalism into three phases: the period between the 1920s and 1930s, the period between 1940 and 1965, and that from 1965 onwards. The first phase coincides with the development of the Boasian anthropology (Douglas 4). The second phase is concurrent with Park's sociological model of culture and the notion of the melting pot. The third phase, which we are most interested in because it has led to our current conception of literary multiculturalism, rejects the Parkian sociological model of culture and returns to the Boasian anthropological model, but the authors modify Boas's principle by "reattaching of culture to race" which "makes possible the treatment of culture as a kind of identity and the object of ambition" (Douglas 202). The Civil Rights movement "displaced notions of race as a strict biological inheritance and forced scholars to confront it as a category with broad political and economic implications" (Ferguson 192). As a result, the antiquated concept of race was transformed into a new concept of identity, which became relevant both in the society in general and in literature and the Bildungsroman in particular.

The newly introduced concept of identity is complex because it "define[s] *who somebody is* in terms of a trait" (During 145). Nowadays attributes such as race, religion or ethnicity are also subsumed under the term identity. Communities are created by placing individuals with the same traits into a group. This process creates the notion of the Other and the Other has "competing, and often conflicting, beliefs, values and aspirations" (Graham et al. 18). It is important to note that because identities are given on the basis of partial traits, such as skin color, gender, nationality etc., individuals can have more than one identity. Furthermore, "not all identities carry equal weight", and they can also change "across time and space" (During 146). Thus the marginalized minority groups are perceived as Other by

the mainstream society which first identifies them as a minority and then takes into consideration their other identities.

The third phase (1965-1975) laid the foundations of contemporary literary multiculturalism. The authors turned to “the anthropological principles of pluralism, relativism, and historical particularity” (Douglas 202). They understood that culture needed “a metaphysical anchor for its pluralism and relativism” and that the “function is performed by two related concepts, race and identity” (Douglas 298). Moreover, they follow the Black Aesthetic in its demand “that books by black authors speak directly to African Americans” (Douglas 185), which can be adapted for other minority writers as well.

The burgeoning of multicultural authors and multiculturalism has changed “the American novel from 1970 onwards” and this changed profoundly the language and the landscape of American literature (Cutter 109). Cutter attributes the increase of multiethnic literature to better educational opportunities offered to minorities (112). She emphasizes that multicultural writers often change the traditional genres, which makes it difficult to categorize them.

Multicultural authors revise and adapt many genres, including the Bildungsroman. They add “elements of gender, class, and ethnicity” (Mujcinovic 110) which are not typical of the classical Bildungsroman. Typically, a classical Bildungsroman “relates the development of a (male) protagonist who matures through a process of acculturation and ultimately attains harmony with his surrounding society” (Karafilis 63). In the case of the ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman both genders are represented and they have to find a way to “attain harmony” with both societies that they are part of: the minority and the mainstream ones. They have to find “a cultural space in which they can develop” and this space has to be created by themselves because it exists neither in the mainstream culture nor the minority culture they come from (Karafilis 71). In other words, these protagonists are between the insider and the

outsider status in both societies. Furthermore, classic Bildungsromane have a linear narrative which “begins with the birth of the protagonist and proceeds chronologically until the point of maturation and assimilation into a larger society” (Karafilis 68). This is often not the case with the ethnic multicultural Bildungsromane, which we will see in the analysis of the chosen novels.

We will also see how the traditional protagonist’s journey from rural to urban area is represented and how the mentors that help him or her on the journey to maturity differ in the ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman with respect to the classical model. The ending of the classical Bildungsromane is often characterized as happy and usually it is accompanied by revealing the protagonist’s true identity, which brings him an inheritance, and often marriage. In the ethnic multicultural Bildungsromane the endings are more open-ended. Multicultural authors not only add “elements of gender, class, and ethnicity”, but they also “present non-dominant cultural practices, values, and symbols as meaningful parts of national culture” (Mujcinovic 99), such as stories and typical dishes, and thus they bring their culture closer to a wider audience, and help bridge the divide between marginalized cultures and the mainstream one. This is exemplified in novels such as *American Dervish* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Many critics use Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* as one of the examples of such adaptations and revisions of genres by multicultural authors.

In the next chapter we will see how these revisions of the classical Bildungsroman are represented in the chosen novels.

#### 4. Examples of the US Multicultural Bildungsromane

In this chapter I will analyze the chosen novels in the light of multiculturalism which has an increasing impact on the formation of a new national identity. First I will provide a brief summary of the plot for each novel, in order to familiarize the reader with their content, and then I will propose a closer analysis of the chosen novels. The novels were chosen because the protagonists- a Latina girl, a Haitian girl, an Afghan boy and a Pakistani American boy- represent the change in the ethnic composition of the US and the emergence of a new national subject that has to find its place in the multicultural society.

*The House on Mango Street (HMS)* is a story that follows the development of the protagonist, Esperanza, from preadolescence to maturity, and her life in Mango Street. We get to know her family and neighbors and the “harsh social realities” (Mujcinovic 100) surrounding the life of the Mexican American community in Chicago.

*Breath, Eyes, Memory (BEM)* follows Sophie Caco, a 12-year-old Haitian girl, and her relocation to the United States to live with her mother Martine. We follow her through her teenage years and early twenties, her marriage to Joseph and her brief returns to Haiti to visit her grandmother Ife. Sophie has to deal with the trauma of abruptly leaving Haiti and her aunt Atie and getting used to living in the US. She breaks from her family’s pattern of behavior based on patriarchal practices, such as testing for virginity, and confronts her past.

In *The Kite Runner (KR)*, the protagonist and narrator of the story Amir remembers his childhood and the time spent with his servant Hassan in Afghanistan, the beginning of the Soviet–Afghan war, the life he and his father Baba led in the US, and his marriage to Soraya. He also recounts how he saved his servant’s son, Sohrab, from a life of abuse and a certain death in Afghanistan and brought him to the United States.

*American Dervish (AD)* is a story about Hayat Shah, a boy who discovers Islam thanks to Mina, his mother's best friend, and becomes obsessed with becoming a hafiz, a person who



can recite the entire Quran from memory. Hayat's actions contribute to Mina's unhappiness. He carries the guilt until he confesses to her, before she dies, that he was the one who informed her family about her relationship with Nathan, an unbeliever and a Jew. Her family's negative reaction prompted Mina to break their relationship and marry a Muslim man considered to be a good match for her. She marries Sunil, an abusive man and leads a difficult life.

#### **4.1. A comparative reading of the selected novels**

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, ethnic multicultural Bildungsromane differ from the classical Bildungsroman in the choice of protagonists and mentors. Because of the time and place of the narratives the journeys that the protagonists undertake in order to reach maturity as well as the endings differ from the classical Bildungsromane.

The tension between the national and ethnic that arises from living in the US renders the characters halfway between an insider and an outsider. In other words, they are part of the mainstream society because they live in it and understand it, but they are not wholly accepted by it. They have to find a balance between the expectations of their immigrant community and the mainstream society. Discrimination from the mainstream society and discrimination from within the immigrant community, which stems from patriarchal culture, play a significant part in producing this tension. On the other hand, education helps relieve the tension because it offers more opportunities for characters to become functional members of society.

#### 4.1.a Gender-based discrimination

In the immigrant communities of the chosen novels gender-based discrimination is strongly connected to patriarchal culture. In both the Mexican-American and the Haitian community it is considered that the only place a woman can belong to is at home taking care of the family. Women learn this lesson from a young age. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Grandmother Ife explains to Sophie the practice of announcing the gender of a new baby and that “[i]f it is a boy, the lantern will be put outside the shack. If there is a man, he will stay awake all night with the new child”. On the other hand “[i]f it is a girl, the midwife will cut the child's cord and go home. Only the mother will be left in the darkness to hold her child. There will be no lamps, no candles, no more light” (*BEM* 119). This practice shows that the birth of a boy is something that should be celebrated whereas the birth of a girl is something to be mourned. The patriarchal norms can also be seen in Atie saying, when referring to her childhood, “They train you to find a husband” (*BEM* 112).

A significant part of the patriarchal culture of Haiti is the “testing”. The testing is done to check if a young girl is still a virgin and it is carried out by the mothers “[f]rom the time a girl begins to menstruate to the time you turn her over to her husband, the mother is responsible for her purity” because “[i]f I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me” (128). Martine starts testing Sophie when she is eighteen and falls in love with their neighbor Joseph. Sophie hated the testing and after a time she used a pestle to break her own hymen to stop the humiliating practice (75). Sophie’s action is a rejection of the patriarchal expectations in regards to her worth as a woman. She describes her action as “an act of freedom” even though she had to seek medical help afterwards (107).

In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza shows us the subordinated position of women through the images of women looking out of the window: Marin stands in the

doorway because she has to babysit her cousins and she dreams of getting a job downtown and meeting somebody who might marry her; Mamacita spends her days by the window singing Spanish songs and she never leaves the apartment; Rafaela “gets locked indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at” (78). Esperanza does not want to become like these women so she rejects the patriarchal norm according to which a woman’s place is in the house. She starts her own small war against it by leaving “the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate” (83). She was named after her grandmother, a strong woman who was transformed into a subdued woman (i.e. a woman looking out of the window) because of a forced marriage. Esperanza may have inherited her name, but she does not “want to inherit her place by the window” (27).

In *The Kite Runner* and *American Dervish* the protagonists are not discriminated against based on gender but nonetheless it is shown how both the Afghan and Pakistani communities in the US still adhere to patriarchal traditions. In *The Kite Runner*, this patriarchal double standard is best described by Soraya, “an unwed woman with a history”, after she is reminded yet again of her past mistake: “[t]heir sons go out to nightclubs looking for meat and get their girlfriends pregnant, they have kids out of wedlock and no one says a goddamn thing. Oh, they’re just men having fun! I make one mistake and suddenly everyone is talking *nang* [honor] and *namoos* [pride], and I have to have my face rubbed in it for the rest of my life” (146). Soraya’s mistake was running away with her boyfriend when she was eighteen. Because of the scandal the family moved from Virginia to California but her past is still fodder for gossip.

In the *American Dervish* Mina’s situation is the perfect example of how far-reaching influence the patriarchal culture has. Her life in Pakistan was controlled by her family. They arranged for her marriage but it ended in divorce after she gave birth to Imran. Even after she moves to the US her family tries to find her a suitable husband. Her life with the Shahs, who

are more Americanized than the rest of the Pakistani community, and enrolling into a training program for beauty technicians encourages her to discard some of the traditions so her “habitual Pakistani garb- the loosely fitting *shalwar* pants, *kameez* tunics, and *dupatta* head coverings- gave way to not-so-loose-fitting blouses and jeans” (55). After meeting her future husband Sunil she reverts back to her traditional Pakistani garb, including a *hijab* on the day of her engagement. The fact that Mina feels the need to lie to her future-husband’s family that she wears a veil and keeps to herself when in the presence of Naveed Shah, Hayat’s father, shows how traditional the Pakistani American community is.

In *The House on Mango Street* the subordination of women is also represented through “scenes of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse [which] are pervasive” (Mayock 226): Sally, one of Esperanza’s friends, is first abused by her father because she is too beautiful and is not allowed out of the house except to go to school (79), and later by her husband, who she married before her eighth grade. Her husband does not let her out of the house, and she is not allowed to even look out the window (91). Esperanza, on the other hand is not abused at home, but the world outside the house turns out to be dangerous for her. At her first job she gets kissed by an older man against her will (59) and is sexually assaulted at a carnival (90).

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* rape is also an important theme. In Haitian history rape has had an important role in subduing women. It was never punished, and it was even encouraged, during the US occupation and the Duvalier regime. The regime’s militia were notorious for committing crimes against women. Martine was raped by one of them in the sugarcane fields when she was sixteen. Sophie is the result of that night. The rape and the practice of virginity testing have left serious consequences on Martine’s psyche. She shows signs of posttraumatic stress disorder, such as insomnia and violent nightmares. It could be assumed that because of her experience with virginity testing, and her telling Sophie that “[t]he one good thing about my being raped was that it made the testing stop” (140), Martine would not subject Sophie to

this practice, but in fact she did. When asked why she did it Martine gives the simple answer “because my mother had done it to me” (140). This answer shows how deeply ingrained patriarchal culture is in the lives of Haitian women. Because she did not seek help, the trauma of rape festered for years and when Martine got pregnant again her mental health deteriorated quickly, i.e. she could hear the baby talking to her, and she committed suicide by stabbing herself in the stomach (184).

Sophie is also greatly affected by virginity testing. She develops bulimia as one of her coping mechanisms and has problems in her relationship with her husband because “she associates her husband with her mother’s rapist” (Francis 82). As a coping mechanism for that she “doubles”. This coping mechanism stems from the stories about the Marassas “two inseparable lovers. They were the same person, duplicated in two” (73). Martine told her stories to distract her during the testing in the same way that her grandmother Ife distracted her and her sister Atie. Now every time Sophie is intimate with her husband her mind wanders to another place and she shuts out what is happening to her body. The trauma of virginity testing and her subsequent self-deflowering was so strong that Sophie was happy that her daughter’s birth was “a Caesarean section” (161) because a natural birth would have been very traumatic; it would have reminded Sophie of her self-deflowering. Her coping mechanisms and the experience of giving birth show the long lasting effect that such practices can have on a woman’s psyche.

In *The Kite Runner* rape also plays a significant part since it was the point from where Amir’s journey to maturity, or as he calls it “*a way to be good again*” (14), began. In the winter of 1975 Amir won the kite fighting tournament. His servant Hassan as his kite runner, the person who collects the defeated kites, ran after the last kite Amir defeated and was caught by Assef, the worst of the neighborhood bullies. Assef wanted the kite, but Hassan refused to give it up because he promised Amir that he would bring him the kite. As punishment Assef

raped Hassan. Amir, who was hidden behind a corner, witnessed the confrontation and the rape and did nothing to help Hassan. After the rape Amir pushed Hassan away and planted some money and a watch under Hassan's bed and then reported it because he wanted Hassan to leave because he did not know how to deal with the guilt he felt. Baba forgave Hassan, but Ali, Hassan's father, insisted on them leaving. Amir's actions haunt him for the rest of his life because his cowardice had provoked so much suffering. Years later the same man abused Hassan's son Sohrab but this time Amir took action and saved him.

#### **4.1.b Religion**

Another element that is relevant when discussing multiculturalism in the recent ethnic Bildungsroman is religion, especially Islam. It became more prominent after the 9/11 attacks and the escalating tensions between Islam and the mainstream American society. As such, Islam represents an important issue in the context of American multiculturalism in general, as well as within some of the multicultural Bildungsromane that we are analyzing here in particular. Not only does religion set the protagonists apart from the mainstream American society, but it often provokes tensions between conservative and liberal views within the Muslim community itself.

Moreover, religion also represents a great tool for educating and molding young minds, which is another relevant aspect related to the Bildungsroman in general. In the context of the multicultural ethnic Bildungsromane in particular, religion can determine the difference between acceptance or hatred of the Other.

The *American Dervish* does not show the usual tensions between Islam and the mainstream American society. It shows that there are tensions inside the Muslim community on how much Muslims should adapt their practices to the mainstream society. This is most easily noticed in women's dressing style which ranges from full body coverage to adopting

the western style. The Shah family are secular Muslims but they still adhere to some conservative practices, for example Muneer Shah, Hayat's mother, has to chaperone Mina's dates (89). Naveed Shah lost his faith because his mother used her religious devotion to abuse her children by "beating them out of bed for their morning prayers, not feeding them if they didn't put in their hours of daily religious study" (40). So he did not teach his son Hayat about Islamic customs and prayers. Moreover Naveed is an alcoholic even though alcohol is strictly forbidden to Muslims. Muneer explains to Hayat that drinking is prohibited "because it *impairs* you. It makes you *foolish*" (23) and that giving a Muslim man a drink makes him "run after white women like a crazed fool" (23).

Hayat gets interested in religion after Mina moves in with them and starts telling him and her son Imran stories about Muhammad's life. For his eleventh birthday she gives Hayat a Quran as a gift and offers to teach him in Naveed's stead. He quickly learns the *namaaz*, the prayer that Muslims recite five times a day and when she deems him ready, Naveed proposes that they go to the mosque to pray, which surprises everyone. After a few months of study Hayat decides to become a hafiz in order to secure, not just his but also his parents' place in Janaat, i.e. Paradise, because he believes that otherwise they would not be accepted into it. Hayat puts all of his energy into learning, even after his father burns his Quran. At Mina's wedding he is asked to recite some verses and he does it in English not knowing that a true hafiz memorizes the Quran in Arabic because that is the holy language. After this he is disheartened and does not touch another Quran for almost ten years.

In *The Kite Runner* religious elements and Muslim practices become more visible during the preparations for Amir and Soraya's wedding because everything is done according to Muslim customs. Earlier in the text, religion was not in the foreground because Baba was a secular Muslim. When Amir asked Baba once if he was a sinner because he drank alcohol, as they were taught in school by the mullah, Baba told him "[y]ou'll never learn anything of

value from those bearded idiots” (25). We see that he does not think highly of the religious men of Islam. On the other hand, Amir becomes a practicing Muslim after Sohrab tries to kill himself after Assef’s abuse. Amir prays to Allah and promises that he would start observing Muslim practices if Sohrab survives.

#### **4.1.c Socioeconomic and racial discrimination**

Discrimination based on class and socioeconomic status is also present in the chosen novels. The financial situation of Esperanza’s family is best reflected by the house they finally bought on Mango Street and the apartments they had lived in before. The house is not the one they dreamt of because “[i]t’s small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you’d think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in” (14). It is not the American dream house they envisioned. As a young child she learnt that where you live is important because it determines your position in society and she was taught this lesson by one of her school teachers

Where do you live? she asked.

There, I said pointing up to the third floor.

You live *there*?

There. I had to look to where she pointed—the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn’t fall out. You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. *There*. I lived there. I nodded. (24)

Her family’s financial situation is also the reason why Esperanza has to find a job to help pay for her education at the Catholic school. Her father, who works as a gardener for the more affluent families, takes the family on Sundays to see the houses where he works. After a while Esperanza stops going because she is ashamed “of us staring out the window like the hungry.



I am tired of looking at what we can't have" (82). This realization brings her to the decision that one day she has to have her own house, a house she would not be ashamed to point at (24).

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Martine works two jobs to be able to help her family financially and to make sure Sophie would get the chance to go to school and not have to work in the sugarcane fields as the previous generations of their family. In this novel we also see that a big part of living the American dream and improving one's socioeconomic status is owning a house. Martine and Sophie move from a Brooklyn apartment to a small house and thus rise in the social hierarchy. Furthermore, Martine is very much aware, even though it does not matter in the US, that if they were still in Haiti she and her boyfriend Marc could not be a couple because he is from an upstanding family (53) and his "French-colonial heritage" reveals his class privilege even outside Haiti (Alexander 378) and she is from a rural village. This shows us that discrimination based on socioeconomic factors is also present in immigrant communities themselves.

In *The Kite Runner* we see that in Afghanistan there are big differences between classes and that discrimination is rampant. The relationship between Baba and Amir and their servants, Hassan and Ali, exemplifies the social and ethnic differences among the Afghan people. Baba is not just a wealthy business man, he is also a Sunni Muslim and a Pashtun which means that he is a member of the dominant ethnic and religious groups in Afghanistan, whereas Ali is a Shi'a Muslim and a Hazara, in other words he is part of the subordinated group which suffers much abuse. As a result, even though Baba and Ali grew up together, Baba never refers to Ali as his friend. The same social differences are emphasized in the relationship between Amir and Hassan, as we can see when Amir says that "[i]n the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing" (32). The subordinated position of the Hazaras is also

exemplified by the fact that other people refer to Hassan as Amir's Hazara. Also a glimpse into their everyday routine shows us the difference in their respective roles in society: "While I ate and complained about homework, Hassan made my bed, polished my shoes, ironed my outfit for the day, packed my books and pencils" (33).

The glaring differences between the social status of the two families are also reflected in their education, as can be seen in the fact that Amir goes to school, but Hassan is illiterate because "what use did a servant have for the written word?" (33). Instead, he helps Ali with chores during the time Amir is at school. On several occasions Amir further emphasizes the differences in their social and educational status through his behavior towards Hassan; for instance, Amir's "favorite part of reading to Hassan" (34) was teasing him when he did not know the meaning of a word, even though afterwards he felt guilty and would give Hassan one of his old shirts or a broken toy.

As a child "Amir accepts the domination of the powerful over the powerless by letting Assef rape Hassan" (Malik et al. 166), but as an adult Amir rejects the divisions in the Afghan society and does not accept them in his family. We see this when Soraya's father is unhappy that Amir brought home "a Hazara boy" (282). He wonders what the community, which still adheres to Afghan traditions, will say. Amir wants to tell them the truth: Sohrab is Amir's nephew, and nobody is allowed to call Sohrab a Hazara. This change in attitude can be attributed to his life in the US and no longer being a part of the dominant group; he and Baba lost their social status when they immigrated to the US. This change in socioeconomic status is seen in the fact that Baba went from managing his many businesses to working at a gas station as a day manager.

Of all the protagonists Hayat, the protagonist of the *American Dervish*, is in the best social position because his parents are part of the "model minority" which consists of highly educated professionals who immigrated to the US in the 1960s when there was a need for

such labor (Malik 46). The “model minority” is respected for their professional achievements, but nonetheless they have a complex relationship with members of the mainstream society of a lower class standing. We encounter such an example when a hotel worker refers to the guests of the wedding as “you people” in the following extract: “Excuse me, gentlemen,” we heard, looking over to find a young blond man in white gloves and a tuxedo addressing us. “We’re expecting quite a few of you people, and we’d like to keep the lobby clear. The reception area is this way” (221). This quote shows that the men are seen as a minority regardless of their surroundings and signs, such as clothes, that they belong there.

As shown in *The House on the Mango Street*, racial discrimination was very much alive in the US at the time the plot of the novel takes place. When they first move into the house Esperanza meets Cathy who is moving away in a few days because “the neighborhood is getting bad” (28). Esperanza finds that non-Chicano people come to their neighborhood only when they get lost and are usually afraid because they expect violence on every corner of the neighborhood. She states that the same is true of the Chicano members when they go to other neighborhoods: “All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight” (39). As Mujcinovic notes, Cisneros shows that social segregation, that is “the division of social space and life”, is still very much present, as a result of “racial/class inequalities”, even though it is “legally prohibited” (107)

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Martine insists that Sophie should quickly learn English after she arrives to the US because she is afraid that children might bully Sophie. Her concerns can be explained by numerous incidents that happened in local schools: Haitian children “were accused of having HBO—Haitian Body Odor” or “of having AIDS because [the students] had heard on television that only the “Four Hs” got AIDS—Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians” (46). These incidents reflect the opinion of the

majority of the mainstream society in regards to Haitian immigrants and the fact that children said this shows how widespread such opinions were at the time

In *The Kite Runner* and *American Dervish* there is no trace of racial discrimination on the part of the mainstream society towards the Afghan and Pakistani communities, but in the *American Dervish* we see that racism, specifically anti-Semitism, is present in the Pakistani community and it has a considerable impact on Hayat's actions. This can be observed in several instances. Once at a dinner party Hayat overheard a Pakistani man expressing regret that they will have to wait another hundred years before anyone tries to kill Jews the way Hitler did. Another instance is when Naveed and Hayat take Nathan, Mina's Jewish suitor who is thinking of converting to Islam, to the local mosque. Knowing that there is a Jew in the congregation, the imam holds an anti-Semitic sermon in which he portrays Jews as ungrateful after everything Allah did for them. This example of anti-Semitism is important because soon after Hayat tells Imran, Mina's son, that "[a] Jew is the kind of person Allah hates the most in the world" (164) and that he should pray to Allah that Nathan does not become his father. This conversation results in Naveed forbidding Hayat's study of the Quran. We can speculate that Hayat's behavior could be accounted for by preexisting jealousy towards Nathan. The imam's sermon just gave Amir the excuse to act on his jealousy.

On the example of the Pakistani community we can see that the immigrant communities themselves are not uniform and that there are divisions and antagonisms inside the community. In this case there are tensions between the Shah family, which is more secular, and the rest of the community, which still adheres to traditional practices. On several occasions Naveed referred to other Pakistani as sheep, fools and idiots. He is not subtle in his disdain towards other members of his community. He was most annoyed by "their ceaseless complaining about the godlessness of American life" and he "couldn't understand what they were still doing here if they thought it was all so evil" (62).

#### 4.1.d Education

Education has great value for immigrant families because it opens more doors for their children and thus creates a chance that they could improve their socioeconomic status and be more easily accepted into the mainstream society. In *The House on Mango Street* Esperanza's mother encourages her strongly to keep going to school and learning because education is "a possible path to female liberation" (Mujinovic 109). She reveals to Esperanza that she left school because she "didn't have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains" (84), and now the only thing she can say about herself is that she could have been somebody. She does not want Esperanza to have the same type of regrets.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* we first see the importance of education when aunt Atie tells Sophie to never complain about school because she is lucky to have the opportunities that Atie, who became literate late in life, did not have as a young woman. Martine has worked hard to ensure a good education for Sophie so she is shocked when Sophie says that she wants to be a secretary. Martine wants Sophie to get a higher education, maybe even a doctorate because "[i]f you get your education, there are things you won't have to do" (53), for example work two jobs the way she does.

We see that education is also important for Baba and Amir in *The Kite Runner*. After their move to the US Amir continues his schooling and graduates from high school as a twenty-year old and then enrolls into college. Baba is not happy when Amir decides to major in English creative writing because he does not consider it "real work" (114) that can support a family. Soraya's father is also disappointed in her choice of a major because he believes she should be a lawyer or a political scientist instead of a mere teacher so that she could help her country, i.e. Afghanistan, when it becomes free again (148). Both fathers had bigger dreams for their children.

#### 4.1.e Cultural exchange between societies

The protagonists of the ethnic multicultural Bildungsromane have to contend both with the expectations of the mainstream American society and their minority groups. In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza rejects her community's patriarchal expectation of becoming another woman confined to the house. She defies the community with her wish to have a house that is "not a man's house. Not a daddy's house" (96) but a house where she has all the power. She also wants to move further away from the influence of her family which is atypical because in the Mexican-American community families usually stay close together. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Sophie also rejects the influence of patriarchal culture on her life by breaking her family's pattern of sexual abuse. She rejects the notion that her worth as a woman should be measured by her virginity.

In *The Kite Runner* we can consider Baba as Amir's link to the Afghan community and their expectations. Since Amir's childhood, Baba wanted him to act more manly and to defend himself when he got attacked because "[a] boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything" (29-30). Moreover, he wanted Amir to play sports and he did not consider reading and writing as good hobbies for his son. He did not show much interest when Amir gave him his first story to read. As a matter-of-fact Baba did not read it, Rahim Khan, Baba's friend, did (36). The only time Baba was truly proud of Amir was when he won the kite tournament (62). When they move to the US Amir's community gets enlarged by the addition of other Afghani immigrants and he has to deal with their expectations too. When he meets Soraya and wants to court her, and later on marry her, he has to follow the traditional practices: the khastegari- asking for the hand of the bride; the lafiz – the ceremony of giving word; the nika- the swearing ceremony; and the awroussi- the wedding ceremony. Moreover, they were always chaperoned when spending time together before the wedding. Amir has never been as active in the Afghan community as his father, but

after the 9/11 terrorist attack Amir and Soraya become more involved in the Afghan community and they even help renovate a small hospital in Afghanistan.

In *American Dervish* Hayat has to contend mostly just with the expectations of his family. The only requirement Naveed has after his son Hayat starts studying the Quran is that Hayat does not become a *mualvi*, i.e. an imam (52). He allows Hayat to study the Quran but after his anti-Semitic talk with Imran Naveed burns Hayat's Quran and prohibits him from having one until he is eighteen years old. His mother Muneer, on the other hand, makes him promise that he will be a better man than his father. Soon after their move Naveed started cheating on his wife Muneer and drinking. Naveed's actions have colored Muneer's opinion of American women and she often warns Hayat to stay away from them. Her opinion can be clearly seen when she describes a teenage girl kissing her boyfriend as a prostitute, but at the same time Muneer "inexplicably, considering her seemingly ceaseless disdain for white women- watched religiously" beauty pageants (44). Hayat does not fulfill her expectation of staying away from American women since he is dating an American girl whom he met at college.

In regards to the larger community, that is the Pakistani American community, he does not fulfill the universal expectations of Islam: he learnt the Quran in English instead of Arabic and he tries a pork bratwurst at a sports game, which is against Islamic rules (7). Moreover, after the class Survey of Islamic History in which their professor holds a lecture about a controversial topic and other Muslim students leave, Hayat tells his girlfriend that losing his faith is "freeing. So freeing...hearing Edelstein talk about the Quran as just a book, a book like any other, makes me feel like going out to celebrate" (12). Naveed, and Hayat are not the only ones who reject some of the community's expectations, Muneer also does it. We see it in her reaction when she finds out that Mina has been beaten because she dared to give advice to her husband Sunil. Muneer is outraged when she hears Sunil's relative justify the beating:

“Ghaleb beats me, too,” she says. Almost like she’s proud! Can you believe it?... I ask her, like any normal person would, ‘Why, Najat, does your husband beat you?... ‘Because we need it,’ she says. ‘Because it’s something about our nature something that needs to know its limit” (247). Even before this incident, we see that Muneer does not agree with the pressure the community puts on women; she tries to convince Mina that it does not matter if Nathan converts to Islam or not. This is one of the indications that the Shah family has moved away from Pakistani traditions and has integrated into the mainstream society.

In the chosen novels we see that for some characters it is difficult to adapt to life in the US. In *The House on Mango Street* Esperanza’s mother needs her daughter’s help to navigate the subway. In *The Kite Runner* we see Baba’s difficulty in adapting to life in the US when he makes a scene at the grocery store because he is asked to show his ID even though he has shopped many times in that same shop (108) and in his refusal to go to English language classes. As Amir explains “Baba loved the *idea* of America. It was living in America that gave him an ulcer” (107). Baba suffers from severe homesickness, but selling goods at a flea market alleviates it because he has the chance to spend time with many other Afghan immigrants. Amir shows us that immigrants have to learn the nuances of the mainstream culture because making a minor faux pas like he did can make it difficult to be accepted into the mainstream society. He revealed the ending of a movie and learnt that “in America, you don’t reveal the ending of the movie, and if you do, you will be scorned and made to apologize profusely for having committed the sin of Spoiling the End. In Afghanistan, the ending was all that mattered” (279). We have another example in the *American Dervish* when Hayat has to explain to Imran that Naveed cannot marry Mina, even though he is a Muslim, because polygamy is not allowed in the US.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter multicultural novels introduce non-dominant cultural practices, such as foreign languages and food. By doing this they promote



communication between cultures. In *The Kite Runner* and *American Dervish* we have a detailed description of traditions connected to engagements, wedding ceremonies and receptions. In the novels, there are also some instance of foreign language use: Spanish in *The House on Mango Street* and Haitian Creole in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The minority languages are used in order to refer to family members (for example, Sophie calls her aunt Atie Tante); for honorifics, such as sahib, which means Mister; for naming traditional garb, such as the hijab or burqa; for naming the traditional food like parathas, or for exclamations, such as inshallah which means “if Allah wills it”.

Another aspect of the cultural exchange between societies in the chosen novels are stories. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* there are several Haitian folk tales that incorporate elements of voodoo. In the *American Dervish* Mina teaches Hayat about the life of Muhammad and in *The Kite Runner* Amir reads to Hassan from the epic Shohnamah and from his own stories. Finally, in *The House on Mango Street* Esperanza will “tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong” (97).

#### **4.1.f Elements of narration**

In this subchapter I will consider the narrator, the mentors, the journey and the endings as elements of narration and I will compare them to the elements of narration of the classical Bildungsroman.

The protagonists of the chosen novels are children of immigrants (Esperanza and Hayat) or immigrants themselves (Sophie and Amir). They are diegetic narrators and they do not use linear narration as was the case with classical Bildungsromane. In *The House on Mango Street* we have a circular narration that ends almost where it began. In both *The Kite Runner* and *American Dervish* the main body of the narrative is encircled by prologues and epilogues that are situated respectively in the more recent past and the present. The novels are

characterized by time shifts. In *The House on Mango Street* there is no explicit time line; we estimate Esperanza's age by what is happening in the story; for example, she has to find a job to help pay for her high school. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* it is explicitly stated that Sophie is twelve years old when she moves to the US, then there is a time shift to the summer after she graduated from high school and another which we can estimate to be a year and a half later. On the other hand, in *The Kite Runner* and *American Dervish* time lines are more explicit; precise years are mentioned, sometimes even in the titles of the chapters, and birthday celebrations offer another clue as to the age of the characters. *The Kite Runner* is specific because in the sixteenth chapter Rahim Khan, a family friend, takes over the role of narrator to inform Amir of what has happened in Afghanistan since he left.

The protagonists of the chosen novels do not have mentors that help them on their way to maturity as is the case in the classical Bildungsroman. In *The House on Mango Street* Esperanza uses the example of the women of her community as negative role models and this leads her towards reaching her maturity. She decides "not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (83). Even though they are not what she wants to become and they were not able to fight against the community's expectations, the women encourage Esperanza and her writing because that is the only way she will be able to surpass the barriers that had constrained them. Also because she does not find female role models to emulate in her community Esperanza turns to the mainstream culture and wants to be like the strong female characters in the movies who have the power and are not willing to give it away, especially not to a man (83).

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Sophie has a similar experience as Esperanza. Her family's practices constitute a counter example, i.e. an example of what she does not want to emulate, but she lacks the support that Esperanza receives from other women of her community.

Moreover, she is the one that offers support to her mother by offering to help her confront the trauma of rape.

In *The Kite Runner* Amir is encouraged by Rahim Khan, a family friend, to continue writing after he reads Amir's first story and the only birthday present Amir cherishes is the leather bound notebook Rahim Khan gave him. He is also supported by Hassan who predicts that one day Amir will be a world famous author (38). Their belief in him helps him reach his goal of becoming a novelist later on.

At the first glance Mina seems to be Hayat's mentor in the *American Dervish* but in reality she is not. She just starts him on the way of studying Islam but then abandons him to his own study. One of Hayat's reasons for studying so hard was to impress her and bring them closer. After Hayat expresses anti-Semitic thoughts, she admits "[i]t was my mistake not being careful...The Quran says many things. And some you will not understand until you're older" (179).

In the classical Bildungsroman the protagonist's journey takes him from a rural to an urban area and he encounters difficulties that he has to overcome to reach maturity. Only in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *The Kite Runner* do we have such a change. In Sophie's case it is a move from Haiti to the US, but her journey includes several returns to Haiti. The difficulties she encounters on her way to maturity are her forced emigration to the US, the virginity testing that Martine forces on her, and the related problems. Martine flees to the US to get away from her memories and Sophie goes to Haiti instead of discussing her problems with her husband. She goes to Haiti to reconnect with her family and to find out why the virginity testing is done in the first place. As a mother Sophie does not want to put her daughter Brigitte through what she had suffered. She wants to be a good mother. In Haiti Sophie uncovers the reasons behind her mother's actions; Martine was repeating what Ife did to her previously. Her discoveries in Haiti lead her to seek help upon her return to the US. She goes

to therapy and frequents a sexual phobia group with other minority women. We can see the influence of her life in the US on this decision. She offers Martine to join her in therapy, but she refuses.

Amir's journey in *The Kite Runner* is similar to Sophie's. The first part of his journey takes him from Afghanistan via Pakistan to California, but his journey comes to a head when he retraces his journey back to Kabul, and saves Sohrab from more abuse and certain death. By saving Sohrab, bringing him to the US and adopting him, Amir atones for the sins of his past, namely his unjust treatment of Sohrab's father Hassan, and breaks his practice of running away from hardships.

Esperanza's everyday life in *The House on Mango Street* can be considered as a hardship because she has to deal with discrimination in all aspects of life, be it in her minority community or in the mainstream society.

In *American Dervish* Hayat's journey to maturity begins with Mina's arrival and the introduction to the study of the Quran. His journey consists of gaining faith and then losing it. The hardships he encounters are his father prohibiting him from studying the Quran, and the guilt he feels after sending the telegram to Mina's family about her relationship with Nathan. Haya feels guilty because his actions led her to marry an abusive man. His guilt was so strong that he would leave the house every time Mina called.

As mentioned in the previous chapter classical Bildungsromane are usually characterized by happy endings, but in the case of the chosen novels the endings can be considered as more open ended, but still hopeful and optimistic about the future. The protagonists have reached maturity, created their identities and become functional members of society. In *The House on Mango Street* Esperanza has come of age by recognizing that she cannot be completely separated from her community and be a part of the mainstream society at the same time. Her Mexican American heritage is what made her what she is. Esperanza

will move away from her community but she will also come back to it because it will always be a part of her. At the end of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Martine's death takes Sophie again to Haiti where she finally confronts her father's ghost in the sugarcane fields where her mother was raped. By confronting the past and seeking help for her problems she puts together all the elements that can help her in becoming whole again. In the last scene of *The Kite Runner*, which is evocative of the scene of the kite tournament when Amir sees Hassan smile for the last time, Sohrab smiles for the first time and gives hope to Amir that their family has a future. Amir reached his maturity by making right the wrongs of his youth and by breaking the vicious cycle of abuse towards the Hazara. In *American Dervish* Hayat also reaches his maturity by righting the wrongs of his youth through an apology he made to Mina and Nathan.

The protagonists of the chosen novels show us that it is possible to alleviate the tension between the ethnic and national, i.e. between the immigrant community and the society as a whole. Some, like Esperanza and Sophie reject expectations of their immigrant community, but at the same time they accept the fact that they belong to this community. Others, like Hayat, reject their community entirely and try to integrate completely into the mainstream society. Finally, those like Amir integrate into the mainstream and then embrace their origins. They all acknowledge that their experiences in the immigrant community made them what they are today.

## 5. Conclusion

The classical Bildungsroman appeared in a period of major changes in European society- the move from the society ruled by aristocracy to the one dominated by the bourgeoisie. The ethnic Bildungsroman followed a similar path – it developed after profound changes in the composition of the US population, which resulted in the need to find ways to make the new arrivals part of the mainstream society.

The ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman follows the concept of the classical Bildungsroman in that it follows an individual on their path to maturity, but in the case of the ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman reaching maturity also means having formed one's identity in the context of the US multicultural society. Multicultural authors have revised the genre and made changes, such as including both male as well as female protagonists, nonlinear narration, the absence of mentors or the presence of atypical ones, and a hopeful open ended ending.

The analysis of *The House on Mango Street*, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, *The Kite Runner* and *American Dervish* has shown that the tension between the ethnic and the national can be alleviated and that to create a multicultural identity one has to find balance between the expectations of the immigrant community and the mainstream society. We have also seen that traditional practices persist even after individuals move and live in the US for years and have a major influence on their lives.

The analysis of the chosen novels has shown that protagonists have to contend with discrimination both from the mainstream society as well as within the immigrant communities. Discrimination on the part of the mainstream society tends to be based on provenance and socioeconomic status, whereas discrimination within the immigrant community is based on strong patriarchal cultural norms that the older generation still adheres to.

The ideal reader to whom the ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman addresses its message is an immigrant himself (as opposed to the classical Bildungsroman, whose ideal reader was a bourgeois man, i.e. a member of the mainstream society). The younger generation can learn that without their immigrant community they would not be who they are. Nevertheless, the novels also show that it is possible for these younger immigrants to integrate more into the mainstream society as well as reject some of the expectations of their community, while still remaining loyal to it. The older generation of immigrants can recognize that providing guidance for younger generations can prevent them from making grievous mistakes. As for the mainstream readers, these multicultural Bildungsromane can open new horizons, offer knowledge about the Other and incite them to further communicate with the minority and help integrate cultural elements into the mainstream. By providing these “lessons” to its readers the genre of ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman follows Morgenstern’s idea that the Bildungsroman does not promote only the development of the protagonist but also that of the reader.

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## Abstract

In this graduation thesis I explore how members of marginalized groups form their identity and integrate into the mainstream society. This is done by comparing the classical European Bildungsroman as defined by Franco Moretti, with the Bildungsroman written by ethnic authors in the era of high multiculturalism in the United States. The novels chosen for the analysis are *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Sandra Cisneros, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) by Edwidge Danticat, *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khaled Hosseini and *American Dervish* (2012) by Ayad Akhtar. The protagonists of the chosen novels all belong to different minority groups.

I offer a brief summary of the origins and features of the Bildungsroman and a brief history of the development of multiculturalism around the world with a focus on its development in the United States and how the Civil Rights movement and the change in the composition of the US population contributed to the move from the notion of the melting pot to that of multiculturalism. The question of multiculturalism's validity at the present time has been briefly explored as well. Based on Christopher Douglas's book *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism* the development of literary multiculturalism has also been explained. Douglas partitions literary multiculturalism into three phases and we are interested in the third phase, i.e. the period from 1965 onwards, because at that time there is an increase in multicultural literary work and revisions of traditional genres, including the Bildungsroman.

In the analysis I study how the protagonists reach maturity and thus form their identity by finding a balance between the expectations of the immigrant community and the mainstream society. Furthermore, we see how the tension between the ethnic and the national is aggravated by discrimination and alleviated by education. In the analysis we also see in what ways the classical Bildungsroman and the ethnic multicultural Bildungsroman differ.

**Keywords:** the classical Bildungsroman, the US ethnic Bildungsroman, multiculturalism, immigration